

GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY LEADERS AS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE:
UTILIZING LEARNING AND ENDURING DISRUPTIVE CHANGE

by

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(Under the Direction of ROBERT J. HILL)

ABSTRACT

Often people have a desire to improve their communities through various community change initiatives, but lack the experience or aptitude for success. Community leadership institutes offer training and hands-on experience alongside community change initiatives. This case study details an action research (AR) project that involved a grassroots neighborhood leadership alumni association in the Southeastern United States.

The purpose of the study was to investigate how a community leadership group learns to plan and take action on community problems. The study was guided by four research questions, which were: (1) What types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community? (2) What are the alumni learning through their leadership efforts in the community? (3) To what extent are the alumni operating as a community of practice (CoP)? and (4) In what ways did the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders influence this AR project? Qualitative research methods were employed over a period of seventeen months, in the form of thirteen semi-structured interviews and four observations of leadership training.

The findings indicate strong elements of experiential learning, formal training, past experience, and social learning. The alumni showed moderate indications of behaving as a community of practice (CoP). Eleven interventions consisted of short term strategic positioning goals, medium range goals aimed at developing operational and tactical strategies, and a long term goal of regular organizational assessments. Although an unexpected dissolution of the alumni association's relationship with the institute slowed progress, the result of the AR case is a community leadership alumni association poised to move forward as a CoP despite disruptive change.

There are four conclusions of the case, which are (1) Learning takes place as a rhizomatic network of learning types including but not limited to experiential learning, formal training, past experience, and social learning, (2) Through community leadership, adults learn functional skills, relationship skills, and gain personal insights, (3) Disruptive change can impact a COP's definition of community, purview, and organizational practices, and (4) The entwined relationship between actions and power defined the AR process.

INDEX WORDS: Grassroots Neighborhood Leadership, Disruptive Change, Adult Learning, Communities of Practice, Rhizomatic Learning, Action Research, Foucault, Power Relations

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my wife and children, who supported me throughout this journey, and to the wonderful people I met in the community who are working selflessly to improve the conditions of others. I could not have completed this work without each of you. Many have made sacrifices to bring this work to completion, and their sacrifices will surely continue beyond this case study.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
Background

Often people desire to take action in their communities on an individual or collective level in order to solve an array of problems such as hunger, affordable housing, neighborhood crime, or for the purpose of influencing political action. Without adequate leadership skills, such as an understanding of how to navigate local bureaucracies and politics, members of the community may feel overwhelmed or helpless when it comes to taking action. Many community leadership institutes offer training and hands-on experience in leadership topics with a goal of equipping citizens to be more effectively involved in a variety of community change initiatives.

When participants graduate from such institutes, there is an expectation that they will apply what they have learned, and that they will continue to learn. The extent to which alumni¹ of leadership institutes manage the learning that takes place individually and collectively may impact their effectiveness in the community (Kearney & Zuber-Skerritt, 2012). Grassroots leaders that effectively manage organizational learning and collaborate to make positive change, have potential to improve our communities. Their involvement in the community is a welcome addition to help solve problems on a grassroots level. The remainder of this chapter details a particular community leadership development alumni association that served as the site for this

¹ Note that the term *alumni* is used throughout this document to represent both female and male graduates of such programs.

action research (AR) case study. It will include the conceptual framework of the case, the identification of the research issue, the research purpose, and significance.

South County Alumni Association

South County Alumni Association (SCAA)² is a grassroots neighborhood leadership alumni association situated in the Southeastern United States. Members of this group are graduates of South County Neighborhood Leadership Institute (SCNLI)³, which is funded by a state grant. The purpose of SCNLI is to provide opportunities for citizens to increase their awareness of community issues and to improve their leadership skills in order to address those issues. The long term goal is to help make the community a more desirable place to live. By training the participants to navigate political, educational and social systems in the county, SCNLI aims to empower residents to take actions that lead to communities that are safer, cleaner, and have more economic opportunities.

South County Neighborhood Leadership Institute originated over thirty years ago. There is a maximum of thirty participants per program year. Over eight hundred have graduated to date. Members of SCAA have planned and initiated a number of community projects ranging from summer youth lunch programs, international community festivals, affordable housing initiatives, food banks, voter drives, and youth mentoring.

South County Alumni Association can be viewed as a community based organization. (Green & Haines, 2012) stated such groups are “rooted in place and have extensive contacts and information about neighborhoods. Their primary mission is aimed at the community; they emphasize the importance of place over other goals” (p. 16). Typically such groups are

² South County Alumni Association (SCAA) is a pseudonym used to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

³ South County Neighborhood Leadership Institute (SCNLI) is a pseudonym used to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

controlled by local residents. South County Alumni Association is a self-help group. Green and Haines (2012) explained that what guides such groups “is the belief that community development is primarily about helping people to learn how to help themselves” (p. 17). This viewpoint asserts that the capacity of residents to address problems results in long-term quality of life improvements. This is a people centered approach that aims to solve community issues on a grassroots level which at times involves collaboration with various government, business, and non-profit groups.

Conceptual Framework

This case employed AR methodology. Reason and Bradbury (2008) defined AR as a “participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview” (p. 1). Action research can prompt learning for the researcher, stakeholders, and community of scholars. This case provided an opportunity for me to learn how to conduct action research. It also gave the stakeholders an opportunity to learn about their organization and practice. Finally, it gave the wider community of scholars and practitioners the opportunity to learn from the research process and outcomes.

Action research is a cyclical process, as Coghlan and Brannick (2010) detailed, “pre-step (context and purpose) followed by four basic steps: constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action” (p. 8). In the pre-step cycle the researcher and stakeholders look at the project as a whole to see why it is necessary, define the problem to be solved, and see which external factors impact the organization. The constructing phase means to collaboratively articulate the theoretical and practical foundations of the action to be taken. Second, planning action is to collaborate in order to find out how to implement the organizational change interventions. Planning action may have multiple steps. Third, taking action is to implement an

organizational change. Finally, evaluating action entails looking at the steps that proceeded and planning for additional cycles as needed.

Adult learning theory provided the theoretical framework for the case. Chapter 2 includes a literature review of the following adult learning theories and perspectives: Andragogy, self-directed learning, Kolb's and Taylor's learning cycles, Illeris's three dimensions of learning, transformative learning, the role of emotions, the body and learning, the spirit and learning, informal and incidental learning, experiential learning, and social and situated learning. These were selected because of their prevalence in the literature and potential connections to the case. Finally, in order to evaluate the organizational learning aspect of SCAA, community of practice framework (Wenger, 1998) was incorporated.

In order to answer the fourth research question pertaining to power relations in AR, Foucault's ([1982] 2000) views of power relations are reviewed. For Foucault, power is a type of relation between individuals. Power is not thought of as some external autonomous force, rather it exists only when acted upon another person, and not necessarily in an adversarial fashion. This point of view helped to reveal the role of power relations in the case study.

Issue Identification

The issue of this case was that the SCAA membership, considering their population size consisting of over eight hundred SCNLI graduates and long history, were infrequently successful at community change initiatives. Further diagnosis revealed they were seldom functioning as a CoP, which impacted organizational learning and effectiveness with solving problems in the community. This issue identification came as a result of cycles of qualitative data analysis, and dialogue with the stakeholders. The case story section will detail the steps involved in identifying the organizational issue that was addressed and the corresponding interventions.

Approximately midway through the AR process, there was a major change to SCAA when SCNLI decided to dissolve relations with the alumni. Additionally, SCNLI formed a different alumni association for new graduates. It was clear that interventions would need to take these changes into account. Approximately the same time these issues arose, I suggested CoP as a guide to analyzing the organizational learning and structuring the interventions. Community of practice framework provided a guide to analyze how learning was managed at SCAA. The AR team agreed that this would be useful to address the research problem, which was compounded by the dissolution of their relationship with SCNLI.

Purpose of the Study

Collaboration with stakeholders, conducting the initial research activity, and reviewing relevant literature resulted in refining the purpose and research questions. There were a few iterations in which the research questions changed. Maxwell (2005) suggested that researchers not settle on questions too early, and have an “open mind’ and seeing what there is to be investigated” (p. 65), after some data have been analyzed. After data collection and analysis of the first few interviews, the final research purpose and questions were designated.

The purpose of the study was to investigate how a community leadership group learns to plan and take action on community problems. The four research questions in the case were: (1) What types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community? (2) What are the alumni learning through their leadership efforts in the community? (3) To what extent are the alumni operating as a community of practice (CoP)? and (4) In what ways did the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders influence this AR project?

Significance

A theoretical significance of this case pertains to adult learning theory and CoP framework. One practical significance concerns the collaboration between a university representative (myself) and a community group, in the form of AR. Additionally, the role of power in AR is examined in this case. Probing the issue of power relations added to the knowledge base of practicing AR.

Theoretical

Adult learning is an expansive field entailing many theories and viewpoints. Merriam (2001) described the field as, “a prism of theories, ideas, and frameworks that allows us to see the same phenomenon from different angles” (p. 96). The literature and research regarding how and what adults learn is substantial. However, less research has been conducted regarding the learning that takes place with grassroots organizations in the community. Studying the learning of community leaders from the adult learning field offers many theories and frameworks. Adult education as a profession, discipline, and field of practice is expansive, occurring in a wide range of contexts. The ways in which adults learn is equally diverse and can take place in a variety of formal or informal settings (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Each of the research questions pertain to learning, which has many definitions. For the purposes of this case I refer to the following broad adult education and learning definition (UNESCO Institute for Education, 1999):

Adult education denotes the entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or

professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society. (para. 3)

There are a variety of viewpoints regarding knowledge. Knowledge has recently been a topic of study in non-educational settings. English (2005) reported there has been a “shift away from understanding knowledge as an absolute and permanent truth to an emphasis on knowledge in relative and context-dependent terms” (p. 335). Our current times are often referred to as being a knowledge economy or society (Merriam & Bierema, 2014), which is a move away from the industrial society. Two broad categories of knowledge are disciplinary, such as science or medicine, and experiential / practice-based (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). Disciplinary knowledge is seen as an object rather than a process. Alternatively, the site of learning becomes most important in experiential / practice-based knowledge, which focuses on the relationship between knowledge, experience, and learning. For the purposes of this case, and the analyses, I am viewing knowledge in an experiential / practice based sense.

This case engaged a grassroots community group to determine how their learning could be utilized on an organizational level to promote a stronger CoP. Wenger (n.d.) stated, “communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 1). Central to the CoP model is what Wenger (1998) called “legitimate peripheral participation” (p. 11). This concept entails the peripherality in which there is approximation of full participation within a group. In time newcomers to a group must be granted enough legitimacy to be treated as full members. Learning takes place at the periphery first, and through a social process further learning takes place with full participation. This case did not employ CoP framework precisely as prescribed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). This case was an opportunity to prompt

organizational change in a community group, and concurrently inform the practice of an alumni association and the researcher.

More often a CoP framework is utilized in educational, business, and healthcare professions. Recent attention has been given to virtual CoPs in a variety of settings such as Wikipedia as a CoP (Zhao & Bishop, 2011), and virtual learning in CoPs (Dzunic, Stoimenov, & Dzunic, 2011). Less often is a CoP framework utilized in a community setting. Some of the research in the community setting that has been conducted includes activists as a CoP (Hemphill & Leskowitz, 2013), and environmentalists as a CoP (Tjørring, 2013). Action research methodology offered a unique opportunity to collaboratively explore these issues and to inform practice.

The research findings of this AR case study contributed to adult learning theory. Specifically, this included the types of learning that takes place with grassroots community leaders, and organizational learning in the form of CoP framework. The research contributed to CoP literature with respect to diagnosing the extent to which the alumni association is a CoP, and the interventions that may stimulate the group to become a stronger CoP.

South County Alumni Association was impacted by a disruptive change during the AR process when their relationship with SCNLI was dissolved. Disruptive events force teams to move away from their usual routines and towards more effortful and controlled strategic organizational change (Louis & Sutton, 1991; Morgeson, 2005). Typically no pre-existing response is available for groups to handle such situations. Similarly, Burke (2008) refers to revolutionary organizational change when he detailed, “(a) internal disruptions that pull subsystems and activities out of alignment ... (b) changes in system’s environment that threatens its ability to obtain resources” (p. 68). South County Alumni Association experienced change

with elements of both type (a) and (b) during the research, when SCNLI ended its relationship with them. This change offered the opportunity to design interventions that assisted the CoP during a time of transition prompted by this disruptive change.

Understanding the phenomena of learning by such alumni can benefit our communities. Specifically, this case investigated how and what they learned, as well as how they applied learning in practice. A group of citizens who are effectively utilizing what they have learned from their practice, and managing that learning as a CoP (Wenger, 1998), may have greater potential to achieve the community change they seek.

Practical

Action research methodology has the potential to inform not only theory, but practice. Utilizing AR methodology was an occasion for me to collaborate with the stakeholders to investigate an organizational problem, develop a research plan, analyze data, and plan interventions. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) contended, “the form of knowledge that action research aims to produce is practical knowing, the knowing that shapes the quality of your moment-to-moment action” (p. 36). In this case, the AR project informed adult learning and CoP literatures, as well as the practice of the researcher and participants. The researcher gained experience with the organizational development of a community group, qualitative research methods, and change leadership. Additionally, the stakeholders participated in organizational change and AR methodology.

This case offers grassroots community groups an illustration of data informed collaboration towards organizational interventions. Specifically, interventions promoted organizational learning through CoP framework. By strengthening community groups with respect to organizational learning, they may be more adept at implementing community change.

Community groups that are skillful with community change are a welcome addition to our neighborhoods.

An aspect of the practical implications is the role of power relations in AR. The discussion of power from a power-over perspective towards a power relations perspective is examined in this case. The examination is accomplished by applying Foucault's views of power as a network of relations. A broader view of power relations informs researcher and participants in what might otherwise be an overlooked or hidden aspect of research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review includes prevalent adult learning theories and models, particularly those which inform the AR case. It is not an attempt to encapsulate the wide range of viewpoints in the field, rather to offer the foundation of literature that assisted with designing the study, data analysis and AR activities, such as team meetings in which adult learning theory was discussed. The two main sections of the literature review are adult learning theory and organizational learning. The adult learning theory section reviews learning primarily on an individual basis, whereas the organizational learning section presents the CoP framework utilized in the case.

Recent adult learning books from English (2005), Jarvis (2007), Mackeracher (2004), Merriam and Bierema (2014), and Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) provided an overview of predominant adult learning theories and topics. These individual and organizational learning theories and topics were searched on the University of Georgia's library service in multiple databases, including EBSCOHost, Education Full Text, ERIC/ CSA, JSTOR, and ProQuest. Additionally, Adult Education Research Conference proceedings and Google Scholar were searched as particular learning theories emerged throughout the research. As an example, CoP articles were first searched with the additional search terms of "neighborhood," "association," "community," or "community group." This search revealed that CoP literature more often involves business and educational settings. There was not as much literature when searching for the term "community groups" in conjunction with "community of practice."

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning is a broad field with many theories. Adult learning can take place in a variety of settings, and encompass a diverse set of beliefs and values. After a section that reviews philosophical background of adult learning, prevalent the adult learning theories are reviewed.

Adult Learning Foundations

Approaches to adult learning can be categorized by philosophical orientation. Hiemstra (1998) offered seven philosophical systems that influence approaches to adult learning. These systems are idealism, realism, progressivism, liberalism, behaviorism, humanism, and radicalism. Similarly, Mackeracher (2004) offered six questions to help reveal one's underlying beliefs and values: "Who is learning what? From whom? By what approaches? For what purpose? Under what circumstances? With what consequences?" (p. 17). Both Hiemstra and Mackeracher help to reveal the multifaceted nature of adult learning with these discussions.

Margo (2001) added to the discussion by detailing six perspectives of adult learning. First is the behaviorist perspective in adult learning. In this perspective there is a focus on skill development and behavior change. This is a hierarchical approach in which one skill is learned and another builds upon it. Here a teacher would use praise and feedback to encourage positive behaviors. The second perspective is cognitivist and constructivist. This perspective focuses on the mental process, such as interpretation, meaning, perception and insight. In this approach, people understand themselves and the world by constructing theories and models in which to predict and control events. The third perspective is social learning. This perspective incorporates some ideas from the cognitive and behavioral views. Self-efficacy, the rationalization of the cause of events, and observing others are key aspects here. The fourth

perspective is situated cognition. This perspective places an importance on the learner being immersed in the culture in which the learning takes place. In this perspective, the context is just as relevant as the skill learned. The fifth perspective is the humanist orientation. This perspective emphasizes the affective domain and highlights choice, freedom, creativity, and self-realization, in which the learner's beliefs and attitudes have a relevant role in how and what they learn. Lastly, Margo presents Patricia Cross's (1981) chain of response model, which views learning activities as a result of a chain of responses "based on an evaluation of the position of the individual in his or her environment" (p. 127). Perceived expectation of success or failure, and attitudes of education particularly through family or peer groups, influences the chain of responses.

Education in general, including adult learning, has gained attention from a number of international bodies. An International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century report (Delors, 1996) to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) suggested four pillars of education (pp. 85 – 97). The report contends formal education primarily focuses on the first pillar, learning to know, and to a lesser extent, the second pillar, which is learning to do. Learning to know means to master the instruments of knowledge. Learning to do is largely inseparable from learning to know, and pertains primarily to vocational learning. The third pillar is learning to live together, which means to discover and share purposes with others. The last pillar is learning to be. This pillar is an inner journey of the complete development of people, as individuals, and as members of families and communities. This inner journey begins with knowing one's self and then reaches out to knowing others.

Adult Learning Theories

There is a wide range of adult education theories, each offering a variety of elements that explain how adults learn. Pedagogical practices and policies are often designed to better promote learning based on theoretical frameworks. After detailing how a postmodern viewpoint can contribute to this discussion, predominant adult learning theories are presented.

Incorporating a postmodern view. The majority of theoretical approaches to adult learning can be described as Kang (2007) termed “adjective-plus-learning-theory” (p. 206), in which learning tends to be categorized into a particular type, such as experiential, transformative, or situated. Kang (2007) critiqued, “each theory approaches learning from that certain standpoint and excludes the others” (p. 206). He further suggested this categorization indicates a certainty and universality in adult learning. A postmodern viewpoint, in which certainty is questioned, makes a different type of connection between the adjectives, the learner, and that which is learned.

Kang assessed the “adjective-plus” approach to adult learning as inaccurate yet necessary, and offered a postmodern rhizoactivity influenced approach to navigate the multiplicity of learning. Rhizoactivity is borrowed from the field of botany. A rhizome is both a root and a stem since it pushes out roots and shoots. The term was used by Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) to reconfigure the view of the author, the book and the world, and reject the idea that an author can depict the world in a book. A rhizome sprouts or pops up and makes connections with whatever is available, has no fixed departure and return points, and starts up again when broken apart.

With respect to adult learning, this non-linear viewpoint is more about making a map than tracing the root. Kang (2007) presented a postmodern view of a learner as “a nonunitary

being that has multiple subjectivities” (p. 216). He goes on to say, the researcher is like a detective following leads, and drawing maps of the various figurations he or she discovers. However, these maps cannot be finalized since the object of the map is always in flux. Kang explained, “as rhizoactivity questions how learning activities shape one’s life and its context, it can serve as a window to this task” (p. 217), the task being to make human life intelligible from the learning perspective. Approaching adult learning from a postmodern viewpoint does not necessarily mean disregarding traditional perspectives. As Hill (2008) suggested, “learning in the postmodern is not simply a break from the past but rather comprises the past’s elements in motion” (p. 91). The incorporation of Kang’s postmodern rhizoactivity viewpoint will materialize in the case conclusions section.

In order to better map adult learning, the following section will describe and critique prevalent adult learning theories most pertinent to the case. The adult learning theories included are Andragogy, self-directed learning, Kolb’s and Taylor’s learning cycles, Illeris’s three dimensions of learning, transformative learning, the role of emotions, the body and learning, the spirit and learning, informal and incidental learning, experiential learning, and social and situated learning. These were selected because of their prevalence in the literature and potential connections to the case. Community of practice framework was selected as the organizational learning model due to its applicability to the alumni group, and in order to fill the gap in the literature that connects this framework with community groups. The section regarding CoP framework will include more focus on criticisms since it is the main framework utilized in the study. This section is not meant to represent all viewpoints in the field.

Andragogy. Over forty years ago, Malcolm Knowles (1968) distinguished adult learning from pre-adult learning and suggested andragogy (a term that was coined in 1833 by the German

educator Alexander Kapp) as a narrative for adult learning. The theory offered the adult education field a much needed unifying identity at the time. This learner centered approach was proposed with five main assumptions. These assumptions included adults as self-directed learners, the accumulation of experience, the relationship to social roles, and the problem-centeredness of adult learners. Later, he added the assumptions of internal versus external motivations and the need to know why. Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) explained, “andragogy became a rallying point for those trying to define the field of adult education as separate from other fields of education” (p. 85). From the 1970’s and early 1980’s, andragogy was followed by much research and criticism alike.

Hattie (1984) questioned whether andragogy is a theory or just good practice for adult education. Knowles (1989) would later agree that it is a “model of assumptions about learning” (p. 112). An additional criticism is whether the assumptions regarding adult learners being different than the assumptions regarding children is accurate. In response, Knowles would revise his views away from children versus adults towards, “a continuum ranging from teacher-directed to teacher-directed learning” (Merriam, 2001, p. 6), and that both approaches may be appropriate depending on the situation. Although andragogy continues to garner attention, it is often perceived as negative towards pedagogy, resulting in a lack of information-sharing between fields (English, 2005).

Recent research has attempted to examine andragogy in a variety of settings. In an effort to address the lack of a measurement instrument with respect to andragogy and process design elements, Holton, Wilson and Bates (2009) measured student satisfaction with andragogical teaching methods and evidence of learning in a postsecondary educational setting. An Andragogical Practices Inventory (API) survey instrument was created and employed in the

study. The researchers contend the API was more successful than previously utilized instruments with respect to measuring andragogical principles and process design elements, thus enhancing the possibility to continue empirical research regarding andragogy.

Alewine (2010) conducted research on a prison GED program. She employed a quasi-experimental post-test only design to measure the impact of an andragogy influenced orientation class preceding GED training in a control group. The study found that improvement to the inmate's mood and behavior during the GED classes improved the GED course outcomes for inmates. Researchers continue to explore andragogy in a variety of contexts.

Self-directed learning. An adult being self-directed with respect to learning is a common theme in adult education. Although Knowles (1968) included self-direction as an assumption of andragogy, Tough (1967) first explored self-directed learning as a form of study when he built upon Houle's (1961) work. Tough studied self-planned learning projects of sixty-six Canadians. This everyday learning that takes place outside of formal educational settings resulted in substantial research.

There are multiple definitions of self-directed learning, which may take place in formal or informal settings, and can take place alone or within groups. Candy (1991) explained self-directed learning can be a goal of learning or a process of learning, and can be a general personal characteristic or a characteristic specifically related to learning. As an adult learning characteristic, Candy's review of the literature prompted the following characteristics of learners working independently:

- Being methodological and disciplined, logical and analytical
- Being reflective and self-aware
- Demonstrating curiosity, openness, and flexibility

- Being interdependent and interpersonally competent, as well as independent and self-sufficient
- Being persistent and responsible, as well as venturesome and creative
- Showing confidence and having a positive self-concept
- Having knowledge about, and skill in, learning generally (i.e., knowing how to learn), especially skill in planning and assessing learning

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) further detailed the three main goals of self-directed learning as, “to enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning, to foster transformative learning as central to self-directed learning and to promote emancipatory learning and social action” (p. 107). Many models of self-directed learning have come forward in the adult education field (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, 2007). Early self-directed learning models from Tough (1971) and Knowles (1975) were more linear in nature. Variations have since occurred, such as a recent model from Garrison (1997) which is grounded in a “collaborative constructivist” (p. 18) perspective.

Self-directed learning theory has received criticism since its inception. Mackeracher (2004) pointed out criticisms of lists such as Candy’s to include that it represents able-bodied, white, middle-to-upper class males in Euro-American societies (Walker, 1984), and that they often lack consideration of female, racial and cultural minorities, persons with different abilities, or working class or poor (Caffarella, 1993; Flannery, 1994; Shore, 1997). This criticism reveals the hazards of detailing the characteristics of an ideal learner.

Research regarding the nature of self-directed learning and its utilization in practice has continued since its inception. Wichadee (2011) utilized the Self-Directed Readiness Learning Scale (Guglielmimo, 1997), Honey and Mumford’s Learning Style Questionnaire (1992), an

opinion questionnaire towards self-directed learning, and a pre-and post-reading test to measure student achievement. A self-directed learning instructional model was designed and implemented during the study. The participants were English reading students in a Bangkok university. The study found that the Self-directed Learning Instructional Model may be an efficient way to teach reading skills for all learning styles. The researcher further discovered that use of the model increased the learner's self-directed learning ability.

Kocaman, Dicle, and Ugur (2009) addressed the conflicting research results with respect to problem-based learning facilitating self-directed learning. Their longitudinal survey explored perceived changes in a baccalaureate nursing education program which incorporates a problem-based curriculum. Utilizing the Self-Directed Readiness Learning Scale (Fisher, King, & Tague, 2001), they discovered an increase in scores on the learning scale by the fourth year of the study. They conclude that self-directed learning is a maturational process. Research regarding self-directed learning continues in a variety of settings.

Kolb's and Taylor's learning cycles. People encounter many experiences in their daily lives that may prompt learning. Kolb (1984) proposed a cycle of learning from experience. Experience is both personal and social, and people are not only individuals rather individuals to be understood in the social context (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The cycle begins when a learner is involved in an experience. Next, the learner reflects and gives meaning to that experience. This step is critical in order to prompt learning from the experience. The learner then integrates the meaning from this experience to other previous experiences, which become part of a model of reality, and conclusions are drawn. These conclusions guide decision making which leads to new experiences in which ideas and concepts are tested.

The unidirectional nature of Kolb's model prompted variations from Abbey, Hunt, and Weisner (1985). They describe four types of "unbalanced" (p. 485) learners. These include learners that move directly from reflection to action, those who bypass action by moving from making meaning to new experiences, those who bypass experiences by moving from actions to reflection and those who bypass reflection by moving from experience to action. The authors further speculate that some learners may get stuck in two of the four cycles.

Taylor (1987) detailed a learning cycle specifically with respect to self-directed situations that involve a personal concern. The steps include a disorientation phase in which a disconfirming experience causes stress or anxiety. The learner may withdrawal or disengage from others during this phase. It is important that the learner name the central issue or problem at this stage. Next, the learner enters the exploration phase in which the individual seeks to further understand the issue by talking to others or searching books and other sources. Often, when enough information is gathered, the learner will retreat to think things over. A reorientation phase comes next in which the learner integrates ideas and experiences with a new understanding of the disorienting event. The individual moves beyond this phase once he or she shares the insight with someone else. Lastly, comes the equilibrium phase in which the new perspective is applied.

Reflection is a key principle in Kolb's and Taylor's cycles, as well other models such as Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning, which will be discussed in a separate section. Also emphasizing reflection is Mackeracher (2004), who is influenced by many theories and proposes a "basic learning cycle" which includes "the learner [making] sense of experience by giving it meaning and value through using pattern-recognition and meaning-making cognitive processes and affective processes" (p. 54). Making sense, looking within, and reflecting are often

significant features of adult learning theory. Critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995), reflective learning (Moon, 2004), and reflective practice (Schön, 1983) highlight additional approaches to the role of reflection and learning.

Kolb's learning cycle continues to be utilized in research. Garber, Hyatt, Boya and Ausherman (2012) utilized Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (Kolb, 1984) with respect to instructional games in a marketing course. An exit survey was used to capture the learner's experience. They found that the learning game appeared to be inclusive of all learning styles because the game allows learners to frame the experience as they choose. Additionally, Stokes-Eley (2007) incorporated Kolb's experiential learning theory and his Learning Style Inventory into a public speaking course to enhance public speaking skills. She contended reinforcing reflection in public speaking assignments is particularly effective with promoting active learning, collaborative learning, and critical thinking.

Illeris's three dimensions of learning. Knud Illeris (2002) offered a constructivist model of the learning process with three dimensions: cognition, emotion, and society. He proposed that all three are present in a learning activity and that learning begins with one of five stimuli. These five stimuli are perception, transmission, experience, imitation and participation. Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) stated, "the strength of Illeris's model lies in its comprehensiveness but also its simplicity" (p. 99). Although not without criticisms, his simple model can be applied very intuitively to adult learning situations, and offers the inclusion of the emotional and societal realm which can be neglected in other models.

Illeris (2009) further elaborated four types of learning. First, cumulative learning represents learning something new, which is not part of something else. He attributed this type of learning primarily to early years of life, but not exclusively. In adulthood it may occur when

learning a new password or phone number. Second, assimilative learning is learning that builds upon established schemes or patterns, often occurring while learning school subjects that build one precept upon another. Third, accommodative learning takes place in situations in which one encounters something that he or she cannot relate to, but finds interesting. In this case, he or she breaks down an existing scheme and transforms it so the new situation is able to be linked to it. This includes a relinquishing and a reconstructing, which may be painful to experience. Finally, transformative learning typically results from a crisis situation that causes a change in one's personality. Illeris refers to not only Mezirow (1991) regarding transformative learning, but Rogers (1951), Engeström (1987), and Alheit (1994).

Transformative learning. Learning is often considered an accumulation of knowledge. However, deeper internal changes in the learner may take place. While informational learning increases the learner's knowledge and skills, transformative learning "changes how a person knows" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 35). Transformative learning seeks to understand the process of adults making meaning of experiences, and how that impacts actions. It has become one of the predominant adult learning theories.

The study that prompted transformative learning theory was Jack Mezirow's 1975 interviews with women returning to college after an extended period of time. In studying this, Mezirow began to differentiate types of meaning structures including "frames of reference, habits of mind, and points of view" (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 132). Transformative learning occurs when there is a transformation in one's beliefs or attitudes, which are points of view, or habits of mind. Mezirow notes that points of view are easier to change than habits of mind, and that these transformations may be sudden or gradual.

Although there are ten steps to Mezirow's transformative learning, they can be broken down into four parts: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action. Essentially, experiences are critically reflected upon by examining one's assumption and beliefs that structure how the experience is interpreted. This causes those assumptions to be revised. Next, the adult exchanges in discourse to test out these new beliefs. Lastly, there is action based on the new beliefs. As Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) stated, "action can range from making a decision about something to joining or engaging in radical political protest" (p. 135). Most often the experiences that prompt transformation are disorienting dilemmas such as the death of a loved one or an illness.

Since Mezirow's initial study in 1975 there has been a lot of research, writing, and critique of transformative learning. Recent research includes a wide range of settings such as higher education (Collay, Winkleman, Garcia, & Guilkey-Amado, 2009), transformative learning in late life (Moon, 2011), non-profit volunteers (English, 2012), and virtual online communities (King, 2011). Criticism of the theory abounds, and not all agree with the high value placed on autonomy (Newman, 2010). Nonetheless, discussion of the theory continues as well as the research pertaining to it.

The role of emotions. The role of emotions is often overlooked in adult learning, although many in the field of adult education acknowledge that emotions influence learning. As Mackeracher (2004) explained, learning "is affected by emotions by three sources: those we bring to the learning process, those that are generated by the process, and those we feel when we receive feedback about whether we have succeeded or failed in our learning endeavors" (p. 15). This viewpoint illustrates a concern regarding the impact of emotions on learning, such as the

emotional aspect of personal issues interfering with adult learning, emotional outcomes of learning itself, or the negative emotions associated with receiving teacher and peer feedback. However, other viewpoints emphasize learning and emotions as working together rather than as opposing forces.

More attention to emotion has come through ideas such as emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Emotional intelligence portrays emotions as something we can manage as we encounter the world. Scientific viewpoints, such as LeDoux (1996) assert that emotion, thought and memory cannot be separated. Among these discussions is the concern of emotion becoming a commodity (Bierema, 2007), particularly in an organizational setting with respect to emotion labor.

In adult education, emotions are often considered irrational and counterproductive to learning, leading some educators to “seek to control, manage, limit, or redirect outward expressions of emotions and feelings” (Dirkx, 2001, p. 66). However, Dirkx (2001) spoke to the significant role of emotions and learning when he asserted, “personally significant and meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in and is derived from the adult’s emotional, imaginative connection with the self and with the broader social world” (p. 64). The emotional aspect of our learning reveals our connection to the world, and the sociocultural context impacts our meaning making.

Perspectives on emotion vary (Dirkx, 2008), ranging from a physiological response originating in the lower parts of our brain, a cognitive view that includes judgment, or a social constructivist view that entails social and cultural processes. Lupton (1998) presented the emotional self as embodied, in which emotion represents the experience of body states and the

interpretation of these states. Sociocultural processes have an impact on our interpretation and naming of the experience in emotional terms.

Researchers continue to seek to understand the role of emotions and learning. Maidment and Crisp (2011) studied the impact of emotions on the learning of participants of a social work practicum. They utilized interviews to determine the student's feelings with respect to undertaking the practicum. They found that students with positive feelings learned more than students with negative feelings.

Järvenoja and Järvelä (2009) inquired into what kind of socio-emotional challenges students experience during collaborative learning and the possible self-regulation of emotions. The Adaptive Instrument for the Regulation of Emotions was designed and utilized, and the researchers discovered that the students used self-regulation of emotions in the collaborative learning context. The study furthers understanding of the social nature of emotions, and the impact on learning.

The body and learning. Although the mind is often privileged in the discussion of learning, and the body treated as housing for the brain (Barnacle, 2009), holistic views of learning and the whole person have been given recent attention. Embodied and somatic knowing draw attention to the body's role in learning. This viewpoint is often neglected in the field of adult learning, or left to discussions surrounding sports or the arts in which the body is considered more relevant.

Embodied learning is often linked to experiential learning since the learning takes place *in* the experience. To further expound upon this idea, Amann (2003) offered a four-part model of somatic knowing to include kinesthetic, sensory, affective, and spiritual. Examples of kinesthetic learning include individuals such as dancers and athletes who are concerned with the

movement of their bodies. Sensory learning speaks to how the senses input information that we relate to experiences which in turn assists us with making meaning. Affective learning speaks to our emotions and their connection with our self and the world. Finally, the spiritual component speaks to how we make meaning through “music, art, imagery, symbols, and rituals” (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 195).

Similar to somatic knowing, which incorporates kinesthetic, sensory, affective, and spiritual learning, Freiler (2008) explained, “embodiment and embodied learning generally refer to a broader more holistic view of constructing knowledge that engages the body as a site of learning, usually in connections with other domains of learning (for example, spiritual, affective, symbolic, cultural, rational)” (p. 39). Embodiment is often described in contextual and social settings, which expands the realm of learning beyond cognitive aspect. Further, Barnacle (2009) drew attention to the need in adult education to develop an “integrated account of knowing, acting, and being” that encompasses the whole person (p. 26). She pointed to Descartes and St. Augustine as two thinkers who have problematized the body. Descartes pointed out the deceptiveness of our sensory experiences and St. Augustine expounded upon the corruptibility of our passions.

The body certainly has a role in learning since our bodies are present and often active during learning. The body has been utilized as a learning tool in a variety of settings, such as foreign language learning (Macedonia & Knösche, 2011). Moving towards reengaging the body with learning raises the question of objects or tools utilized during learning experiences. A phenomenological perspective (Alerby, 2009) of embodiment may consider the use of objects to extend the body, such as a walking stick or pencil. For example, can we know how to write until we do so with the tools of writing? As Alerby (2009) explained the knowledge of writing is,

“according to Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the lived body, neither in the physical body, nor in the physical things, nor in the cognitions of the language, but in the bodily use of the utilities to write” (p. 5). This perspective takes learning beyond the self and towards an inclusive view that involves not only our whole body, but the objects that are part of the experience.

Spirit and learning. With respect to our mind, body, and spirit, our spirit is often ignored in our discussions of learning. There are seemingly limitless viewpoints regarding the spirit, and likewise the relationship to learning. Moore (1992) reported that the soul lies “midway between understanding and unconsciousness and that its instrument is neither mind nor body, but imagination” (p. xi).

Although many adults may consider themselves spiritual beings, the connection between spirituality and adult learning is often overlooked. English and Gillen (2000) stated spirituality is “an awareness of something greater than ourselves, a sense that we are connected to all human beings and to all creation” (p. 1). They contend that neglecting the spiritual dimension of adult learning ignores the complexity of the adult learner. Adult educators may incorporate God into beliefs about knowledge. For example, Coghlan (2006) asserted, “all knowledge is knowledge about God” (p. 39). Tisdell (2003) took spirituality and learning into a cultural context. One’s spirituality becomes informed by culturally defined experiences, symbols, myths, and rituals. Further, Dirx (2001) referred to images as an access to the soul. These images occur spontaneously during learning, and can be fostered through imaginative activities.

Many religious organizations offer illustrations of incorporating the spirit into learning. One such model that incorporates spirituality is Ignatian pedagogy (International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education [ICAJE], 1993). Ignatian pedagogy is based upon *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Ignatius & Puhl, 1951). *The Spiritual Exercises of St.*

Ignatius are “rigorous exercises of the spirit wholly engaging the body, mind, heart and soul of the human person” (Duminuco, n.d., p.15). St. Ignatius and the resultant Jesuit religious order focused much attention on education and social justice. As Menkhaus (2009) explained, “with Ignatian spirituality, three themes emerge that support the Jesuit focus on social justice: discernment, imagination, and love” (p.448).

Ignatian pedagogy is centered on the steps of “context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation” (Duminuco, n.d., p. 20). Context refers to an understanding of the social and spiritual background of the learner. Experience refers to both what the teacher helps the students recollect about their experiences in the subject matter, as well as the teacher’s continuing guidance regarding new information and experiences. To experience is “to taste internally. Mind, heart and will the use of imagination, feelings and mind” (p. 9). Feelings are central to the process from the experience itself, to the reflection that follows and the resulting action. Experience provides the material for reflection. With reflection, “memory, understanding, imagination and feelings are used to grasp the essential meaning and value of what is being studied” (p. 10). The conscious of the learner is formed here.

The actions that follow reflection are a very important part of Ignatian pedagogy. The action phase is the aim of experience and reflection. Duminuco breaks these actions down to two steps, interiorized choices and externally manifested choices. Interiorized choices involve a move of the will, or a clarification of points of reference. Externally manifested choices pertain to the new convictions causing external actions which are consistent with convictions. The type of action that encompassed Ignatius’ goal was that students would “contribute intelligently and effectively to the welfare of society” (Duminuco, n.d., p. 19). Ignatius aimed to form men and women who would take action in the service of others. As Mooney (2009) explained, “all of our

choices, grand and small, should be made in light of the end for which we were created” (p. 203). Ignatian pedagogy offers a model that incorporates the spiritual aspect of our being with our learning.

Informal and incidental learning. Learning can take place in a variety of settings, often outside of a classroom or formal setting. Mundel and Schugurensky (2008) asserted, “most of the significant learning acquired throughout life is part of the informal subsystem” (p. 50). As Marsick and Watkins (2001) further explained, “formal learning is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom based, and highly structured. Informal learning ... is not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner” (p. 25). They explained that incidental learning, a type of informal learning, takes place as a byproduct of another activity and people are not always aware learning has taken place. Informal learning is difficult for adults to recognize, and therefore is infrequently labeled as learning (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Informal and incidental learning are often results of significant unplanned life events.

What conditions promote learning in informal environments? Marsick and Watkins (2001) suggested these conditions:

Critical reflection to surface the tacit knowledge and beliefs, stimulation of proactivity on the part of the learner to actively identify options and learn new skills to implement those options or solutions, and creativity to encourage a wider range of options. (p. 30)

In informal settings, the social aspect of learning is often emphasized. Referring to activists, Ollis (2011) stated, “the dynamics of social interaction and conversation in the practices of activism can lead to fruitful learning. Everyday activists connect through discussing

their desires, needs, wants and aspirations” (p. 255). Sometimes the learning that is prompted by social interaction takes place unconsciously, but it can also take place purposefully. Further, Eraut (2000) highlighted the social nature of learning when he asserted, “we learn that others know things that we do not know, and that we can rely on others to contribute to certain aspects of a situation and save our own mental effort” (p. 132).

Schugurensky (2000) detailed three forms of informal learning. The first is self-directed learning, which is both intentional and conscious. It is intentional because the person has a purpose of learning before the learning process begins, and it is intentional because the person knows learning has taken place. This form refers to learning projects that individuals undertake without the help of a teacher, instructor, or facilitator. However, a resource person may be present who does not regard his or her self as an educator. The second form, incidental learning, is unintentional but conscious. In this case, the learner does not intend to learn before the learning has taken place, but recognizes learning has taken place after the experience. The third type, socialization, is neither intentional nor conscious. This type refers to the “internalization of values, attitudes, behaviors, skills, etc.” (p. 4). Although this is an unconscious process, one may later become aware that learning has taken place through retrospective recognition. For example, someone may ask questions about one’s learning which may prompt retrospective recognition. They may then come to realize learning has taken place.

Experiential learning. Often the differentiation between childhood and adult learning is thought to be the accumulation of experiences for adults. One use of the label experiential learning points to the assertion that adults have an extensive history they bring to new learning experiences. As Mackeracher (2004) explained,

Past experiences structure the ways that an adult will approach new experiences, determine which information will be selected for further attention and how it will be interpreted, and determines which knowledge (meaning and values) and skills (strategies, tactics, and styles) will be employed in the learning process. (p. 35)

These experiences, whether on a conscious or unconscious level, are part of the learning cycle and impact both actions and learning. However, experience does not guarantee learning. Dewey (1938) said that experiences could “narrow the field of further experience” (p. 13). He contended that for experience to be educative it must first have continuity, which means “that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies on some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 27). In other words, experiences cannot be isolated events in time. Secondly, he said experiences must have interaction, which means a transaction taking place between the person and his or her environment.

The second use of the label experiential learning refers to models of learning that contend learning takes place in the doing. For example, even though we may prepare and study for a task, when we actually do the task is when we learn. The role of experience and learning has various viewpoints. Adult learning models such as Boud and Walker’s (1991), Jarvis’s (1987), Kolb’s (1984), and Usher, Brant, and Johnson’s (1997) all purported that experience is key to learning. Further, Clark (2001) included the physical body’s role in the experience as a key element in which learning needs to be understood. This idea shifts experiential learning away from the solely cognitive realm.

Kolb’s (1984) model is particularly influential regarding experience. He contended that four abilities are needed in order for learning from experience to take place. These abilities include a willingness to be involved in new experiences, having the skill to observe and reflect

upon new experiences, analytic ability so that integrative ideas result from the observations, and problem solving skills so that concepts can be put in practice. Jarvis (1984) addressed the lack of attention to the learner's context in Kolb's model, when he considers experiential learning and reflective practice as high forms of learning.

Research regarding experiential learning has taken place in a variety of settings. Ballantyne and Packer (2009) conducted interviews and observations with students and teachers in environmental education programs. They concluded that the most effective learning experiences, in the context of learning in natural environments, occur through experience based strategies rather than teacher directed strategies. They further suggested integration of learning in natural environments with learning in classrooms.

Social and situated learning. Merriam and Bierema (2014) contended that "learning is embedded in the world in which we live" (p. 2). With situated learning, the learning is inseparable from the context in which it occurs, and the learning takes place in the doing. This point of view is counter to placing cognitivist classroom-based learning in preeminence, by addressing the tacit learning that takes place in practice (Blackler, 1995). Situated learning emphasizes the social construction of knowledge.

The social and contextual nature of learning has been discussed since Dewey (1916), who spoke about the individual that "shares or participates in some conjoint activity" (p. 26). Niewolny and Wilson (2011) reviewed the social/individual divide in the literature regarding context in adult learning. They explained that scholars taking a situated perspective detail learning as culturally constituted through socially structured power relations. Scholars taking a cognitive approach are likely to acknowledge the social element of learning but see the individual as the container of learning. Social cognitive learning theory "highlights the idea that

much human learning occurs in a social environment” (Schunk, 1996, p. 102). This may take place through observation, and can impact people’s knowledge beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Bandura (1976) moved the focus of social learning away from a behaviorist orientation to cognitive process. He asserted learning can take place through observation without the necessity of imitation. Bandura (1976) explained, “virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experiences can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other people’s behavior” (p. 392).

Situated learning contends that learning is inherently social, influenced by the social context, the tools used in interactions, and the activity of learning. As Hansman (2001) explained, “the real world contexts, where there are social relationships and tools, make the best learning environments” (pp. 45-46). Situated learning contends that learning cannot be separated from the situation in which learning is taking place. This idea takes learning outside of solely the learner and incorporates the environment and social interaction that accompanies learning. Learning in a particular situation entails attention to the people involved, the tools utilized, and the context in which it occurs.

Influential to situated learning, Lave’s (1988) study entailed observing adults, who were taught mathematics in a formal setting, as they practiced mathematical problem solving in an informal setting of a grocery store. She found that the grocery store experience, including calculating specials and coupons, and interacting with people in the store, was the social context in which learning took place. This study pointed to the real world experience as an effective learning environment. Lave (1988) further stated that cognitive activities include “mind, body, activity and setting” (p. 18).

With an emphasis on the social aspect of learning, models have been developed to explain how learning takes place in groups or communities. Brandt, Farmer, and Buckmaster (1993) described five phases of cognitive apprenticeship in the context of continuing professional education. These phases are not necessarily sequential. The first phase, modeling, entails behavioral modeling in which learners observe experienced members of the community, and cognitive modeling in which experienced members share expertise with newer members. The next phase is approximating, in which learners try out activities while articulating their plans and reflecting upon their differences with the expert's performance. Scaffolding is provided in this phase in order to provide assistance and minimize failure. The third phase is fading in which the scaffolding and support is gradually decreased. The next phase is self-directed learning where the learning practice and the task is completed with minimal assistance. In the last phase, the students generalize what they have learned with dialogue and relate what they learned to potential future actions. Some research has demonstrated the benefit of social imitation to an individual's learning (Wisdom, Song, & Goldstone, 2013). Situated learning is a foundational aspect of CoPs, which will be addressed in a separate section of the literature review.

Organizational Learning

Learning within organizations of any type is often a theme in the adult education literature. English (2005) explained, "organizational learning encompasses the fields of business management, education, organizational studies and human resource development" (p. 446). Organizational learning has gained increased attention since Senge's (1990) writing regarding the learning organization, and the attention to the cultural aspects that support learning in organizations (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). In addition to the learning that takes place in groups, group decision making has gained attention since Lewin's (1948/1999) organizational theories,

and Argyrs and Schön's (1978) single, double, and triple loop learning theory. No singular theory can possibly encapsulate the dynamics of groups and the learning that takes place within and between groups (Crossan, Maurer & White, 2011).

In addition to formal settings such as business and education, the literature has numerous examples of networks of people in the community, and the learning that takes place in these settings. This ranges from the learning and coordination that takes place in networked communities (Earl & Katz, 2007), the activities that lead to learning in networks (Holden, 2008), cross organizational collaboration in the community (Shoul & Rabinowitz, 2011), and practitioners networking with the community and taking action (Dale, 2008). As Siemens (2004) explained,

Personal knowledge is comprised of a network, which feeds into organizations and institutions, which in turn feed back into the network, and then continue to provide learning to [the] individual. This cycle of knowledge development (personal to network to organization) allows learners to remain current in their field through the connections they have formed. (p. 5)

Organizations and communities, in whatever form they take, can be a rich field of learning for adults. Learning communities can have a powerful influence on their members. As Hill (2005) explained, "communities of learning reproduce what is judged valuable and, by exclusion, teach what is not valuable" (p. 76). There are a variety of models that incorporate organizational learning. One model of organizational learning comes from the CoP literature, which will be reviewed in the following section.

Communities of Practice

One means of studying learning in organizations is communities of practice (CoP). Lave and Wenger (1991) defined CoPs as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (p. 98). People typically are part of multiple CoPs. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) would later indicate the three basic parts of a CoP to be, “a domain of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a community of people who care about this domain; and a shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain” (p. 27).

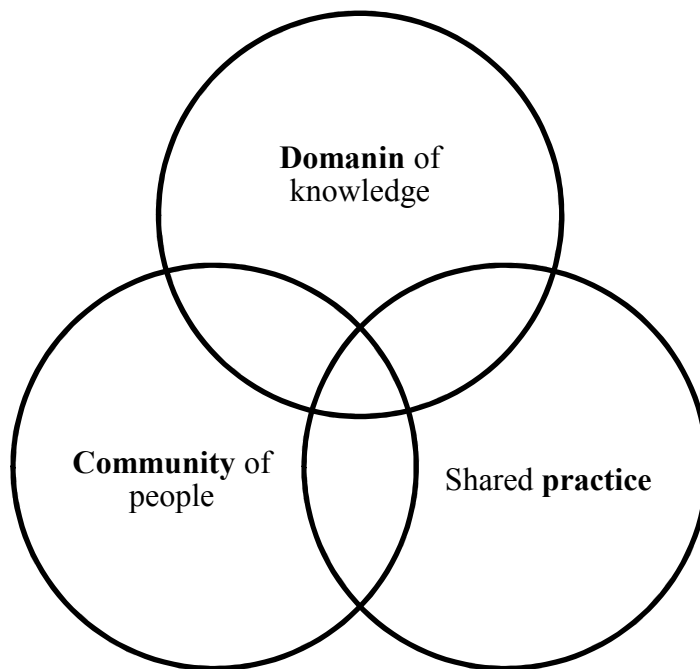


Figure 1. *Key Aspects of a Community of Practice (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002)*

Similarly, Hansman (2001) defined CoPs as, “self-organized and selected groups of people who share a common sense of purpose and a desire to learn and know what each other knows” (p. 48). Hansman goes on to say that although these groups are often informal, they often exist within larger organizational structures. A few examples of the wide range of CoPs

are technicians at a utility company, attorneys in a corporation, or faculty at an educational institution.

Communities of practice have the potential to transfer explicit and tacit knowledge within the group (Li, et al., 2009), which makes the model unique. Tacit knowledge may be difficult to transfer from one member of another without the social interaction common to a CoP. The following sections will detail the key parts of the CoP model, including the domain, the social nature of participation and learning, practice, making meaning, networks and brokering, developing a CoP, recent research, and criticisms.

Domain. The shared domain of a CoP is the issues that matter to the group. When the group is committed to a shared body of knowledge, the practice can be developed. Whether explicit or implicit, this domain guides what is important, the questions asked, and the means in which knowledge is organized.

Connecting the goals of a group with individual goals is significant. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) explained, “the most successful communities of practice thrive where the goals and needs of an organization intersect with the passions and aspirations of participants” (p. 32). If the domain of the community is not inspiring to the members, the CoP will struggle.

The degree of interaction with other members of the community is important to building shared visions and learning as a group. As Wenger (1998) suggested, “it is not necessary that all participants interact intensely with everyone else...but unless they do, the more their organization looks more like a personal network or a set of inter-related practices rather than a single community of practice” (p. 126). Since learning takes place socially in a CoP, which is influenced by situated learning, the level of interaction impacts the learning that takes place within the group.

Community and the social nature of participation and learning. One foremost aspect of CoPs is its social nature with a focus on the practice of a CoP as a place in which learning occurs. For CoPs, practicing means practicing with other members of the community. As Wenger (1998) explained, “it is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In this sense, practice is always a social practice” (p. 47). By consulting one another for help, members of a CoP deepen relationships and discover collective ways of approaching problems and finding solutions. As a result, Wenger (1998) contended, “communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning” (p. 86). In this respect, it is through social interaction that learning is transferred to other members of the community. As Duguid (2005) affirmed, “within the CoP the knowing *how* of the community, not merely of an individual, is on display” (p. 113). In this way, meaning is constructed socially. Muijis, West and Ainscow (2010) further emphasized the social constructivist view of learning when they explained,

Organizations are most likely to be effective learners where they form communities of practice in networks or other collaborative arrangements and are engaged in a process of social learning that occurs when actors who have a common interest in some subject or problem collaborate to share ideas, find solutions and build innovations. (p. 9)

When discussing a socially oriented theory there is a specific means in which newcomers to a community are included. It is through “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) in which newcomers have an opportunity to become included in a CoP. Wenger (1998) explained, “peripherality provides an approximation of full participation that gives exposure to actual practice” (p. 100). This approximation can come about through lessened intensity or risk, special assistance, supervision, or reduced production pressure. By

necessity, peripheral participation provides access to mutual engagement with other members, to their actions and negotiations with other members of the community, and to the repertoire in use.

Legitimacy refers to the importance that newcomers to the community are granted enough legitimacy to be treated as members. Legitimacy may take many forms, such as being feared or being useful. In time, newcomers can become old-timers in the organization as they learn to practice in the particular context of the community. Offering a newcomer legitimacy entails allowing mistakes to become learning opportunities, rather than a means of dismissal from the group.

CoPs are influenced by situated learning theory, in which learning is inseparable from the context in which it occurs, and the learning takes place in the doing. Communities of practice take learning into an organizational level in which it can be utilized for the whole, rather than contained solely within individuals. Further, a CoP can be a source of innovation rather than just a sharing of routine work activities (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

Practice. Practice is an important factor in CoPs. Wenger (1998) explained that practice involves making meaning, relationships with community members, learning, boundaries, and locality. Although the setting and type of practice in a CoP can be rather diverse, CoPs are often referred to in business and educational settings. Saint-Onge and Wallace (2008) proposed three levels of CoPs based on the structure of the organization and how it is governed. They offered informal groups as discussion forums among practitioners, supported groups which are sponsored by management for the purpose of building knowledge, and structured groups that are developed and managed by the organization in order to promote the business strategy. The CoP model offers organizations a means of understanding how learning and knowledge is managed

with groups. However, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) cautioned that CoPs develop naturally, and should be designed with a light hand to allow for their organic evolution.

The academic literature regarding CoPs focuses more on the community aspect than the practice (Duguid, 2005). Practicing within a community entails learning what it means to be in that role. As Wenger (1998) explained, “practice entails the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context” (p. 149). Learning how to be a member of a group comes from being with other members in the CoP. In this way practice is a source of coherence for the community. Next, learning in practice entails discovering how to engage, understanding what the enterprise is all about, and developing shared repertoires, styles and discourses.

Making meaning. Wenger (1998) explained that “practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life” (p. 52), and that human engagement in the world primarily entails negotiating meaning. Additionally, he argued that meaning is negotiated in our social structures, and involves two processes called participation and reification. Specifically, participation refers to being actively involved in, and members of, social institutions. However, negotiation of meaning does not require direct contact or conversation with other members of the community.

Reification is less common and refers to communication shortcuts in which we project meanings into the world and consequently perceive them as having their own reality. This provides focal points in which we can organize our meaning-making in the community. Reification is both a process and its product, and can have the negative impact of substituting communication shortcuts for deep meaning.

Participation and reification are complimentary and inseparable. Wenger (1998) stated if a community relies too much on participation, “then there may not be enough material to anchor the specificities of coordination and uncover diverging assumptions” (p. 65). If the community

relies too much on reification, “then there may not be enough overlap in participation to recover a coordinated, relevant, or generative meaning” (p. 65).

Networks and brokering. In some cases, groups reach out beyond their CoP and into a network of practice (NoP). As Vaast and Walsham (2009) explained, “members of a NoP do not necessarily work with each other and may never have met face to face. Yet, they share a common foundation of work practices and may be interested in similar types of issues” (p. 550). The author goes on to give an example of lawyers working for a law firm that is geographically scattered. Although these lawyers may not typically interact with one another, they would benefit from exchanging ideas regarding their practice.

Membership in multiple CoPs can lead to brokering (Wenger, 1998) in which information and skills can be transferred from one organization to another by members. Oborn’s (2010) research regarding learning and working together across professions found that there are often difficulties establishing multidisciplinary teamwork. However, she suggested three practices to facilitate learning in this context. The first is organized discussions that open up transparency. These discussions allow for opposing views to be expressed in order to deepen understandings. The second is acknowledging other perspectives which broaden the understanding of how other groups know and work. The third is challenging assumptions in such a way that current practices are able to be questioned across the multidisciplinary professions.

Additional learning opportunities exist not only within, but outside of these communities and networks. Oreszczyn, Lane, and Carr (2010) detailed the relevance of boundaries in communities and networks of practice when they explained, “over time the ‘shared history of learning’ (Wenger, 1998) which characterizes communities and networks [create] informal

boundaries between those who have participated in that community or network and those who have not” (p. 406). They go on to say that new opportunities for learning and fresh insights often occur at the boundaries. Although, at times this can be difficult because of the challenge of differing technical languages between groups. When groups are successful at communicating with outsiders, there is a potential for enriched learning.

Developing a CoP. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) recommended seven principles for cultivating CoPs. These principles include design for evolution, open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives, inviting different levels of participation, developing both public and private community spaces, focus on value, combining familiarity and excitement, and creating a rhythm for the community. The following sections offer further detail regarding these seven principles.

Design for evolution. Designing a CoP for evolution speaks to the belief that they are not created from scratch. Communities are built upon existing networks which may evolve beyond any particular design. Events that allow community members to interact, such as planning meetings, allow the community to evolve.

Dialogue. Dialogue amongst insiders allows issues to come forth that only the insider would know. Dialogue with outsiders brings perspectives that may help the community see the possibilities of what the CoP could become. Additionally, outside dialogue may help form strategic relationships.

Different levels of participation. People may be part of a CoP for various reasons, and various levels of participation should be offered to coincide with their interest. The three main groups within a CoP, ordered from smallest in size to largest, are the core group, active group, and peripheral group. The core group is most active and at the heart of planning, the active

group typically attends meetings and activities but with less frequency, and the peripheral group watch on the sideline and participate rarely because of time constraints or because they feel they don't have anything to contribute. Nonetheless, members that participate in the peripheral group are important because they may be quietly implementing what they learn from the community in various aspects of their life.

Public and private spaces. Public spaces are the events that all members of the CoP may attend, such as meetings or celebrations, in which ideas are exchanged and relationships strengthened. Private spaces are the often informal one-on-one encounters and where networking takes place. Public and private spaces are interrelated and can complement each other by providing opportunities for the CoP to gather and build socially.

Focus on value. Communities of practice thrive when they deliver value to the organization and the CoP members. Rather than attempting to predetermine the value of a group, activities and relationships can prompt the potential value of a CoP to emerge. Early discussions about value can help community members to understand the impact of their community.

Familiarity and excitement. Familiar events and routines allow CoP members to be comfortable, which may help prompt more open discussions. Less familiar events allow for excitement and renewed interest. Each type of event could benefit the other by promoting engagement amongst the members.

Rhythm. Rhythm refers to the timing of the interactions amongst community members. Moving too slow could cause some members to lose interest, while moving too fast could cause members to feel overwhelmed. There are multiple rhythms within the CoP including events,

private interactions, people on the sidelines becoming active, and the overall evolution of the CoP.

Recent research. Recent research regarding CoPs has taken place in a variety of settings, frequently within business and educational groups. Researchers have sought to understand multiples aspects of CoP model, from the social nature of learning to apprenticeships. This section will detail some of the findings.

Table 1

Recent CoP Research

Researcher(s)	Problem	Findings
Monaghan and Columbaro (2009)	How do the experiences of a CoP in a graduate level course impact learning and professional development?	Three findings regarding the students' experience: (a) an acquisition of content knowledge, (b) interrelationship skills, and (c) self-directedness and collaboration as two ways of engaging with lifelong learning.
	How does the CoP experience compare to other types of collaborative learning?	(a) Greater learning opportunities for participants compared to other collaborative groups, (b) challenges with respect to promoting diversity in CoP participant selection, integrating new members into an existing CoP, and the "artificial nature" (p. 422) of establishing a CoP within the class.
Parker, Patton, Madden, and Sinclair (2010)	What factors facilitated the creation and maintenance of a CoP?	Themes that facilitated the development and maintenance of a CoP: (a) catalyst to initiate the effort, (b) vision for the students and the project, (c) the importance of support from the district and university, (d) the significance of strong relationships among stakeholders, and (e) the realization of empowerment.
O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007)	The experiences of adult students transitioning into higher education.	Three themes: (a) peripheral participation in the university in a controlled setting, (b) learning by doing, in which participants expressed a belief that they would learn more when they actually took part in an activity, such as note taking and essay writing, (c) participants spoke about belonging to the university, the program, and the general community of students.

Monaghan and Columbaro (2009) sought to discover how experiences of a CoP in a graduate level course impacts learning and professional development, and how the CoP experience compares to other types of collaborative learning. Their qualitative study resulted in three findings regarding the students' experience. These findings are an acquisition of content knowledge, interrelationship skills, and self-directedness and collaboration as two ways of engaging with lifelong learning. With respect to the second research question, the findings included greater learning opportunities for participants compared to other collaborative groups in which they have been involved. They also discovered challenges with respect to promoting diversity in CoP participant selection, integrating new members into an existing CoP, and the "artificial nature" (p. 422) of establishing a CoP within the class.

Thiry and Laursen's (2011) study inquired into the apprenticeship aspect of a university student-advisor relationship of a scientific CoP. Research students were sampled from four universities. Semi-structured interviews sought to understand student perceptions of how they developed scientific traits, habits, and identities through everyday interactions with the CoP. The researchers found that the mentoring aspect of the CoP assisted the students with learning the nature of scientific research and practice. Further, some participants benefited from developing career and educational trajectories.

Parker, Patton, Madden, and Sinclair (2010) inquired into what factors facilitated the creation and maintenance of a CoP. The research participants were elementary physical education teachers who were tasked with disseminating district-wide curriculum. Interviews, field notes, and artifacts were used to answer the research question. The researchers found five themes that facilitated the development and maintenance of a CoP. These themes are a catalyst to initiate the effort, a vision for the students and the project, the importance of support from the

district and university, the significance of strong relationships among stakeholders, and the realization of empowerment. The realization of empowerment was the most significant theme mentioned by participants. This empowerment increased confidence to pursue capacity building, which in turn enhanced their learning.

O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) inquired into the experiences of adult students transitioning into higher education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students in a program in the United Kingdom university system which aimed to introduce university study techniques to new students without formal high school qualifications. Analysis of the interviews results in three themes. These themes include peripheral participation, in which participants were aware that the program was on the periphery of the university by design, and allowed them to participate in the university in a controlled setting. The next theme was learning by doing, in which participants expressed a belief that they would learn more when they actually took part in an activity, such as note taking and essay writing. Finally, participants spoke about belonging to the university, the program, and the general community of students. This sense of belonging ranged from a feeling of full belonging, beginning to belong, or not belonging.

The research literature surrounding CoPs often includes an affirmation of the key principles of the model. The negative aspects of the model are rarely reviewed. The next section will review criticisms of the model.

Criticisms. Although CoPs have been applied to a variety of settings, the theory is not without critique. Wenger et al. (2002) as cited by Roberts (2006), asserted, “the very qualities that make a community an ideal structure for learning – a shared perspective - are the same qualities that can hold it hostage to its history and achievements” (p. 636). Roberts stated the prevalent concerns for CoPs, such as the role of power, trust, and the relevance of the

predispositions of the community members. First, an understanding of the power dynamics in the CoP is pertinent to an understanding of the knowledge creation. Further, power can impact the degree of participation. Roberts (2006) explained, “meanings may continue to be merely a reflection of the dominant force of power” (p. 627). Powerful members may limit full participation to novices (Handley, 2006). Secondly, the level of trust may influence how much information is shared. Poor relations between workers and management, strong hierarchical control, and high levels of competition can each diminish trust. Lastly, the members of a CoP have predispositions and specific preferences that will not necessarily change easily within the CoP. Likewise, the CoP can become stagnant with respect to knowledge creation and have predispositions of its own. As Roberts (2006) explained, “radical change may be difficult to bring about within existing communities, and may be more easily introduced through the destruction of old communities and the emergence of new ones” (p. 630).

An additional discussion is the differing views of what practice means. Brown and Duguid (2001) added clarity when they stated, “by practice we mean, as most theories of practice mean, undertaking or engaging fully in a task, job or profession” (p. 203). However, it can be difficult to know when one is fully engaged. Wenger’s (1998) view of practice is one of compartmentalization within an individual’s multiple memberships. Handley (2006) pointed out that it may be difficult for an individual to compartmentalize identities based on the community they are participating in. She asserted, “one could argue that the site for development of identities and practices is not solely *within* a community of practice but in the spaces *between* multiple communities” (p. 650). This discussion illustrates the difficulty in compartmentalizing identities across varying practices.

Belonging to CoPs also raises questions regarding the individual conforming to group norms, and what the ethical consequences of that may be. Preston’s (2012) qualitative longitudinal study of an outdoor and environmental education course explored the influence of membership to the group on the formation of the ethical codes of the students. She found that multi-membership in groups helped to form an ethical identity. She further argued that a CoP may be an important place for some people to work on their ethical self. Preston (2012) explained, “a community of practice could provide sanctuary and encouragement for experimentation with other ways of being, rather than simply acting to police conduct” (p. 37).

Additionally, a consideration for any group is the issue of groupthink, which is reaching consensus in order to avoid conflict (Janis, 1972). However, conflict may actually promote innovative solutions (Troyer & Youngreen, 2009). Mackey and Evans (2011) researched teachers’ online professional learning in a university graduate diploma program. They considered the role participants play in determining their engagement in and across boundaries. They found that although participants admitted gravitating toward like-minded course members, they also acknowledged different perspectives prompted new ways of thinking.

Table 2

Community of Practice Criticisms

Author	Criticism
Brown and Duguid (2001)	(a) Differing views of what practice means (b) Can be difficult to know when one is engaging fully
Handley (2006)	(a) Powerful members may limit full participation to novices (b) Level of trust important (c) Difficulty in compartmentalizing identities across varying practices
Janis (1972)	Issues with groupthink

Roberts (2006)	(a)Powerful group members may influence knowledge creation (b) radical change may be difficult to bring about
Wenger et al. (2002)	“The very qualities that make a community an ideal structure for learning – a shared perspective - are the same qualities that can hold it hostage to its history and achievements” (p. 636)

Action Research and Foucault’s Views of Power

A significant portion of my journaling included the role of power and research. This resulted in careful consideration of what the role of power relations was in the AR case. During his visit to our cohort, I had an opportunity to present a question to David Coghlan (2010), co-author of *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*. I asked how the researcher can “always treat people as an ends, never as a means” (p. 134). He joked with me that I cited the page number, however as I later noted in my journal “the question wasn’t answered.” I was not placing the burden of answering my questions on him, rather was curious about how such a thing could be accomplished.

I contend that actions are intertwined with power during the AR process. One outcome of the AR process is new power relations and/or the reinforcement of existing power relations. Contrary to a simplistic view of power in which an individual or group has control over another, Foucault’s ([1982] 2000) views offer a unique perspective into the AR practice.

Foucault has written, lectured, and interviewed extensively regarding the themes of power, discourse, and knowledge. His work continues to offer unconventional viewpoints that can meaningfully assist with researcher reflection. Reflection can prompt learning (Lay & McGuire, 2010) that will inform the practice (Schön, 1983) of both researcher and stakeholders. Reflection on the part of all parties should take place throughout the AR process.

Many researchers have found a Foucauldian perspective useful. Prins (2010) found Foucault's views regarding surveillance informed her research regarding participatory photography. She discovered the unintended consequences of self-monitoring of behavior and suspicion present with participants. Taking a Foucauldian lens, English and Irving (2008) critiqued their government contracted project regarding adult education literature on gender and learning, and how power and resistance manifested in their research project. Other researchers have utilized Foucault's work to examine the role of ethics committees (Juritzen et al., 2011), discourse in AR (Curran, 2010), student's freedom of speech in art education (Matthews, 2008), the significance of Foucault's panopticon in surveillance studies (Caluya, 2010), and the role of power in community-university relationships (Sandmann et al., 2010). Employing Foucault's themes can provide an alternative lens to help all AR researchers and stakeholders to critique and reflect upon their research, and hopefully better understand the role of power in their research.

When analyzing a case through the lens of Foucault's power perspectives, it is important not to assert a simple cause and effect relationship. This means looking for contingencies that may or may not have a role in events rather than singular causality. Further, we would not search for truths as though they were independent of power relations. Power is entwined in the relationship between individuals and between institutions and the individual. However, power relations are not viewed solely as oppressive, rather a component of our actions and interactions that cannot be separated. For Foucault, power is not thought of as some external autonomous force; rather it exists only when acted upon another person, and not necessarily in an adversarial fashion. Power is a type of relation between individuals. Foucault ([1982] 2000) refers to power relations as a "management of possibilities" (p. 341) and a question of government. The term government means to "structure the possible fields of actions of others" (p. 341). This argument

offers action researchers a unique perspective in which we consider how we are managing possibilities and structuring the possible fields of action during our research.

Another important factor here is that individuals in power relationships have options. They have actions to choose from to respond to an action. Further, Foucault contends that resistance is built into power relationships. There is always a degree of resistance with actions of power.

Power has an influence on our behaviors. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault detailed the panopticon. This architectural design arranges people, such as in a prison, in a way that they can be seen by an observer without being able to see the observer or one another. This causes one to always act assuming observation is taking place. This is an important idea in which the individual internalizes the power relationship by taking both the role of observed and observer. This design results in self-monitoring in which an external power figure is not needed. This concept expands the study of power to the mundane every day workings of power rather than just the obvious oppressive acts we often associate with it, such as bullying or abuse. For example, workplace behavior is embedded with the possibility that someone is watching, therefore we may internalize the role of observed and observer. Our actions at the workplace are influenced by the observer within. Action researchers should consider how power relations are internalized in us and the stakeholders. Does the introduction of the researcher to the research site cause an internalization of power relationships? Further, what power relationships are internalized within the researcher that affects her/his actions?

Although power influences actions, it is important to reiterate that power is considered a productive network. As Foucault ([1977] 2000) explained,

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things...it needs to be considered a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (p. 120)

This view is more encompassing than a solely oppressive view of power. For Foucault, more central than the instances of power relations is the overarching rationalization of power. Foucault ([1979] 2000) queried, "How are such relations of power rationalized? Asking it is the only way to avoid other institutions, with the same objectives and same effects, from taking their stead" (p. 325). Although power is more pervasive than something contained in an institution, power relations can become institutionalized.

Summary

Adult learning for individuals is a broad conceptual field lacking a unified theory. No singular learning model can represent the complex nature of learning. However, the various perspectives offer many angles to view the variety of contexts in which learning may occur.

There are equally extensive theories and models to apply to learning in organizations. Although not without criticism, CoP framework provides a detailed structure to understand how the alumni manage the knowledge they accumulate. A CoP framework is often applied to institutional settings such as the workplace, schools, and more recently virtual settings. CoP framework is rarely applied to community-based organizations. This case contributed to the literature and field by applying a new lens to understand the underrepresented study of organizational learning in a community setting. The case offers a system of evaluating the health of a CoP by analyzing the community, domain, and practice. Additionally, the case details a

community group that underwent a disruptive change. This situation adds valuable insight into how a community group might react to, and move forward from such a change.

Finally, power relations may be overlooked in the AR process. However, lack of assessing this field results in human interaction during AR without critique. An understanding of power relations can expand our view of participation and collaboration in AR.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to investigate how a community leadership group learns to plan and take action on community problems. The study was guided by four research questions, which were: (1) What types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community? (2) What are the alumni learning through their leadership efforts in the community? (3) To what extent are the alumni operating as a community of practice (CoP)? and (4) In what ways did the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders influence this AR project? In this chapter the design, sampling, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and reliability, limitations, and research subjectivity are discussed.

Design of the Study

An action research approach was employed in this case in order to encourage engagement from all stakeholders. Qualitative data collection methods were used primarily in the form of interviews with some observations. The stakeholders and I collaborated with respect to methods, data collection, analysis, and organizational interventions.

Action Research Methodology

Reason and Bradbury (2008) defined AR as a “participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview” (p. 1). Action research provides an opportunity for the researcher to learn about his/her practice, the stakeholders to learn about their organization and practice, and for the wider community of scholars and practitioners to learn from the case.

Highlighting the levels of practice that can benefit from AR, Bradbury and Reason (2001) distinguished, first-person practice as “work for oneself,” second-person as “work for partners,” and third-person as “work for people in the wider context” (p. 449). Ideally, the outcome of AR is theoretical knowledge gained, and knowledge to improve the practice of the researcher and stakeholders. In turn, other practitioners and organizations may benefit from the knowledge gained.

The AR process either builds a new collaborative relationship or may enhance an existing relationship which may continue after research. Glassman, Erdem, and Bartholomew (2012) asserted, “AR recognizes the importance of recognizing groups as a web or field of human interactions collectively working towards shared goals within general community framework” (p. 272). They went on to explain that members of a community that are working towards some goal interact based upon the norms or patterns learned. Action research can help alter these relationship norms and develop new “action agendas” (p. 273) by expanding the rules of participation to include all stakeholders and encouraging “non-hierarchical dialogue” (p. 274).

Action research was influenced by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1958), who integrated theory and practice in studying real life problems, and proposed that we better understand something when we try to change it. Lewin elaborated a three phase organizational model of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. In the unfreeze phase, the organization must see the need to do things differently and be malleable enough for change to take place. The change phase occurs when the organization is ready to move in a new direction. The refreeze phase occurs when the organization has made changes and a support structure is in place to reinforce those changes. These phases are analogous to AR cycles.

In AR, rather than the researcher driving decisions, a collaborative relationship with the stakeholders is imperative. Stringer (2007) posited, “by working collaboratively, participants develop collective visions of their situation that provide the basis for effective action” (p. 67). Often action researchers must manage multiple roles, particularly if they are conducting research within their own organization, or an organization in which they have existing relationships. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) cautioned that such researchers “may be too close to the issues and the people in the organization and so you have to work more consciously and explicitly at the process of inquiry” (p. 122). Conversely, outsiders to an organization may need more time to build relationships and obtain trust in order for the AR study to move forward.

Action research cycles. Authors have articulated different versions of AR cycles. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) presented the AR cycles as, “pre-step (context and purpose) followed by four basic steps: constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action” (p. 8). In the pre-step cycle the researcher and stakeholders look at the big picture of why the project is necessary, define the problem to be solved, and consider which external factors impact the organization. Additionally important here is an assessment of how the collaborative relationship will function. The constructing phase means to collaboratively articulate the theoretical and practical foundations of the action to be taken. These foundations may evolve throughout the study. Planning action is to collaborate regarding how to implement the organizational change interventions, which may take the form of multiple steps. Next, taking action is to implement an organizational change. The organizational change may have varying levels of complexity and time commitment. Finally, evaluating action entails looking at the steps that proceeded and planning for additional cycles as needed. There are often multiple cycles in the AR process.

Reflection and AR. Reflection is a fundamental aspect of AR, applied throughout the process in order to link experiences, improve judgments and inform new actions (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). Reflection can promote learning (Lay & McGuire, 2010) that will inform the practice (Schön, 1983) of both researcher and stakeholders. One means of categorizing reflection is content, process, and premise (Mezirow, 1991). By reflecting upon the content, the researcher and participants consider what they perceive is taking place regarding the research site and research questions. Reflecting upon the process offers opportunities to critique methods, analysis, and the action steps throughout the research. Lastly, reflecting upon premises means to consider what assumptions are influencing the research actions. Reflection can lead to enriched dialogue, just as dialogue can enrich reflection. Highlighting the collaborative nature of AR, Stringer (2007) proposed “meaning-making discussion and dialogue – hermeneutic dialectic processes – with the intent of developing mutually acceptable accounts of the issues and problems they are investigating” (p. 115). Incorporating a systematic reflection plan into the AR process can enrich the researcher / stakeholder relationship and enhance dialogue.

Action research criticisms. Like other methodologies, there are a number of criticisms regarding AR. Two concerns pertain to the nature of collaboration and role of validity. I will briefly address these two concerns next.

One feature of AR is the increased participation from stakeholders in the form of collaboration regarding the direction of research. Details of how collaboration is lived out is often lacking in AR write-ups (Peters, 1997). Explicitly defining what participation and collaboration means would add clarity for AR practitioners and stakeholders. Regarding participation, Peters (1997) bluntly cautioned,

What some of us call participation is really involvement. We don't give up much control, although we say that the people affected by our research participate in doing the research. More often than not, 'participants' provide a sounding board or are advisers, or simply go-alongs, politely cooperating with action researchers who are just one philosophical inch away from contradicting their own espoused beliefs about people participating in research that affects their lives. (p. 67)

This distinction between involvement and participation is important. Likewise, what researchers may call collaboration may be more like cooperation. Peters (1997) divulged a subtle and important distinction that collaboration "means people laboring together with the intent of creating something," and cooperation "means people working together to help each other out" (p. 67). It would benefit AR stakeholders to dialogue regarding expectations surrounding collaboration.

In addition to collaboration, validity in AR can be a contested issue. Anderson and Herr (1999) suggested that AR adhere to outcome, process, democratic, catalytic, and dialogic validities. Outcome validity refers to the success of the research outcomes, which is the extent to which the outcomes match the intention. Process validity pertains to the effectiveness of the research in addressing the problem. Democratic validity pertains to the level of collaboration with stakeholders. Catalytic validity is the extent to which the research process transforms the participants, deepens understanding, and moves participants towards social action. Dialogic validity is the extent to which practitioner-researchers dialogue with other practitioner-researchers.

Newton and Burgess (2008) proposed a prioritization of Anderson and Herr's (1999) validity criteria based upon the mode of AR. Particularly, they referred to the three modes of

emancipatory, practical, and knowledge gathering in the field of educational AR. They offered a distinction between primary and secondary validities. The primary validities address whether the primary goal of the AR mode has been accomplished. The secondary validities ensure that the AR project falls within the field of educational AR. With emancipatory AR, the primary validity is democratic and catalytic, and the secondary validity is process and outcome. With practical AR, the primary validity is catalytic and outcome, and the secondary is process and democratic. With knowledge generating AR, the primary validity is outcome and process, and the secondary is democratic and catalytic.

Case Study

Merriam (2009) defined a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). The bounded systems of case studies may be a “person..., a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy” (p. 40). The key factor of a case study is that the phenomenon of interest is bounded. In the case of this study, the bounded system is the action research project with SCAA. Yin (2009) offered case studies’ strengths as “its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence –documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (p. 11).

Qualitative Methods

This AR case utilized qualitative research methods, consisting of thirteen interviews and four observations. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 13). Qualitative research has a particular strength, as Maxwell (2005) explained, “its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers ... qualitative researchers ... tend to ask how x plays role in causing y, what the process is that connects x and y” (pp. 22-23). Since we were seeking to understand the

connections between the alumni's community activity and their learning, as well as the extent to which they are a CoP, this study was best suited for qualitative methods. Further, qualitative research is often well suited for AR because of the focus on people in their contextual situations (Maxwell, 2005).

Qualitative research tends to entail a cyclical relationship with the applicable literature, rather than a linear process. Merriam (2009) called this relationship a, "dialogue with previous studies and work in the area" (p. 71). A preliminary review of the literature takes places, followed by continual reviews as the study unfolds and the meaning of the data emerges. As new literature is uncovered, it is incorporated into the process.

Study Participants

The study participants were members of SCAA. They ranged in age from 40 to 62, were African American or mixed race, and seven out of the ten were female. Table 3 contains participant characteristics. Veronica, the alumni president, and I discussed whom I could interview by considering who has been active in the community after graduating from SCNLI, and would be available to interview. Regarding availability, we took into consideration alumni that were known to be going through health issues or personal struggles which would prevent their participation. I relied on Veronica's knowledge of potential participants since I was not familiar with most of them. Veronica and I used what Maxwell (2005) called "purposeful selection ... in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten well from other choices" (p. 88). We discussed each of the choices to make sure we were obtaining a wide range of graduation dates and various types of community involvement.

Table 3

Participant Characteristics

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Year of Graduation</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Community Involvement</u>
Alicia	2007	49	Female	African Am.	Affordable housing, Financial literacy
Beatrice	2008	58	Female	African Am.	Volunteering for SCAA, Disability awareness, Energy assistance
Carmella	2008	40	Female	African Am.	Childhood education
Charles	2006	57	Male	African Am.	Homeowner's association, Community safety, Church involvement
Harvey	2004	59	Male	African Am.	Food and clothing drives, HIV/AIDS awareness, Youth instruction
Lisa	2005	unkn.	Female	Native Am., African Am.	Nutrition education
Mary	2009	54	Female	Multiracial	Diversity issues, Public health, Business development
Nadia	2002	62	Female	African Am.	Food drives, Interim SCAA president
Ronald	2010	62	Male	Native Am.	Employment issues
Veronica	2007	59	Female	African Am.	Neighborhood watches, Previous SCNLI director, Newly elected SCAA president

The participants selected were mostly typical, that is, “selected because it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). Additionally, we attempted unique sampling, such as the daughter of SCNLI’s founder, and two individuals who were part of first few classes. However, these individuals were not available because of health issues. Merriam (2009) described unique sampling as, “rare attributes or occurrences of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 78).

Data Collection

Qualitative research typically relies upon three types of data collection, which are observations, interviews, and documentation. This case primarily relied upon interviews, with some observations. Documentation from SCAA and SCNLI was minimal. This research was approved by the University of Georgia’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Interviews

Interviews were the primary source of data collection for the study. As Merriam (2009) stated, “interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It also is necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 88). By taking advantage of interviews as a research method, I was able to collect data of past events that I had not observed. Also, the interviews helped to investigate areas that were related to the research questions.

Patton (2002) referred to six categories which interviews touch upon. These categories are experience and behavior, opinion and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and demographic. The interviews, and corresponding demographic questionnaire, touched upon each category with the exception of sensory. The interviews were semi-structured, with an interview script being utilized, and follow-up probes often taking place after the response (Roulston, 2010).

The follow-up probes allowed for investigating areas related to the research questions that evolved during the interview. See Appendix B for the interview guide.

Observations

Merriam (2009) explained the benefit of observations is to “provide some knowledge of the context or to provide specific incidents, behaviors, and so on that can be used for reference points for subsequent interviews” (p. 119). Observations can help answer research questions and provide data that can be expounded upon during interviews. Elements to observe can include the physical setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversations, subtle factors (such as unplanned activities, commutative meaning of words, nonverbal communication, physical clues, and what does not take place), and the behavior of the observer (Merriam, 2009). Taking plenty of detailed notes during observations creates data that can be analyzed and compared to other forms of data.

The observations occurred early in the research, during the periods when SCNLI training was being conducted. The goal of observing these training sessions was to allow me to experience what the alumni had learned from SCNLI, how the training sessions were structured, what the learning environment was like, and how the participants interacted with one another. In addition, those occasions allowed me to be present with the participants and provided opportunities for building trust. Maxwell (2005) explained that observing participants “can enable you to draw inferences about this perspective that you couldn’t obtain by relying exclusively on interview data” (p. 94).

Observations were documented in my journal and referenced once the interviewing began. For example, when I noticed social learning emerging from the interviews, I reviewed

the observation journal to search for social learning references. This practice provided opportunities for triangulation (Merriam, 2009).

Table 4

Data Collection and Analysis

Data source	Time frame collected	Data analysis strategy
RQ1: What types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community?		
Interviews Observation journals	June 2011 - Nov 2012	Constant comparative method
RQ2: What are the alumni learning through their leadership efforts in the community?		
Interviews Observation journals	June 2011 - Nov 2012	Constant comparative method
RQ3: To what extent are the alumni operating as a community of practice (CoP)?		
Interviews Observation journals	June 2011 – Nov 2012	Constant comparative method
RQ4: In what ways did the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders influence this AR project?		
Exit interview Researcher journals	Feb 2011 – Aug 2013	Constant comparative method

Data Analysis

I followed an inductive approach to analyzing the data. As Roulston (2010) explained, “inductive analysis is based on the assumption that inferences can be developed by examining empirical data for patterns” (p. 150). An inductive process is used to build theory rather than to

test existing theory, as in a deductive approach. Analysis of the first three research questions was carried out in the prescribed manner mentioned in the methodology section. For the fourth research question pertaining to what the AR team had learned, I framed the answer to that question as it related to Foucauldian power relations. Regarding the fourth research question, a final interview with Veronica provided insight, along with my journals.

I followed a constant comparative method for analyzing the interview data (Merriam, 2009). This method entailed comparing one piece of data with another to determine similarities and differences. The constant comparative method originated with Glaser and Strauss (1967), and has evolved to accommodate various perspectives and disciplines. The basic steps of the method are (1) comparing incidents pertaining to each category, (2) integrating categories, (3) delimiting theory, and (4) writing up the theory. The researcher is encouraged to take notes throughout this process in order to record how the process is developing and leading towards the goal.

In order to expound upon the steps of the constant comparative method, I prepared the following steps which were inspired by Merriam (2009, pp. 175-193).

1. Transcription of interviews
2. Reading through transcription and making initial notes or open coding
3. Reviewing notes and assigning codes based on the research questions
4. Moving on to the next data source and repeating the first three steps
5. Merging all transcripts into the codes created
6. Refining codes and creating themes
7. Considering interrelationships of themes

These guidelines provided a consistent method of interview analysis. Throughout the process I referred to observation notes and my research journal and notated relationships amongst these data.

Each of the interviews took place at an off-site location and was recorded for transcription by a professional. I listened to each recording to confirm the quality of the transcription, and to become reacquainted with the interviews before coding. As each interview was completed, I went through the steps of transcribing, making initial notes, and assigning codes. After this was completed for each interview, I began to consider what themes were emerging from the codes. Once all the interviews were completed, I merged the codes, removed duplicate codes and revised other codes as needed. Finally, I began to assign the themes that would represent each of the codes. I noticed that analyzing one interview prepared me for the next interview by bringing to mind possible themes that appeared to be emerging. Table 5 provides an example of the coding that took place.

Table 5

Sample of Interview Coding

Example one.

Research question one: What types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community?

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Quote</u>
Social	Example of Others	Ronald	I learned then and again in my professional life, just when you think you know something, you find out how little you know when you compare other people and the type of work that they are doing.

Social	Example of Others	Beatrice	As I saw them, they all were very instrumental in it, as the people were directed to the center they would be there early in the morning helping the people, you know getting it organized, opening the doors.
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Example two.

Research question three: To what extent are the alumni operating as a CoP? (practice aspect of CoP)

Resource Awareness	Directing to resources	Beatrice	I would direct them to the program in the area where they were, where they could get the help they needed.
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Resource Awareness	Directing to resources	Harvey	we make sure we give out resources to the community and if they knew ... and most of them, none of the community knows about.
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Example one in Table 5 demonstrates coding of transcribed interviews. All quotes were input into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for convenient sorting. In example one, I assigned the code of “example of others” to this data. When I reviewed Beatrice’s quote from the transcriptions, I noticed it also related to “example of others,” so I coded it as such. This process took place for all thirteen interviews. On many occasions the codes were refined when there were similar occurrences. For example, the “community activities” code originally had a variety of activity types. During the coding process, it was refined. Lastly, the interrelationship of themes was considered and presented in the implications section. This process took place for each research question.

Regarding example two in Table 5, the code “directing to resources” was assigned to Beatrice’s quote. When I read Harvey’s quote, I noticed it was similar so I assigned the same code. Once all codes were assigned and refined, I assigned themes. The theme of “resource

awareness and information distribution” occurred five times with respect to the alumni’s practice as a CoP. I followed the same pattern for the other research questions.

Trustworthiness and Reliability of the Data

There is an abundance of discussion regarding what makes for quality quantitative research. Merriam (2009) contended, “rigor in qualitative research derives from the researcher’s presence, the nature of the interaction between researchers and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description” (p. 166). Trustworthiness and reliability will be addressed in this section, as well as the research journals that were maintained during research, and researcher’s assumptions and biases.

Trustworthiness

Validity, often referred to as trustworthiness in qualitative research, can be a contested topic. It is often differentiated by the researcher’s inclinations towards either positivism or interpretivism. Miles and Huberman (1994) queried, “Do the findings of the study make sense? Are they credible to the people we study and to our readers? Do we have an authentic portrait of what we are looking at?” (p. 278). They further drew attention to the questions of “what the study does for its participants ... and for its consumers” (p. 280). Maxwell (2005) offered general guidance regarding validity threats when he stated, “the main emphasis on a qualitative proposal ought to be on how you will rule out specific plausible alternatives and threats to your interpretations and explanations” (p. 107). Further Merriam (2009) offered practical advice in this area by stating, “the qualitative study provides the reader with depiction in enough detail to show that the author’s conclusion makes sense” (p. 210). Maxwell (2005) contended that researcher bias and reactivity are two internal validity threats to be considered, and offers the following strategies to address trustworthiness.

Length of time. The length of time a researcher spends with the site is relevant to trustworthiness. Speaking to this ideal Maxwell (2005) asserted, “not only does [length of time] provide more, and more different kinds, of data, but also the data are more direct and dependent on inference” (p. 110). How much time is considered long-term is open to interpretation. From start to finish, my length of time with the alumni was twenty-eight months.

Rich data. The next opportunity to manage trustworthiness is by obtaining rich data. As Maxwell (2005) asserted, “in interview studies, such data generally require verbatim transcripts ... for observations, rich data are a product of detailed, descriptive note taking” (p. 110). Verbatim transcriptions took place for all interviews. Follow-up interviews took place with three participants when further clarification was needed. The observations were accompanied by detailed note taking.

Respondent validation. Misinterpretation is a considerable concern for researchers. One way to diminish the effects of this is with respondent validation or member checking. Each participant was given an opportunity to review transcripts and the analysis, to make comments and offer clarification. Maxwell (2005) said doing so, “is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting ... as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases” (p. 111).

Participant feedback helped reveal differences with how I viewed the data and how others viewed the data. Three interviewees responded to requests to review my interpretation of the data. In one case, Mary explained to me that she prefers not to be considered a teacher in the community because it denotes authority. The two others that responded said they had no corrections or concerns regarding the analysis. The remaining interviewees did not respond to requests to review the analysis.

Researcher presence. The researcher's presence has a consequence on the data collected. In action research, the researcher's presence is heightened since he/she collaborates with stakeholders throughout the process. Researcher presence inevitably has an impact on research outcomes. The journals that are mentioned in the following section brought awareness with respect to my presence with the stakeholders.

Discrepant data. There may be times when data appears to be discrepant, meaning it is not congruent with other data collected. Maxwell (2005) suggested, "you need to rigorously examine both the supporting and the discrepant data to assess whether it is plausible to retain or modify the conclusion" (p. 112). I did not encounter data that was conflicting or significantly challenging to the analysis. However, I had a number of opportunities to present portions of my analysis to cohort classmates. This process allowed for other perspectives to check my biases, assumptions, and potential flaws in methods.

Triangulation. Triangulation entails collecting data from a diverse range of participants and methods. Although triangulation is not a guarantee of a reduction of threats to trustworthiness, Maxwell (2005) asserted, "this strategy reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method, and allows better assessment of the generality of the explanations that one develops" (p. 112). The AR team made efforts to include a variety of participants, from various SCNLI classes and community interests. Both observations and interviews were incorporated.

Reliability. Reliability is more often associated with quantitative research. Merriam (1998) addressed reliability in qualitative research and stated, "the question then is not whether findings will be found again but whether the results are consistent with data collected" (p. 221). Her suggestion is that an audit trail of how the data was collected and analyzed supports

reliability. In order to keep a record of the research activity, I maintained a journal for information regarding the research processes, what decisions were made by the team, and why those decisions were made. Details of the audit trail are provided throughout this document.

Research Journals

The four journals I maintained throughout the research were a research log, researcher subjectivity, racial considerations of the research, and ethical considerations. Regular writing in the journals was a means of “thinking in a strenuous manner” (Amble, 2012), by considering my identity in relation to the research as well as to make notes pertinent to the research questions (Roulston, 2010). These journals provided rich source of data pertaining to researcher reflection in addition to research processes.

Research log. I began a journal to document my interactions with the stakeholders in order to assist with reactivity. The goal was not to remove how I influenced participants, rather to better understand it. This journal began with my first site interaction and has over sixty entries. The entries include topics from the mechanics of conducting AR, data collection and analysis, and ideas regarding theoretical connections. This journal was useful regarding documenting the research processes, particularly the stakeholder involvement in research decisions.

Subjectivity. This journal provided an opportunity for me to write notes regarding the research subject matter in order for me to better understand my subjectivity. There are over forty entries that include thoughts after interviews, my personal experiences with community activities, and connections to various relevant literatures. The goal of the journals was not to remove the subjectivity I brought to the research, but rather they were to aid in the understanding of it.

This journal was influenced by phenomenological bridling (Vagle, 2009), with a purpose of capturing my views of community leadership and problem solving. As Vagle (2009) explained,

First, bridling involves the essence of bracketing in that pre-understandings are restrained so they do not limit the research openness. Second, bridling is an active project in which one continually tends to the understanding of the phenomenon as a whole throughout the study. (p. 591)

This approach is similar to a bracketing journal in phenomenological research in which the researcher documents his/her understanding and experiences regarding the research subject matter. Some phenomenological researchers say the goal of doing so is to limit the researcher's impact on the research, while others believe this is not possible and journaling can only help reveal the impact rather than prevent it. A bridling perspective views the relationship between the researcher and research topic, and subsequent impact, as continually changing throughout the study.

Impact of race. A third journal was kept to document what it was like for me being a white researcher with mostly African American participants. This came as a result of feeling the need to document the unique racial make-up of the case. The results of this journaling are reported in chapter 5.

Ethics. This journal included ethical considerations of the research. Influenced by Gellerman, Frankel and Ladenson's (1990) ethical advice regarding being cautious of prompting power shifts in organizations, I began to consider the impact of power relations regarding the actions of the researcher and participants, and the change of power relations that might take place

during and as a result of the research. These journal entries assisted with answering the fourth research question.

Limitations

Regarding sampling, Veronica and I discussed whom I should interview by considering who has been active in the community and who would be available to interview. Alumni that were not available to interview resulted in data that was not collected. These alumni may have had valuable stories to share as to why they are less involved in SCAA. Further, as an outsider to the organization I was reliant upon Veronica's suggestions for interviewees, although we did discuss each choice. The SCAA executive committee had the opportunity to review choices for interviewees and to offer feedback.

The results of this case are not generalizable. However, the case does offer valuable information that other community groups can learn from. The story of SCAA provides insight from which other community groups may benefit, such as how to best manage organizational learning, and the impact of change on a CoP.

Researcher's Subjectivity

Researchers enter into research with assumptions and biases. Viewpoints regarding managing this issue vary from attempting complete objectivity to simply understanding the role of biases and assumptions. With respect to qualitative research Maxwell (2005) explained that the researcher is the instrument, and "separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypothesis, and validity checks" (p. 38).

It is important for a researcher to understand his/her viewpoint regarding qualitative data. Roulston (2010) offered six conceptions regarding interviewing, which are neo-positiveness, romantic, constructivist, postmodern, and transformative. My approach to interviews did not fall

solely into one category. I conducted interviews with elements of neo-positiveness in which “the interview subject has an ‘inner’ or ‘authentic’ self ... which may be revealed through careful questioning” (p. 52), and constructiveness in which “the data are co-constructed by the interviewer and interviewee” (p. 60). Further, I considered the postmodern conception in which I “question the possibility of generating ‘truthful’ accounts by asking questions of others” (p. 63). Managing both viewpoints entailed aiming for data from the subject’s authentic self with an understanding that it might be an unreachable goal. Merriam (2009) explained that qualitative research is more often located in interpretive research, in which reality is socially constructed.

Although this is not a phenomenological study, I am influenced by certain phenomenological viewpoints such as Van Manen’s (1990) assertion that conducting hermeneutic phenomenology, “is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal” (p. 18). He goes on to say this claim should not make us give up the cause; rather it should make us pursue human science more vigorously. Hermeneutics is the study of written text which focuses on context and original intended meaning.

My view of writing the research report is that I cannot escape inserting my own interpretation, which makes understanding my biases and assumptions important to reveal. As Jootun et al. (2009) stated, “the reflexive researcher acknowledges that any finding is the product of the researcher’s interpretation” (p. 45). Interpretation means that the researcher must know his or her self in order to know what effect that has on interpretation and research outcomes. Another researcher would likely have different outcomes to report than mine. The act of writing

up the research is a complex relationship of the meaning the participants attempt to communicate, my meaning, the meaning put in writing, and the reader's meaning.

Regarding adult learning, my assumption is that learning is multifaceted, incorporating culture, spirituality, imagination, neuroscience, the physical body, social aspects, and much more which we are not aware of. This complexity makes categorization problematic. With respect to the participants, I assumed they did in fact learn something during their community interactions, and expressed their learning to the best of their ability.

Finally, I have an affinity to grassroots community groups, and enjoy helping them to be successful, assuming their goals for the community are closely related to mine. I desire to see these types of groups have a positive impact in the community by being a balance to other institutions with power, such as government.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY REPORT

Community based groups may face challenges that hinder their ability to implement change in the community. Challenges arise from within an organization, or externally. The purpose of the study was to investigate how a community leadership group learns to plan and take action on community problems. During the case, SCAA's relationship with SCNLI was dissolved. The study was guided by four research questions, which were: (1) What types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community? (2) What are the alumni learning through their leadership efforts in the community? (3) To what extent are the alumni operating as a community of practice (CoP)? and (4) In what ways did the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders influence this AR project? This chapter will tell the story of the case through its context, participants, timetable, and unfolding of the action research process.

This chapter provides the action research context and then the case story and outcomes. Details are provided to tell the story of the case in order to connect that story with research processes and outcomes. The story is an AR case in which the researcher and stakeholders were met with disruptions. However, the case moved forward to provide valuable findings and a path forward for SCAA.

Action Research Context

South County Alumni Association is a neighborhood leadership alumni association situated in the Southeastern United States. Members of this group are graduates of SCNLI. The

purpose of SCNLI is to provide opportunities for citizens to increase their awareness of community issues and to improve their leadership skills in order to address those issues. The long term goal is to help make the community a more desirable place to live brought about by a network of trained and skilled grassroots leaders who reside in the neighborhood. By training the participants to navigate political, educational and social systems in the county, SCNLI aims to empower residents to take actions that lead to communities that are safer, cleaner, and have more economic opportunities. South County Neighborhood Leadership Institute's informational flyer states (South County Neighborhood Leadership Institute, n.d.),

The [Institute] is a nine month educational program for emerging grass roots leaders in [the county]. It is designed to develop leaders that can assist their neighborhoods in understanding their government and in dealing effectively with community problems. Each class consists of individuals that represent the diversity of [the county] in terms of race, age, sex and occupation. Three quarters of the participants are from low/moderate income communities. Business, education, arts and civic groups are also represented. All participants must have demonstrated a sincere commitment, motivation and an interest in serving the community prior to their enrollment. Graduates are expected to use their increased knowledge to further serve their neighborhood and to become a part of the network of trained community leaders growing throughout [the county]. Believing effective leadership is vital to a community's long-term wellbeing, [the institute] is committed to providing [the county] with the most effective leadership possible.

South County Neighborhood Leadership Institute receives funding from a state grant, which requires that at least seventy percent of the participants are from low/moderate income households using the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guidelines of income no

greater than one hundred and twenty five percent of the poverty level. South County Neighborhood Leadership Institute has been in existence for thirty years, and there is a maximum of thirty participants per program year. Over eight hundred have graduated to date. Unfortunately, fewer than thirty alumni typically show up for the quarterly alumni meetings. I was not able to obtain the demographic data of previous graduates.

County Demographics

Understanding learning in the community setting demands consideration of the social-cultural context (Kim, 2012). The United States Census Bureau estimated the following 2012 data for the county in which SCAA operates.

- Population of 707,089
- 37.4% White alone
- 54.6% Black or African American
- .6% American Indian and Alaska Native
- 5.5% Asian
- .1% Native Hawaiian
- 2% Two or more races
- 9.5% Hispanic or Latino
- 29.9% White alone, not Hispanic or Latino

Most notably, Black or African American is 23.5% higher than the overall state percentage, and Asian alone is 2% higher than the overall state percentage.

Intercultural Concerns

A report (Intercultural Task Force Report, n.d.) produced for the county in which SCNLI and SCAA operates, offers demographic data as well as recent intercultural concerns. The

largest immigrant and refugee groups are Asians and Latinos, growing from 2.5% percent of the population in 1980 to 12.5% in 2000. One in six residents is foreign born.

The report further identifies five major intercultural issues, which are day laborers, gangs, refugees, public health, and economic development. Day laborer concerns include unfair wages and resident concerns of day laborers waiting on the roadside. The report identifies a growth of gang activity, mostly attributed to Latinos. The county received the most refugees of any county in the state. There is a concern that living conditions for refugees are much less acceptable than other residents. The most critical public health issues are identified as motor vehicle injuries, HIV/STDS, and prenatal care. The economic development issue is identified as a need to further develop relationships with refugee communities in order to grow economic activity and tax revenues. This information not only assists with setting the context, it also informed AR interventions.

Nature of the Site

The community can be a site of lifelong learning through formal educational initiatives as well as a variety of informal learning opportunities such as team projects, problem solving, and social interaction (Jarvis, 2009). Further, a critical pedagogical perspective sees the broad field of community development as third sector in society between state and industry (English & Mayo, 2012). This viewpoint positions community groups as a means of balancing power relations when members of the community are able to organize and influence government and business entities with respect to policy and actions.

South County Alumni Association consists of graduates of SCNLI who choose to become members. The alumni have been involved in various community projects ranging from getting pedestrian signage installed, organizing food drives, and establishing a community international

festival. Often they function as social entrepreneurs (Prieto, Phipps & Friedich, 2012) which are individuals who approach social needs using a blended approach that may include private, public, and non-profit resources for problem solving.

Stakeholders

The five person SCAA executive committee participated in the AR planning at varying levels. Although all alumni were informed about the research via email and were encouraged to participate in planning, no alumni outside of the executive committee responded to that request. A few alumni did make minor suggestions such as potential interviewees. This sparse participation by other alumni may be explained by the dissolved relationship with SCNLI and a transition in leadership. The AR stakeholder with the most participation was the newly elected president of SCAA, Veronica, who was previously the SCNLI director for a number of years. She was the first person I had proposed AR to when she was the SCNLI director at that time. In addition to Veronica, four participants were relatively active on the AR planning team. This may be considered a small team, however optimal team size is hardly conclusive (Aubé, Rousseau, & Tremblay 2011; Mueller, 2012). Please see Table 3 for participant characteristics.

Participant Profiles

The interviewees ranged in age from 40 to 62, were African American or mixed race, and seven out of the ten were female. Of the ten participants, three were interviewed twice and the rest were interviewed once. The types of community involvement vary for the alumni, although the interviews revealed some instances of collaboration despite this variety.

Alicia. Alicia is a 49 year old African American female. She graduated from SCNLI in 2007 and now serves on SCAA's executive committee. Her interests in the community are affordable housing and financial literacy. She has been active in SCAA since graduation. One

interview was conducted with Alicia. She spoke of her role in the community: “I like to make a change. I don’t like being in the limelight, I like being in the background. So how would I define my role? Probably a rebel. More like a rebel.” Alicia was part of the AR team, with a moderate level of participation, offering feedback regarding data analysis and participating in intervention dialogue.

Beatrice. Beatrice is a 58 year old African American female. She graduated from SCNLI in 2008. Her interests in the community include disability awareness, energy assistance, and volunteering for various causes. Her physical disabilities prevent her from being as active as she would like. One interview was conducted with Beatrice. She shared her role in the community as, “kinda like a watchdog.”

Carmella. Carmella is a 40 year old African American female. She graduated from SCNLI in 2008. Her interests in the community include child and adult education. She served as the education liaison for SCAA for a few years. Recently, she has been less active, requesting a break from the work. Two interviews were conducted with Carmella. She refers to her role in the community as, “educating ... I never want to be the front runner person but I always want to be the person behind them doing the research.”

Charles. Charles is a 57 year old African American male. He graduated from SCNLI in 2006, and serves as treasurer for SCAA’s executive committee. His interests include various causes that improve the community such as serving on homeowner’s associations, community safety, and church involvement. He has remained active in the community since graduation. One interview was conducted with Charles. Charles describes his role in the community as, “[having] the people at heart.” Charles was part of the AR team with minimal participation, being present for some AR planning meetings. However, he did not offer feedback.

Harvey. Harvey is a 59 year old African American male. He graduated from SCNLI in 2004, and has been active in the community since. His community interests include food and clothing drives, HIV/AIDS awareness and assistance, and youth instruction. At times, his health prevents him from being as active as he would like. One interview was conducted with Harvey. He commented on his role: “I don’t define my role – my community defines my role and the need defines my role. I’m not a leader, I’m a servant.”

Lisa. Lisa is a mixed race Native American / African American female. She did not disclose her age, but could be estimated at middle age. She graduated from SCNLI in 2005, and served on SCAA’s executive committee for a number of years. Lisa stopped serving on the executive committee when the relationship with SCNLI was dissolved. Her interests in the community are nutrition and health. One interview was conducted with Lisa. She defined her role by stating, “I consider myself as ... I’m analytical. If someone approached me about something and asked me about something, I’ll spend my time and I’ll try to analyze it.” Lisa was briefly part of the AR team, before the relationship with SCNLI was dissolved, with minimal participation. She offered some input into the AR planning early in the research.

Mary. Mary is a 54 year old multiracial female. She graduated from SCNLI in 2009. She has a wide array of interests in the community, including diversity, public health, and small business development. Two interviews were conducted with Mary. She describes her role in the community as, “I always play devil’s advocate, that’s what I’ve been learning how to do.”

Nadia. Nadia is a 62 year old African American female. She graduated from SCNLI in 2002, and has served four years as SCAA president. Additionally, she is founder and president of a non-profit organization and is very active in the community. Some of her activities include summer food programs for children, and initiating a local international fair. When asked about

her role in the community, she said, “I’m really trying to focus more on my non-profit, which is my baby and it’s becoming very demanding of my time, as well, moving forward.” As interim SCAA president, Nadia was part of the AR team, with moderate participation, including AR team dialogue regarding data collection, analysis, and intervention planning.

Ronald. Ronald is a 62 year old Native American male. He graduated from SCNLI in 2010 and serves as the communication liaison on SCAA’s executive committee. His other main role was facilitating the monthly SCNLI training sessions, until the relationship was dissolved. Ronald was part of the AR team with minimal participation, offering a few ideas regarding the potential direction of the AR.

Veronica. Veronica is a 59 year old African American female. After serving as SCNLI director for a number of years, she was given the title of honorary alumni. She retired from SCNLI in 2011, and became SCAA president in 2012. Her activity in the community includes neighborhood watches and neighborhood cleanups. She defined her role as, “a facilitator.” Veronica was part of the AR team with the most participation. She was the first person I was introduced to at the site, and pressed SCAA’s executive committee to make the AR project a priority.

Case Story and Outcomes

South County Alumni Association has been in existence for over twenty years as the official alumni group for SCNLI. During this time, the association’s main function included facilitating the institute training sessions and various community change initiatives. Members of SCAA had common shared experiences from SCNLI, which were often mentioned in the interviews as a source of learning. During the course of the AR case, SCAA went through what

may have been their most consequential change, the dissolution of their relationship with SCNLI.

The AR case had four phases, which were entry and contracting, transition in alumni leadership and turmoil, Veronica returns, and moving forward. The entry and contracting phase details the genesis of the AR project. Transition in alumni leadership and turmoil entails the dissolved relationship with SCNLI and changes in leadership with the key stakeholders. Veronica returns represents another change in leadership at SCAA, which will remain during the conclusion of the AR project. Finally, moving forward describes the new chapter for SCAA and the conclusion of the research. Table 6 provides the AR case timeline.

Table 6

AR Case Timeline

<u>Main phases</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>AR activity</u>
Entry and contracting	Feb 25, 2011	AR meeting with SCNLI director
	April 1, 2011	Commitment from site to participate
	June 10, 2011	First AR team meeting
Transition in leadership and turmoil	June 11, 2011	Veronica (director) retires from SCNLI
	June 18, 2011	Observation of training session
	June 28, 2011	Meeting with Nadia (SCAA president)
	July 16, 2011	Observation of training session
	July 19, 2011	AR team meeting
	Oct 15, 2011	Observation of graduation ceremony
	Jan 27, 2012	Marie interview
	April 17, 2012	AR team meeting
	April 27, 2012	Second interview with Marie
	May 1, 2012	Beatrice interview
Veronica returns	May 3, 2012	Anita interview
	May 8, 2012	Veronica interview
	May 8, 2012	Veronica becomes new alumni president
	May 10, 2012	Harvey interview

	May 19, 2012	Lisa interview
	June 13, 2012	AR team meeting
	July 18, 2012	Carmella interview
	Aug 18, 2012	Observation of SCAA reunion
	Oct 4, 2012	Nadia interview
	Oct 10, 2012	AR team meeting
	Nov 1, 2012	Carmella interview
	Nov 9, 2012	Ronald interview
Moving forward	Jan 15, 2013	AR team meeting
	Feb 26, 2013	AR team meeting
	Mar 26, 2013	AR team meeting
	Apr 16, 2013	AR team meeting
	May 7, 2013	AR team meeting
	July 13, 2013	AR Exit interview with Veronica
	Aug 20, 2013	AR team meeting

Entry and Contracting

My first encounter with the research site was through my introduction to Veronica, the director of SCNLI, in February 2011. A classmate in the Adult Education program at the University of Georgia explained AR methodology to Veronica, and she was interested to know how it could benefit the organization. The classmate soon introduced the two of us. We had a phone conversation in which Veronica and I discussed the general philosophy of AR methodology and the organization's background. We planned a second meeting to take place in-person. At this second meeting, Veronica said she'd like to see the alumni have a greater presence in the community and that they would be better equipped to mentor other community organizations with change initiatives. I explained that we would talk more about her concerns and have time to investigate possible interventions. At the conclusion of the meeting, I asked her to consider the stakeholders that would make up an AR team. She would later select five individuals, some of which worked at SCNLI and others from SCAA. Due to dissolution of

SCAA's relationship with SCNLI, which will be detailed, none of these five individuals would remain on the AR team.

Five members attended our first team meeting in June, 2011. I reviewed the AR process and answered some questions regarding how the process might unfold. We discussed possible times and locations for regular meetings. I also emphasized the collaborative nature of AR. I noted in my journal that the group appeared to be interested in an AR project and had many thoughtful questions. After this meeting, and each additional team meeting, updates were emailed to all alumni, soliciting feedback and suggestions regarding various AR steps such as data collection and analysis. The level of response from the alumni, other than the president and SCAA executive team, was minimal. This level of participation may have been due to SCAA's dissolved relationship with SCNLI. At this early stage of the project, we were not sure what problem we would attempt to solve.

The mention of the AR team in the rest of this case write-up refers to primary Veronica and me, with varying levels of participation from the association's executive team. Veronica was present at this first meeting along with three SCNLI employees and one alumna. Veronica was the only one present that would continue to be involved in the AR team.

Transition in Leadership and Turmoil

In June 2011, Veronica retired from SCNLI. She soon explained to me that there was strife between SCAA and SCNLI. At the time of her retirement, Veronica said she was not yet sure why the relationship was damaged. Additionally, Nadia the interim alumni president said SCNLI did not appreciate the work the alumni were providing, and SCAA decided to no longer provide support to SCNLI. The type of support they were providing consisted mainly of preparing and facilitating the monthly training sessions and various community service

initiatives that SCNLI sponsored. As a result, the alumni gathered together less frequently during this period. However, a number of SCAA initiated community activities took place in which small teams collaborated for planning and execution. These initiatives included a neighborhood international festival and a summer food program for children.

In the months that followed, I discovered that Nadia had upset the SCNLI overseer by bringing a local politician to what was meant to be a private meeting discussing the role of the alumni with respect to SCNLI. By the end of the AR process, Nadia and Veronica confirmed that SCNLI started a new alumni group and asked future graduates to only associate with that new group. Because of this strained relationship, and Veronica's retirement, I decided to work with SCAA exclusively rather than SCNLI for the research. The project continued with the alumni as the research participants, and the alumni president and alumni executive committee as the AR team.

Research Ensues

Maxwell (2005) stated "you can lay out a tentative plan for some aspects of your study in considerable detail, but leave open the possibility of substantially revising this if necessary" (p. 81). Certainly the cyclical nature of inquiry in AR can lead to revised plans, research agendas, and interventions. In this case, reviewing the academic literature throughout the problem formation phase added valuable topics for team dialogue. Specifically, the AR team took occasion to discuss various aspects of adult learning theory, and how organizations manage learning such as in CoPs. Early in the research, the AR team contemplated investigating the role of networking for the alumni. This subject matter would soon change.

After I conducted two observations of SCNLI's training sessions, in August of 2011 we decided to initiate interviewing in order to begin answering the research questions, with the

intention of being open to what might emerge. The issue we were addressing was our concern that the alumni were lacking as a CoP, which impacts organizational learning and effectiveness with solving problems in the community. In time, the AR team settled on the final four research questions previously mentioned.

Literature Emerges

While reviewing scholarly articles in the field of community based groups, I discovered literature regarding communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Community of practice framework provided a means to assess the alumni regarding how they manage organizational learning. The AR team expressed interest in adult learning theory and CoP framework for our study, therefore these frameworks became the central literature for the research. The particular aspect of the broad field of adult learning theory that would be utilized evolved throughout the case as data were analyzed.

As the interviews continued, the poor relationship with SCNLI was frequently mentioned as a disappointing reality that often caused division and lack of direction for the alumni. Veronica spoke about this period when she said, “I felt that the organization was at a crossroads even then, and that they needed to understand where we’ve been and where we needed to go and how to get there.” Ronald also commented on the impact of SCAA’s dissolved relationship from SCNLI when he said, “and when that split, that separation took place, almost three-quarters of [the momentum] just went out.” One alumnus mentioned continuing to assist SCNLI after the “split,” and that other alumni were not happy with his decision.

Although data collection, analysis, and AR team dialogue continued during this first round of interviews, Nadia was much less responsive to the research as an alumni president. Additionally, the alumni were going through a transitional phase caused by their relationship

with SCNLI being dissolved. My journal has many references during this period in which I questioned if the association would survive to benefit from the research.

Veronica Returns

In April 2012 the association elected a new alumni president, Veronica. As mentioned, she was the first person I was introduced to and previously SCNLI's director. I considered this to be a beneficial change because Veronica demonstrated more interest in the AR process than the interim president by being available to meet regarding progress. Data gathering, in the form of interviews, and analysis continued during this phase.

During a June 2012 AR team meeting, Veronica reiterated some of her concerns with the association such as the need to reengage some alumni that have lost interest, and the association's poor relationship with SCNLI. As mentioned, there are over eight hundred alumni and the association has approximately three to four hundred accurate addresses. Fewer than thirty alumni typically show up for the quarterly alumni meetings. Further, Veronica expressed the frustration with SCAA splitting with SCNLI. She believed this relationship was very important and hoped it will be restored in time. Additionally she said she hoped the research would be a "shot in the arm" for the alumni. Primarily, the two of us made up the AR team, with varying levels of involvement from the alumni executive team.

Veronica invited me to an alumni reunion that took place on August 18, 2012. She said the goal of the reunion was to bring the alumni together to network and to meet the current SCNLI class. However, no one from SCNLI showed up. She attributed this to some communication issues regarding the event and the fact that it was a weekend during which the class had training. Everyone present had an opportunity to speak about what they have been doing in the community and how they have been collaborating with other alumni in some

instances. Veronica announced to the group that the AR team was working together on the research and would have some suggestions for SCAA and the alumni in the coming months. She explained that interviews have taken place, and the AR team would soon analyze the data. She also stressed to the alumni the importance of collaborating and assisting each other with community initiatives.

Moving Forward and Interventions

By this phase, all data had been collected and analyzed. The five final AR team meetings consisted of redefining the purpose of the organization and setting a detailed path to move forward as a CoP. Final data analyses and intervention plans were discussed during these meetings. Veronica and the SCAA executive team recognized that the relationship with SCNLI was over and a path forward was needed. This significant change to the organization needed to be addressed in the interventions. Table 7 lists the interventions, which are discussed in full in chapter 4.

Are we relevant? During a phone call, in preparation for an AR meeting that would take place in January 2013, Veronica commented to me that she hoped to gauge from the executive team if SCAA is still relevant. Veronica initiated a meeting with the executive committee to discuss, as stated in her email, “the future of the alumni association.” The meeting began with each member providing an update regarding their activity in the community. Veronica and I proceeded to provide an update on the research and a few preliminary findings and recommendations. The meeting ended on a hopeful note, as Veronica commented during the meeting that she felt SCAA still has a role in the community. The executive team agreed and appeared optimistic in their comments and body language.

Redefining the organization. The AR recommendations were the top agenda item for the meeting in February 2013. Recommendations were reviewed with an opportunity for feedback or critique. Nadia, the interim SCAA president commented that she felt we were “in her head” regarding some of the recommendations. The team decided to prioritize renaming the organization, and continue with the recommendations of creating a new vision and a mission statement. Additionally, it was decided to continue planning the AR interventions for the next two meetings and reveal the updates to all alumni at a meeting in May 2013.

Who are we? There were two conference call meetings in March and April of 2013. These consisted of finalizing the new vision and mission statements. After the second meeting, a letter went out to all alumni to solicit feedback regarding the new vision and mission statement. Veronica later commended that no responses were generated.

Now what? The SCAA meeting in May 2013 included an open invitation to all alumni to unveil the plans to move forward. Four alumni showed in addition to the executive team. The executive team was pleased with the showing. The final AR report with recommendations was presented. Appendix D contains the report provided to SCAA. Next, Veronica revealed the new name of the organization, and the tentative vision and mission statements. These items were discussed at previous meetings and were followed by a few email exchanges from some of the executive committee. The final meeting topic was a discussion of summer project ideas the alumni can take on as a group. These ideas included a youth financial literacy fair or an Affordable Care Act information session. Planning a community activity for the alumni was a significant agenda item since the last such event was almost one year prior.

Return to the community. On August 20, 2013 SCAA arranged a conference call to discuss a community activity they could organize. They decided to begin plans for informational

sessions regarding the Affordable Care Act. There were follow-up planning calls throughout the fall with plans to begin the information sessions in November 2013.

Interventions. Analyzing the community, domain and practice aspects of SCAA as a CoP, and the emergence of social and experiential learning, proved useful in planning interventions. Further, SCAA's dissolved relationship with SCNLI demonstrated that the loss of the core function of SCAA disrupted their identity as a CoP. This section will review the interventions and connect those interventions with adult learning and CoP framework.

The five final AR meetings from January to August of 2013 entailed revealing and planning the AR interventions. I was in the process of completing data analysis during this time. Therefore the first two of these five meetings consisted of the proposed interventions. During April's meeting I detailed the final intervention plan to Veronica and the executive team, and at May's meeting Veronica and I reviewed the final intervention plan to all alumni present. Please see Table 7 for a brief list of the interventions, and appendix D for the intervention report provided to SCAA.

Table 7

AR Interventions

Strategic positioning

1. Create / revise vision statement
2. Create / revise mission statement
3. Define future membership guidelines

Developing operational and tactical strategies

4. Enhance communication
5. Create system for integrating newcomers
6. Plan regular social events
7. Regular advanced training events
8. Create opportunities to have group dialogue
9. Assign locality liaisons and/or subject matter experts
10. Begin to organize and document systems of practice

Continual organizational assessment for growth

11. Plan a regular organizational assessment
-

Organizational change philosophical background. The dissolved relationship between SCAA and SCNLI was a disruptive change. Disruptive events force teams to move away from their usual routines and towards more effortful and controlled strategic organizational change (Louis & Sutton, 1991; Morgeson, 2005). Typically no pre-existing response is available to handle such situations. Similarly, Burke (2008) refers to a revolutionary change which is sudden and impacts the organization at the core. Burke (2008) explained,

Revolutionary change or transformation requires different tools and techniques for bringing about successful organizational change ... total system events, such as an initial

activity that calls attention to the clear need for a dramatic modification of mission and strategy due to changes that have occurred in technology or (2) new, unforeseen forays by a significant competitor” (p. 21).

Interview data revealed that this disruptive or revolutionary change impacted SCAA by removing one of their primary functions, causing feelings of disappointment, and possibly being a cause of some membership to cease involvement. Burke (2008) further stated, “the fundamental mission of an organization is to survive ... sometimes survival depends on an entirely new “raison d’etre” (p. 69).

Both before and after the dissolved relationship with SCNLI, SCAA’s focus was on the community. The existing mission statement listed on their website had six points:

To provide continuing education and skill development for alumni, to provide support to the annual [institute] program, to identify community needs and develop strategies to meet them, to network with neighborhood and civic groups on community building, to assist neighborhoods with organizing groups and events, and to support governmental programs and events. (unknown, n.d.)

As mentioned, although SCNLI is only one of six points to the mission statement, analysis showed that it was an important relationship for SCAA.

The interventions were designed with a teleological perspective. The teleological theory of organizations focuses on the purpose and adaptability of the organization as it moves towards some end goal. As Van de Ven and Poole (1995) explained, “proponents of this theory view development as a repetitive sequence of goal formation, implementation, evaluation, and modification of goals based upon what is learned or intended by the entity” (p. 516). The first two steps of the intervention involved defining a new *raison d’etre*. The interventions were

designed to provide short term strategic positioning goals (interventions 1 through 3), medium range goals aimed at developing operational and tactical strategies (interventions 4 through 10), and a long term goal (intervention 11) of an annual organizational assessment. Although the order of the interventions does not need to be sequential, the short term goals were presented as most urgent.

Interventions and their connection to literature. The interventions were designed to enable SCAA to better utilize the learning that is taking place so as to become a problem solving group. The CoP literature, along with the broad field of adult learning theory, offered a framework to guide SCAA beyond the negative impacts of the disruptive change and towards a stronger CoP.

Create / revise vision statement. South County Alumni Association did not have a vision statement. Burke (2008) explained the vision, “addresses the future and concerns aspirations and desired outcomes” (p. 192). By creating a vision statement the stakeholders were able to dialogue regarding where they would like to see the organization go. They decided upon the vision statement, “all communities will be represented by grassroots leaders who are well prepared to promote and facilitate empowerment activities to improve conditions in their communities.” Regarding CoPs, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) explained, “the key element for designing for value is to encourage community members to be explicit about the value of the community throughout its lifetime” (p. 60). The vision statement can cultivate a CoP by helping the alumni to understand the value they offer to the community, frame who may be interested in becoming members, and determine which community initiatives to devote resources to.

Create / revise mission statement. South County Alumni Association had an existing mission statement. However, the mission statement was partially tied to the relationship with SCNLI: “to provide support to the annual [leadership institute] program.” Burke (2008) explained that, “mission is current, or the present, and concerns ultimate purpose ... mission is tied directly to core competencies of the organization and provides an answer to the question. ‘If this organization did not exist, what difference would it make’” (p. 192). South County Alumni Association’s new statement mission is, “the [neighborhood organization’s] mission is to educate, inform, and connect people with the resources required to increase community well-being and encourage long-term problem solving.” The mission has a similar impact as the vision in cultivating a CoP, since it helps to define the domain of the community, and may connect to how they practice.

Define future membership guidelines. Prior to the dissolved relationship with SCNLI, membership into SCAA required graduation from the institute. A small yearly fee is paid as well. The SCNLI experience was a shared experience which was referenced frequently in the interviews. Future membership will need to be expanded and redefined since SCNLI graduates will likely not join SCAA. Membership is a key concept for CoPs, as new members begin to learn what it means to be a competent person in the group, and to practice the craft of the group. Defining future membership should take into consideration the vision and mission by making sure there is a connection members can relate to. Although there has been some discussion at the AR team meetings, this intervention has not taken place yet.

Wenger (1998) referred to five trajectories members may take as they form their identity within the CoP. In a peripheral trajectory, the member never fully participates yet includes enough participation to contribute to his/her identity. A member whose identity is “invested in

their future participation” (p. 154) represents a member who has an inbound trajectory. Members who fully participate, yet identity evolves as the work of the CoP continues, represent members who have insider trajectories. Members who primarily link to other COPs have boundary trajectories. Finally, members who are leaving the CoP represent outbound trajectories. South County Alumni Association will likely see shifts in trajectories as new members are initiated, current members decide to leave, and others redefine their organizational role.

Major changes to SCAA, such as redefining new membership and eventually initiating new members, can impact the learning of the group. As new members are initiated, they will begin to learn at the periphery as the group works towards granting full participation. In time newcomers to a group must be granted enough legitimacy to be treated as full members. Learning takes place at the periphery first, and through a social process further learning takes place with full participation. There may be potential for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) as new members, no longer with the SCNLI training, bring new ideas and methods of practice. Transformative learning occurs when there is a transformation in one’s beliefs or attitudes (which are points of view) or habits of mind. This occurs when disorienting dilemmas are introduced to the learner. As new members join the group, SCAA would benefit from opportunities for critical reflection and reflective discourse regarding the impact of new membership.

Enhance communication. The interviews revealed that communication was found to be lacking. During SCAA functions and social events, alumni share experiences and information readily, but there is no effective communication strategy in place. On other occasions, the alumni call one another to exchange information, or encounter each other in the community. In

order to better utilize the learning that is taking place, an effective communication strategy needs to be implemented.

Communication is an important factor of any community. Wenger (1998) referred to the shared repertoire of a CoP which includes “routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, actions or concepts” (p. 83). Communication is not a tool he envisions with a purpose of literally transmitting meaning, rather it is an opportunity to sustain engagement. The alumni need improved communication in order to sustain engagement in order to distribute and gather accurate information to the membership. This intervention has been discussed at AR team meetings, however a new communication structure has not been implemented.

Create system for integrating newcomers. Since membership will no longer come from SCNLI, there will need to be a means of integrating newcomers. New members may have a variety of backgrounds and experiences, but will lack the common experience of SCNLI training. In time the association will include both those who graduated from SCNLI, and those who have not. This may cause a division amongst both types of members, and opportunities for new types of interactions between the two groups. Wenger (1998) explained, “if learning in practice is negotiating an identity, and if that identity incorporates that past and the future, then it is in each other that old-timers and newcomers find their experience in history” (P. 157). Fostering learning at the periphery, while the newcomers gravitate towards full participation, will enrich organizational learning.

In order to replace SCNLI training which newcomers will not have experienced, SCAA have discussed creating training for newcomers. This may include training sessions and/or mentoring. This will not be difficult since they had provided the SCNLI training for a number of

years. This training has not yet been established, although the AR team has discussed the importance of future training.

Plan regular social events. The alumni revealed that not only has learning taken place during social events, that they also have built memories from these events that shape their identity within the organization. Social interaction is a significant aspect of a CoP, although social interaction alone does not constitute a CoP. Without social interaction members of a CoP are disadvantaged regarding learning what it means to be part of the group, creating shared histories, and making meaning together. Additionally, social interaction will help newcomers and old-timers to connect and potentially create mentoring opportunities.

Through data analysis, we discovered an emphasis on the social aspect of learning. Planning regular social events addresses the decrease in social activity after the relationship with SCNLI was dissolved. Learning in a social context has a long history (Dewey, 1916; Schunk, 1996), providing opportunities for learners to dialogue regarding their experiences and observe one another (Bandura, 1976). This intervention has not taken place yet, however it has been discussed by the AR team and will be easy to incorporate into future alumni functions.

Regular advanced training events. Formal learning events provide opportunities for learning as well as social interaction. Formal learning is conducted with the intention of prompting learning. As Watkins (2001) explained, it “is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom based, and highly structured” (p. 25). Participants mentioned SCAA’s “advanced training” as a valuable source of learning. These were training sessions the alumni received at a major university, through grant funds. Since new membership will likely not come from SCNLI, this training will be a valuable means of replacing that training by teaching the tools of the alumni’s practice. In turn, the tools taught may be incorporated into shared repertoire of the

CoP. The AR team has discussed this intervention and plans to have advanced training within a year.

Create opportunities to have group dialogue. Part of the social aspect of learning that emerged from the data entails dialogue with alumni and others. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) encourage CoPs to dialogue from within the organization and outside the organization. Dialogue within the organization is essential to forming meaning together. Dialoguing with other organizations allows the group to consider their possibilities, and learn new ways of practice.

English (2005) contrasted dialogue and discussion and explained, “in dialogue, there is the free and creative exploration of complex issues, a deep listening to one another and suspending of own views ... in discussion different views are presented and defended” (p. 185). Learning models such as Freire’s (1970), Knowles, (1968), Mezirow’s (1991), and Taylor’s (1987), incorporate dialogue in the learning process. Mackeracher (2004) distinguished the dialectical learning models as having the characteristics of interaction and meaning-making with other people, constructive and interpretive through social interaction, and transformative through interaction. Dialogue is not a guarantee of learning, and could be exploited in power relations. As English and Mayo (2012) question, “who dialogues with whom and from what position of power or subordination” (p. 62)?

The purpose of this part of the intervention is to incorporate dialogue as much as possible. This should take place after group events, in order to uncover what was learned and what can be used to improve future events, and any situation in which the alumni can learn from their individual and group experiences. This intervention has been discussed, however there have not been opportunities to incorporate it.

Assign locality liaisons and/or subject matter experts. The purpose of this long term intervention is to help the alumni manage the various domains of interest the alumni share, as well as to manage the wide geographic territory the alumni work within and would like to expand to. As the AR team begins to consider implementing this, a diversity liaison should be considered since the county has unique demographic concerns, as mentioned previously. This intervention is considered long term since SCAA is still in a phase of regrouping.

Begin to organize and document systems of practice. The alumni struggled to describe a common system of practice. There are many types of community activities SCAA is involved with, but they lack a common practice. Further, SCAA has no documentation of processes that can be utilized when the time comes to take action. This intervention can begin immediately and correlate with the other interventions such as the advanced training.

The goal is to build a library of systems of practice, such as how to start a neighborhood watch, understanding the local political structure, or organizing voter drives. This process has been discussed at AR team meetings, and will include a team of alumni who are interested in dialoguing and documenting practice. Wenger (1998) explained that learning takes place as people pursue various enterprises together, and in time “this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant of social relations” (p. 45). In the case of SCAA, documenting these practices will allow them to share what they have learned with other groups, and to refer to written practices when they encounter a situation they have handled previously.

Plan a regular organizational assessment. South County Alumni Association would benefit from a regular organizational assessment. The process and design for this assessment has been discussed, but not finalized. One unique quality of AR is that the team has the opportunity

to learn AR as they practice it. A regular organizational assessment can include AR cycles. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) presented the AR cycles as, “pre-step (context and purpose) followed by four basic steps: constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action” (p. 8). A regular assessment can include these cycles which in turn may prompt future AR interventions.

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002, p. 99-103) offered seven points of evaluation for CoPs in a mature stage, some of which is covered in other intervention items. First, is to identify knowledge gaps and continually evolving the learning agenda. Next, is to define the CoP’s role in the organization, or in the case of SCAA, their role in the community. Third, is to redefine the boundaries, which can entail changes to geographical areas or subject matter. Fourth, is to routinize the entry of newcomers. Fifth, is to measure the value of the CoP, which helps to make the case for membership involvement. Sixth, is to maintain a focus on cutting-edge issues. Seventh, is to build a knowledge repository to help identify tacit and explicit knowledge. These points, along with an AR style investigation of issues at the time of the assessment, will be used as a guide for the first organizational assessment.

Exit Interview. On July 13, 2013 Veronica and I had an AR exit interview. The interview was an opportunity to first exchange thoughts regarding the AR process and the future of the organization. Secondly, we met to talk about the role of power relations in the case. Regarding the process and the future of the organization, Veronica mentioned she was pleased with the outcome but wished the circumstance regarding SCNLI had not occurred. She was also disappointed in the participation level of the alumni, and associated that with relationship with SCNLI being dissolved. She said she was “cautiously optimistic” about the future of the

organization. The second aspect of your conversation was my reflections regarding in the role of power in the case. The details of that conversation are included in chapter 5.

Summary of Case Story and Outcomes

AR is a cyclical process. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) presented the AR cycles as, “pre-step (context and purpose) followed by four basic steps: constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action” (p. 8). This case was more cyclical in the early stages of constructing and planning actions. The stakeholders and I began the process first with the assumption that the relationship with SCNLI was intact. As such, early in the research our AR team conversations pertained to Veronica’s concern that the alumni could be doing more in the community. Once Veronica retired, and Nadia the alumni president was the primary contact for the alumni, we considered looking at how the alumni network in the community. Finally, when Veronica returned as alumni president, we settled on the four research questions mentioned throughout this case.

Since the interview data demonstrated the importance of the relationship with SCNLI with respect to opportunities for the alumni to learn and build their identity as a CoP, we needed to take the dissolved relationship into account while planning interventions. Although the medium and long term interventions have not been implemented due to the delays resulting from leadership turnover and the dissolved relationship, the AR team believes SCAA is positioned to be a stronger CoP. Further, the AR team has asked that I continue to work with them, and we will continue to work towards fulfilling the remaining interventions.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

This chapter provides findings for each of the research questions from the case study. The study was guided by four research questions. The findings are presented in the order of the four research questions, which were: (1) What types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community? (2) What are the alumni learning through their leadership efforts in the community? (3) To what extent are the alumni operating as a community of practice (CoP)? and (4) In what ways did the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders influence this AR project? Findings are presented as alumni learning in community problem solving, content of learning, alumni as a CoP, the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders.

Table 8

Overview of Findings

Research question	Category	Subcategory
RQ1: What types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community?	(a) Experiential learning while working as a team or taking community action	(i) With other alumni
		(ii) Independent of other alumni
	(b) Formal training in which the purpose of an event is learning	(i) Institute training
		(ii) Alumni advanced training events
		(iii) Being mentored
	(c) Past experience of working with people in community or personal struggles	
	(d) Social learning in primarily social settings	(i) Alumni interaction
		(ii) Example of others
		(iii) Dialogue
	RQ2: What are the alumni learning through their leadership efforts in the community?	(a) Alumni are learning functional skills
(ii) Facilitation		
(iii) Researching		
(iv) Resource awareness and information distribution		
(b) Alumni are learning relationship skills		(i) Communication
		(ii) Managing differences

		(iii) Networking
		(iv) Understanding and concern
		(v) Working in teams
	(c) Alumni are learning about their self	(i) Abilities
		(ii) Approach preference
		(ii) Community role
RQ3: To what extent are the alumni operating as a CoP, as defined by Wenger (1998)?	Community aspect of CoP	(a) Communication lacking
		(b) Group interaction impacted by dissolved relationship with institute
	Domain aspect of CoP	(a) Diversity in community
		(b) Economic issues
		(c) Financing of initiatives
		(d) Organizing and facilitating events
		(e) Politics
	Practice aspect of CoP	(a) Ways of being: approach preference and relationship skills
		(b) Ways of doing : fundraising, organizing and facilitating events, resource awareness and information distribution

RQ4: In what ways did the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders influence this AR project?		
Point of analysis	Researcher	Veronica (Primary stakeholder)
Systems of differentiation	Educational Racial Regional (Northern and Southern United States)	Educational Racial Regional (Northern and Southern United States)
Types of objectives	Degree completion	Giving the alumni a “shot in the arm”
Instrumental modes	Research methods Being primary author of case	Promoting grassroots identity
Forms of institutionalization	University in which I am completing dissertation, and all subgroups	Grassroots community groups
Degrees of rationalization (actions)	Avoiding certain subject matter (such as demographic data) with goal of completing research in timely fashion	N/A

Alumni Learning in Community Problem Solving

Learning for adults may take place formally, informally or incidentally (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Further, learning may incorporate many factors such as body (Amann, 2003), spirit (English & Gillen, 2000; Tisdell, 2003), and emotion (Dirkx, 2008). Adult learning is often presented in cycles that incorporate steps such as experience, reflection, dialogue, and new experiences (Kolb, 1984; Mackeracher, 2004; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 1987). In order to answer this research question, what types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community, all thirteen interview transcripts were analyzed with consideration of the adult learning theory referenced in the literature review. Additionally, my observation journal and general researcher journal were referenced when applicable. With

respect to the participants, I assumed they did in fact learn during their community interactions, and expressed their learning to the best of their ability. Data analysis revealed the four themes of (a) experiential learning, (b) formal training, (c) past experience, and (d) social learning. Table 9 includes the themes that emerged for this research question.

Table 9

Types of Learning

Research question	Category	Subcategory
RQ1: What types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community?	(a) Experiential learning while working as a team or taking community action	(i) With other alumni
		(ii) Independent of other alumni
	(b) Formal training in which the purpose is learning	(i) Institute training
		(ii) Alumni advanced training events
		(iii) Being mentored
	(c) Past experience of working with people in community and personal struggles	
	(d) Social learning in which alumni learn in primarily social settings	(i) Alumni interaction
		(ii) Example of others
		(iii) Dialogue

Experiential Learning

Instances emerged in which the alumni expressed learning in association with their experiences in the community. Although learning models refer to experience in different ways

(Boud & Walker, 1991; Jarvis, 1987; Kolb, 1984), for the purposes of this theme, experiential learning refers to “learning processes in which the experience of the learner is used as the prime source of stimulus for learning” (English, 2008). The learning that took place in these instances was associated with either community activities (i) with other alumni, or (ii) independent of other alumni. Seven of the interviewees indicated such occurrences.

Experiential learning with other alumni. Five alumni offered examples of learning in association with the experience of working on various alumni team projects. Nadia detailed a situation pertaining to applying for grants with other alumni when she stated,

Well, one thing, in the grant industry, that most grantees are looking for collaborative efforts. They don't want to give money to one organization. They want to make sure they are touching more than one community or one organization.

In this case, the experience of soliciting for grant funds taught Nadia that she needs to collaborate. In turn, she reported new experiences of soliciting for grants collaboratively, which offers potential for additional learning.

I had opportunity to observe experiences that prompted learning for alumni. My observation journal mentions two occasions in which Ronald was facilitating the monthly training sessions at SCNLI, with support from Mary. Ronald would later state in an interview, “...as I'm learning about all this and meeting these people and learning about what they're doing, the strongest thing that came from them and what was emphasized was commitment, their dedication.” Ronald learned how to facilitate the sessions, in addition to learning about the character of the guest speakers.

Experiential learning independent of other alumni. Some learning experiences occurred independent of other alumni. When asked about the most important lessons she learned while being active in the community, Beatrice reported:

The most important thing I learned was to keep going, you know. I learned that even though you got disabilities you have to keep going. You know, don't turn around and just be out of it. The more you keep going the more you'll learn, the more you'll want to learn.

This statement expressed learning that took place for Beatrice during her community activity. Additionally, she recognized that learning continues as she "keeps going." Charles explains how the experience of working to solve community problems has taught him about people and leadership:

I learned that anytime that you come up with a group of people you have a large number of suggestions. And you're not going to get everybody in agreement in what you trying to do. I learned that if I think it's going to benefit the community then I will push towards trying to make it better. I learned that you can't go in many different directions with many different opinions. You have to get one and move forward on it. I learned you can't just be wishy-washy.

Further, Alicia and Lisa detailed the learning that took place regarding building relationships in the community, and Veronica explained the struggles she encountered taking action in the community.

The experiences of the alumni have emerged as a significant source of learning. These experiences are either with other alumni or in other settings. In either case, a relationship emerged between experience and learning.

Formal Training

In some instances the alumni have learned through formal training venues. Most of the formal training mentioned in the interviews was connected to either SCNLI or SCAA in some fashion. The formal training categories include (i) institute training, (ii) alumni advanced training events, and (iii) being mentored. Analysis demonstrated that formal training is an effective mode for learning to take place, although the alumni have limited opportunities for formal training.

Institute training. With respect to formal training, most often the alumni mentioned SCNLI training as a source of learning. Seven of the interviewees referred to SCNLI training. Alicia gave an example:

The first session of the [institute] was outstanding, when we went to the Capitol and [a house representative] actually came in and spoke with us on some different things, so it was great ... on just implementing changes. Since then, I started doing the research on my own and I learned more and more on how to make changes.

When Harvey was asked about his work with Section 8 housing, he explained that SCNLI training enhanced his skills:

It's the same approach that you have to have, the same skills that you must develop and to continue to develop in order to participate. And through the alumni and the leadership institute, I was able to get those skills and also enhance some of the skills I already had. I just didn't know what to do with them.

Further, Beatrice referenced how SCNLI training taught her problem solving. Mary spoke about SCNLI's leadership and organizational change lessons. Nadia mentioned the retreat weekend at

SCNLI. Ronald and Veronica said they often refer back to the materials presented at SCNLI. The training received at SCNLI emerged as a significant source of learning for the alumni.

My observation journal references the outings that took place during some of the SCNLI training sessions. One such outing was to a suburban permaculture site in which the candidates took a tour and asked questions. In addition to listening to the guide, the experience included the ability to use senses to experience what the guide was talking about, and socializing among the candidates. I noted that SCNLI participants asked many questions and appeared to enjoy the interactivity and social aspect. I made a personal note that the hands-on nature of this particular outing was effective to my learning.

Alumni advanced training events. Although only two alumni mentioned the advanced training that took place in 2011, there were approximately twenty five alumni in attendance. This was a seminar the alumni designed and facilitated in which various community involvement topics were presented. When asked how she learned to work with people, Veronica referenced the advanced training:

But when we had the advanced level training, the alumni did, and we talked about the whole community organizing and how we get people engaged and whatever, we talked about the delivery of the message, you know, how you deliver the message and how that can make a difference. So it played off of what I have learned.

Similarly, Beatrice referenced the advanced training:

They still have the seminars and all the touring and all that, you know. Those are good, and they keep you in tune with all that's going on, you can hear who's speaking where and what they're doing about this part and doing about that, you get all that information all the time.

The advanced training was a source of learning in a formal setting mentioned by both Veronica and Beatrice. South County Neighborhood Leadership Institute training and advanced training constituted the formal training for the alumni. The dissolved relationship with SCNLI mentioned in the Case Story section will result in new membership to the association who will not have the benefit of the SCNLI training. Additional advanced training sessions are part of the AR recommendations.

Being mentored. Two interviewees mentioned mentoring relationships as a source of learning. Although the formality of these mentoring relationships varied, I included it in the formal training section. Alicia explained that her sister was helpful with reviewing her grant proposals and other community work:

I guess I look at her like she can do anything and I'm trying to be almost as good as her ... A lot of times I'll take and I'll write up something and I'll send it to her to review it and let me know what she thinks. When she gives me her yes or no or tweaks it, then I'm okay with it.

Robert explained how he was mentored to facilitate the SCNLI training sessions:

She was teaching me how to do that job. That helped her because she knew what to do. In all honesty, she was sort of getting frustrated too because she was already sensing that there was no additional help or interest to assist her. So that was already taking place before I got there. Once I got there, I started to sense that we had a problem retaining our current interests of our graduates. But definitely, she taught me the process and it helped me all the way through until we got to that one session and we were like, 'well, okay here we go, do it.'

Robert was the only alumni to mention mentoring within the association. Formal training in the form of SCNLI training, alumni advanced training events, and being mentored, emerged as a source of learning for some of the alumni.

Past Experience. For the alumni, past experience of working with people in community and personal struggles emerged with respect to learning. As Mackeracher (2004) asserted, “experiences structure the ways that an adult will approach new experiences, determine which information will be selected for further attention and how it will be interpreted, and determines which knowledge ...will be employed in the learning process” (p. 35). The analysis demonstrated the relevance of past experience for the alumni, and how those experiences shape learning and actions.

Beatrice explained how her previous experiences in the community taught her how to interact with people:

Sometimes they come in with problems and you don't meet fire with fire, and stuff like that because you don't know what kind of problems they are having in their day to day life so you learn how to be professional about that.

Beatrice went on to explain an example of how she learned that people often have problems that impact their interactions with others. This statement demonstrated that Beatrice learned from past experiences. Additionally, Lisa explained how presenting nutrition training to academicians was a learning experience:

What it taught me was I shouldn't be focused on what a person has as far as a piece of paper. That doesn't ... it means that person is qualified in that subject, because it means that person took the time to study that, but it doesn't mean that just because that person has that, that person has this global background of so many different subjects.

Lisa went on to explain that experience helped her to present confidently to academicians in future situations. Alicia also detailed how past experience impacts how she interacts in the community when she shared, “well, I’ve learned over the years to not judge people. Be nonjudgmental; once you meet someone, just get to know them for who they are and not go on your own assumptions.” Further, Carmella shared how working with a parent teacher association impacted her with a belief that people don’t take action until things get bad. Ronald stated his financial struggles have taught him lessons about himself and the community, which impacts his view of the community. Four alumni referenced past experience and learning and how that impacts their interaction in the community.

Social Learning

Analysis demonstrated that learning can be fostered through social interaction. Six alumni referenced a social aspect of learning. This theme entails learning that took place in a wide variety of social settings. Social learning occurred through (i) alumni interaction, (ii) example of others, and (iii) dialogue.

Alumni interaction. Alicia, Harvey, and Ronald each referred to the interaction with other alumni as a source of learning. When asked who influenced her learning, Alicia detailed two particular alumni in which she participated in group projects with:

Oh, there’s actually two people, Carmella and Veronica. When I started at [a job], I had a different director but when she became my director, she actually pushed you out there and she showed you how to do it. She didn’t do it for you. And that made a major difference.

Ronald described how he learned to facilitate the SCNLI training sessions, which involved social interaction with other alumni:

Now the alumni, which I had the opportunity to be a part of, put me in the position of - I guess you could say – leadership, being able to facilitate a session, learning how to find a speaker and get that speaker interested. I mean, it really wasn't that hard because there again, they got this commitment to do it; it's more of, do I have the time or when is it and I'll be glad to. That was really cool. But then trying to put that session together – not just to eat and that sort of thing but trying to be prepared for the type of questions that's coming after the speaker speaks. That was educational. I had to learn about format. I loved every moment of it.

Finally, Harvey referred to the communication skills that were nourished with his social interaction at SCNLI. The social interaction with other alumni emerged as a significant source of learning.

Example of others. Four alumni referred to the examples of others as influential to learning. This is an important finding since the examples of others can be utilized through formal mentoring or simply social interaction. When asked about the impact on her learning, Beatrice explained the influence of the community volunteers:

They were very instrumental in it, as the people were directed to the center they would be there early in the morning helping the people, you know getting it organized, opening the doors so the people wouldn't have to stand out in the cold or anything like that. They were there opening the doors and making everybody comfortable when they went in so they really made that a success.

Veronica explained how she learned from observing other leaders over her many years of community activity:

Well, probably some forty years of being out here. Just experience and being in situations with so-called leaders, learning from the worst, learning from the best and somehow taking even something from the worst and saying, ‘I know I don’t want to do that.’ But finally coming up with a concept has worked well for me.

Further, when asked who was influential to her learning, Carmella mentioned a PTA president as an example, because of her exemplary relationship skills. Ronald referred to both the SCNLI guest speakers and the members of the community as examples that were influential to his learning.

Dialogue. The analysis demonstrated that dialogue prompts learning for the alumni. Three alumni referenced dialogue with others as part of their learning. Carmella referenced the opportunity to dialogue with other alumni during the advanced training sessions:

I think being together allows that. Everybody can talk; you can vent about what a bastard commissioner such and such is, you know – or you can do that and laugh, and you know, it’s just that being together kind of lets everybody know that even when they are in their own little area of the county or world doing something, that there’s still other people that are out there doing it too. I’m not by myself. So-and-so has the same issues that I’m having so I guess I’m not crazy, you know? And then, how did they overcome that? So let me try and use some of the tools and then this person may say, ‘Well, this is what I did.’ or, ‘this is who I called; this is what I did.’ So getting together helps us do that.

Ronald also referenced speaking with alumni, as well as people in the community which allowed for learning opportunities when he shared, “at the time, I didn’t know that but the more I kept talking to people and listening to people, the non-profit guys started to talk about fundraising. If you have a non-profit you have that 501(c) for tax exemption.” Charles discussed how his

dialogue with local politicians influenced his approach regarding his neighborhood association involvement:

Well yes, I knew that going in things had to change. My way of thinking, my way of doing things, because I was dealing with different, low income and high income people. And there were no middle income people, there was low income and high income. So I, by knowing what was going on, and talking to some of the commissioners, I knew that this was something that was an ongoing thing, and there was going to be a change.

The social aspect of learning occurred through alumni interaction, example of others, and dialogue with alumni or others. This social aspect was a recurring source of learning for the alumni. My observation log details an alumni reunion event in which participants had an opportunity to socialize, speak about current activities in their communities, and listen to updates from the alumni president. I noted that that function appeared to be a good opportunity for alumni to learn from one another.

Summary of Research Question One

The themes mentioned are not meant to imply that the learning that emerged has one dimension. Rather, the themes were used to categorize the learning instances most logically. The alumni's learning predominately occurred socially and experientially. Additionally, the formal settings in which learning occurred were through the SCNLI training, alumni advanced training events, and being mentored. A few alumni also mentioned past experience. These results are encouraging to the extent that the alumni have many opportunities to learn outside of formal settings, provided they remain engaged with other people in community activities.

Content of Learning

In exploring research question two, what the alumni are learning through their leadership efforts in the community, the thirteen interviews were analyzed, with references to observations and journals when appropriate. The three themes that emerged from this question were (a) functional skills, (b) relationship skills, and (c) self. Table 10 includes the list of themes for this research question. Analysis demonstrated a wide array of learning content garnered as the alumni were active in the community.

The content of learning can be called knowledge. As knowledge has recently been taken up in non-educational settings, there has been a “shift away from understanding knowledge as an absolute and permanent truth to an emphasis on knowledge in relative and context-dependent terms” (English, 2005, p. 335). Two broad categories of knowledge (English, 2005) are disciplinary, such as science or medicine, or experiential / practice-based (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). Disciplinary knowledge is seen as an object rather than a process. Alternatively, the site of learning becomes most important in experiential / practice-based knowledge, which focuses on the relationship between knowledge, experience, and learning. For the purposes of this case, and the following analyses, I am viewing knowledge in an experiential / practice based sense.

Table 10

What the Alumni are Learning

Research question	Category	Subcategory
RQ2: What are the alumni learning through their leadership efforts in the community?	(a) Alumni are learning functional skills	(i) Community bureaucracy
		(ii) Facilitation
		(iii) Researching
		(iv) Resource awareness and information distribution
	(b) Alumni are learning relationship skills	(i) Communication
		(ii) Managing differences
		(iii) Networking
		(iv) Understanding and concern
		(v) Working in teams
	(c) Alumni are learning about their self	(i) Abilities
		(ii) Approach preference
		(ii) Community role

Functional Skills

The analysis demonstrated four types of functional skills, which are tools the alumni may use to solve community problems. The theme of functional skills included (i) community bureaucracy, (ii) facilitation, (iii) researching, and (iv) resource awareness and information distribution. The interviews revealed a broad range of functional skills learned. However, I limited the list to those referenced three or more times.

Community bureaucracy. Four alumni referenced learning about the bureaucracy in their community. Charles explains how learning the community bureaucracy has benefited his efforts:

I think one of them is know the people in [the] county concerning the communities.

Whether it's our commissioners, or whether it's the people that are over the land portion of the community. It was the people that were introduced to us at the institute that I made contact with in getting a lot of these things solved.

When Alicia was asked what advice she would share with people interested in SCNLI she said, "I would try to encourage them to participate in the program and just tell them some of the experiences that I had, especially at the federal and state level. Another one that was really significant was code enforcement." Similarly, Harvey explained how SCNLI taught him about bureaucracy:

How systems and boards and councils work, even at the administrative level all the way to the city level. It has exposed me to different venues of education and skill development that I would otherwise not had the opportunity to benefit from.

In some instances, learning about community bureaucracy took place while executing a community initiative. Nadia detailed a community project in which the group of organizers learned about code enforcement:

They were just going to do the entrance to the subdivision and they ended up working with code enforcement and getting some other things done and helping them to get the neighborhood association started and the neighborhood watch ... and then that took some of the alumni to go in because the group, you know, they were new.

Learning about community bureaucracy is beneficial for the alumni, as it impacts many of their initiatives.

Facilitation. Often the alumni's community initiatives require facilitation, at varying levels of sophistication. Three alumni mentioned learning facilitation skills. Ronald explained that he learned to facilitate the SCNLI training sessions when he stated,

Now the alumni, which I had the opportunity to be a part of, put me in the position of I guess you could say leadership, being able to facilitate a session, learning how to find a speaker and get that speaker interested. I mean, it really wasn't that hard because there again, they got this commitment to do it.

I observed two SCNLI training sessions in which Ronald was being trained to facilitate. I noted that he listened to and followed the direction of the facilitator who was training him. Mary offered detail regarding her work with a local health collaborative:

And so I had about fifteen people in the room and they talked to those items. As facilitator I said, 'this is not my party, this is your party, I'm just supposed to help lead the discussion.' And so we talked about those items and what they thought it meant to them.

Mary's comments reveal the act of facilitation in the form of leading a public conversation regarding obtaining grants. When asked what she considers to be her role the community, Veronica responded,

I guess one word would be 'a facilitator,' particularly on a long term type of situation where there seems to be constant work going on with something. I think a facilitator would be a good word, because you got to be sure that the work is getting done and how it's getting done.

She went on to offer examples of her role as a facilitator in various community initiatives. The theme of facilitator was a functional skill indicated by three alumni. Further, SCNLI training includes group projects in which facilitation is taught. During a SCNLI graduation ceremony, I observed the graduates describing their project, and the facilitation of those projects when they were given the opportunity to speak.

Researching. Five alumni referenced learning to research relevant information to assist with their community activity. In particular, Lisa referenced researching with respect to three different community initiatives. In one case, the research was with respect to her community nutrition training:

Over the years and the different places where I lived I have seen for myself that the African American community as a whole has the poorest health. And I've done my own research about it as well. They have the poorest health in the United States because of the types of foods that they eat.

Harvey explained that he learned to research through the SCNLI training, and has since utilized what he learned:

They gave me the tools to be able to research [information] and find out what my rights are and I can pass the information on to my community – that they do have a right to be able to live in a safe community.

Harvey's example is one of implementing the research tools he learned at SCNLI. Similarly, Alicia explained how she was motivated to research after the SCNLI training:

When we went to the Capitol and [a politician] actually came in and spoke with us on some different things, so it was great ... on just implementing changes. Since then, I

started doing the research on my own and I learned more and more on how to make changes, basically.

Additionally, Beatrice spoke about how she reviews the information distributed from various community sources in order to keep current. Charles explained how he researched promises made by local politicians and their corresponding actions. Researching is a skill that is taught during SCNLI training and is practiced by many alumni.

Resource awareness and information distribution. Six alumni spoke about how they keep abreast of community resources and often distribute that information to members of the community. Mary offered an example:

People are calling me and saying, ‘I don’t have enough for my rent, my light bill, and my agency you know has not done this for me, or done that for me. And I’m going, ‘what am I supposed to do?’ So I have to go back and say okay what resources are there that they may not know about that I can tell them about?’

Similar to Mary, when asked what she has learned that she would like to pass on to others, Alicia said,

Find out about just the different resources that are available. I would probably just try to direct them in that way. That’s one of the things through the organization we want to put together – resource information, so we’ll be able to direct them to where they need to go to.

Beatrice described how the SCNLI training taught her about resources available to the community and said, “it was a good experience, you know. You learned all that. They came in and they had seminars and you learned from them how to guide people and get the help that they need.” Charles detailed how he presented zoning regulations to his community members.

Harvey explained that he learned to come prepared with documentation when he solicits donations. Veronica provided best practice resources to her community association when they were in formation.

Relationship skills

The alumni detailed many instances of learning relationship skills. This theme includes (i) communication, (ii) managing differences, (iii) networking, (iv) understanding and concern, and (v) working in teams. There were a variety of aspects to the relationship skills theme, as the analysis demonstrates.

Communication. Six alumni mentioned learning communication skills, mostly verbal, with one mention of written communication. Sometimes this entails informing the community about resources available. Beatrice explained how she got word out regarding energy assistance programs:

I got word out about it to those that didn't know about it and directed them to, sometimes some people that I knew ... I would pick them up and take them to the center where they could get the assistance.

In addition to getting information out, Veronica shared the importance of listening skills when she said,

Well my motto is: As a leader, first of all you have to listen to what people are saying, you have to learn from what people are saying and then you have to make decisions about what might need to be done and who you might need to get this done. You know, if you aren't listening to people, you're dead in the water.

At times, communication comes in a written form. When asked to describe a situation in which she was most proud of herself, Alicia responded, "probably the biggest one is interacting through

the foreclosure process with [a national bank] and I actually wrote letters and got all the way into the top person.”

Style of communication can be equally important. Mary explained how she is cautious with her communication style, “I have to figure out how to say that to her without offending, you see? So it’s all in the delivery of the information and the receptiveness of the receiver and how you present it.” Harvey spoke about how he is courteous when asking for donations, even when he is turned away. Lisa spoke about how she engages in dialogue in order to obtain various viewpoints. Communication emerged as a major people skill for the alumni.

Managing differences. Six alumni referenced the people skill of managing differences. Charles detailed how he managed differing opinions when he worked on a neighborhood association as it went through gentrification:

What I learned that anytime that you come up with a group of people you have a large number of suggestions, and you’re not going to get everybody in agreement in what you are trying to do ... you can’t go in many different directions with many different opinions, you have to get one and move forward on it.

Mary does much of her community work in a particularly diverse area of the county in which she resides. After one of our two interviews, she introduced me to many business owners in the area. She commented on the impact of diversity and said, “the dynamics of dealing with the varying cultures has been a struggle and a learning experience for me. Because of the various cultures not everyone sees the value of associating [with the business association].” Managing a variety of personalities can be equally challenging. Veronica reflected upon her many years working with various community organizations:

Being in a community organization is a small version of the world as a whole, because you have problems that need to be solved, you have the group dynamics that have to be dealt with, you have the person that wants to take over, or the person that lays back all the time because they are afraid of being criticized or whatever. So you got all these personalities you got to work with.

Additionally, Alicia explained how she tries to be non-judgmental when working with people of different opinions. Beatrice shared how she tries to understand younger generations. Lisa talked about how she learned to present to academicians.

Networking. Six alumni referenced learning about networking. Alicia shared what she learned about networking and said, “over the years I’ve learned that relationships matter and you have to build relationships, especially since I moved to Georgia. In California, I didn’t feel relationship based but in Georgia, everything is relationship based.” She went on to share that she had improved her networking skills dramatically since graduating from SCNLI. She made efforts to surround herself with people that have experience which benefits her work, and to nurture those relationships. Charles explained how SCNLI introduced him to important people in the community when he said, “so I think going through that class helped me be able to connect with the people within the county to get things done within the community.”

Alumni may manage multiple networks within and around their communities. Mary described her various networks:

Since graduating from [the institute], the networking I’ve been involved with had some different avenues, meaning I have a community side of networking that I’ve been able to develop from friends Then I have a political side of networking and then I developed

a combination of both where I tried to help to lead others down that same path of understanding that I was able to garner from my personal experiences.

Additionally, Beatrice explained that she attempts to learn who is living in her community to make connections. Carmella said that she learned to network and position herself to garner support for her community initiatives. Harvey said that he attempts to get to know people whenever is out in the community. Networking is a prevalent people skill that emerged for the alumni.

Understanding and concern. All of the interviewees mentioned learning to understand people or have a concern for other people in their communities. In the case of Veronica, she referenced an understanding of the relevance of presenting tangibles to people in the community:

That you really have to get people to buy in even though they should want to buy in, because it is their community but for some reason you have to give people, even though there are benefits to doing this, but somehow you have to give them ... they want something tangible.

Understanding generational differences can be a valuable skill for the alumni. Nadia referenced older people in her community:

Older communities with older homeowners – I think they kind of get stuck with this is the way it is, nothing's going to change, and so just trying to convince them or just trying to find someone in the community that - hopefully a younger person - to see a difference.

Lisa shared her view of certain people in the community, “you know, we all could use some change. All of us could stand changes in our lives. But there are some times when people are just not willing to change; they're not willing to be open to new ideas.”

Instances of alumni having a concern for others also emerged in the interviews. Charles referenced the many years of his community service and said, “if the people have a problem, and they bring it to my attention, then my number one thing is to take care of the people and get the job done.” Additionally, Carmella expressed her view that people don’t get involved until things get really bad. Harvey mentioned he uses encouragement to motivate others. Mary said she has a spiritual understanding of people.

Working in teams. Five alumni referenced learning to work in teams. When Beatrice was asked what she learned through SCNLI and her community activity, she said, “oh, I learned so much. You learn how to interact with one another, and how to solve problems. That was the main thing: a professional way of solving problems.” She went on to give examples of working in a team. Veronica shared her view of working in teams when she said,

I think one would be that as you select other key people for things, if you selected them for their skills and abilities, so forth and so on, then let them do the job that you selected them for. Don’t micromanage.

She went on to explain the importance of obtaining everyone’s input and making people feel a part of the projects they are involved in. Additionally, Charles expressed the need for community members to work together with the youth in the community. He expressed a concern for the youth and the challenges they face at this time. Mary detailed a situation in which she received backlash from certain members of the community during a team project. Alicia expressed the need for obtaining support and working in teams to implement community change. Working in teams emerged as a prevalent people skill.

Self

The final aspect of what the alumni learned is about their self. This theme had three categories which were (i) abilities, (ii) approach preference, and (iii) community role. The details of each category will be provided.

Abilities. Six alumni referenced instances in which they learned about their abilities. Charles shared what he learned from his work in the community: “I learned that if I think it’s going to benefit the community then I will push towards trying to make it better.” Mary shared insight into her view of her abilities:

I’m growing. I am, every day I walk out of my house I never know what I’m going to find. And I’m excited about being here. So what it’s done for me I’ve become a world player in the small little county. Even though wherever I go I tend to, I just tend to embrace what I see.

Alicia shared her view of herself with respect to her limitations and an opportunity to delegate more often:

I have a tendency to just try and do everything myself and I know that there’s only so much of me, so I really have to ... I’m learning to delegate more and allow others to do it their way, instead of ... it may not be the way I would do it, but at least delegate to them and allow them the freedom to do that. Then, if there’s something where you might need to make changes, it will at least allow the people the freedom to do it their way.

In some instances, the alumni referred to barriers to their abilities. As Beatrice shared,

Age seems to be a factor, that you know it doesn’t hinder me as much as many other people. But it seems like the age factor slows you down. I don’t know how to describe it but the age factor, it seems like you kinda get left behind hanging up the rear all the time.

Similarly, Harvey explained how lack of transportation hindered his ability to accomplish his community activity. The alumni have expressed a variety of characteristics they have learned about themselves as they got involved in the community.

Approach preference. Six alumni shared that they have learned about their preferences pertaining to how they take action in the community. As Alicia explained,

No, it's definitely stepping out of my comfort zone. Honestly, I am not a people person. I'm not real outgoing for the most part. I have my moments. Some will say I have two sides but for the most part I'm not very outgoing.

Alicia also shared that she tends to try to do everything herself, and is working on delegating more. With respect to her community nutrition education, Lisa shared, "because of the type of parents I had, I was never one of those who would just complain; you know, well, you should have done this. I was always cool and calm." She was referring to nutrition training she was providing and the lack of vegetarian food provided at the training. Harvey explained his approach to asking for help and stated, "I can help the people with no financial gain. I get disability myself, so I'm barely making it but there's always somebody who always helps every time I ask. And I have no problem asking." Additionally, Charles explained that he prefers to "speak up" when he believes something should be done differently. Mary shared that she is "shy" and often will not speak up immediately. Veronica explained that she has learned to "push forward," through the encouragement of other successful community groups. These comments demonstrate that the alumni are learning about their preferences as they are active in the community.

Community role. Seven alumni revealed that they learned about their role in the community. Lisa described her role as a nutrition educator when she stated:

African Americans still have the poorest health in the United States and I'm doing it on a small scale, trying to educate the community that there are better ways to eat. I'm not trying to get anyone to stop eating meat but I am trying to get them off red meat.

Mary is involved in a number of community organizations. She detailed a number of occasions in which she felt her role was to give constructive feedback to other members of the organizations. In one interview she said:

I always give feedback because if you don't know, how can you make things better. Or if you don't know, because you're not paying attention in that way then if somebody tells you and explains to you why it's important you'll start paying attention a little bit differently.

Harvey shared experiences in which he felt powerless, particularly when struggling with HIV/AIDS. When asked about his role in the community, he mentioned empowerment:

I want to be always able to help somebody or teach somebody new ways and give them new hope and know that if they take a position, empower themselves, and be their own advocate, most of the time, it'll be all right.

Beatrice, who has experienced many socio-economic changes in her community in recent years, shared that she considers herself a watchdog,

Well, how I define my role is like a watchdog. When you see things that need work, something that needs to be done you can do it. But I think it's kinda like a watchdog, just watching out for the community in my area, being alert and how I can be beneficial.

Alicia explained that she sees her role as a rebel:

I don't see, really, myself as a leader. I like to make a change. I don't like being in the -limelight, I like being in the background. So how would I define my role?

Probably a rebel, more like a rebel.

Additionally, Charles explained that he sees his role as having “the people in [his] heart,” and that this guides his actions. Veronica said that she sees herself as a “facilitator” with respect to her community activities. It appeared as the alumni participated in the community, they learned much about what their role in the community is.

Summary of Research Question Two

As the alumni participated in community activity, they were found to learn within three main areas. The themes that emerged from this research question were functional skills, relationship skills, and self. The functional skills included community bureaucracy, facilitation, researching, resource awareness, and information distribution. The relationship skills included communication, managing differences, networking, understanding and concern, and working in teams. The self category included abilities, approach preference, and community role. These themes demonstrated that the alumni were learning how to carry out community activities, while learning how to interact with other people and learning about themselves. This was a broad range of topics in which the alumni were learning.

Alumni as a CoP

In order to find out to what extent the alumni are operating as a community of practice, thirteen interview transcripts were analyzed with respect to three key CoP features. These features were community, domain, and practice. Community of practice framework as detailed by Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) was employed. Additionally, research journals were

referenced when applicable. The analysis shows some areas of weakness, as well as a foundation to build upon.

CoP's are subgroups within an organization. We viewed the alumni as a subgroup of the community at large, mainly one county in which they are most active. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) stated the three basic parts of a CoP are, "a domain of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a community of people who care about this domain; and a shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain" (p. 27). With respect to categorizing the themes into these three basic parts, community includes themes that pertain to features of the site that relate to how well connected the members are as a community. Domain includes the issues with which the alumni are actively concerned and involved. Practice includes the tools the alumni use to go about solving community problems. Table 11 details the themes that emerged from the interviews within the three CoP features of community, domain, and practice.

Table 11

Alumni Community of Practice Elements

Research question	Category	Subcategory
RQ 3: To what extent are the alumni operating as a CoP, as defined by Wenger (1998)?	Community aspect of CoP	(a) Communication lacking
		(b) Group interaction impacted by dissolved relationship with institute
	Domain aspect of CoP	(a) Diversity in community
		(b) Economic issues
		(c) Financing of initiatives
		(d) Organizing and facilitating events
		(e) Politics
	Practice aspect of CoP	(a) Ways of being: approach preference, and networking and relationship skills
		(b) Ways of doing : fundraising, organizing and facilitating events, resource awareness and information distribution

Community Aspect of CoP

The condition of the community in a CoP is important because of the focus on social and situated learning. The interviews revealed both strengths and weaknesses with respect to community. The predominant themes pertaining to community that emerged from the analysis were (a) communication, and (b) group interaction.

Communication. There are instances in which communication in the alumni association was deemed effective by some participants. However four interviewees considered communication ineffective and lacking a systematic approach. Carmella and Mary mentioned occasions in which alumni call each other in order to stay in touch. Beatrice spoke about email as a means of staying informed, however Nadia explained the email database is out of date. Nadia and Ronald both indicated alumni will often encounter each other spontaneously in the community and catch up with each other. Carmella, who has been a very active alumna, explained the type of communication that has been most effective:

I'm going to have to say we're really good about calling each other out of the blue if we hadn't talked to each other in five or six months. And it will be like, "Hey, girl, where you been?" and I'll be like, "Oh, you know, I've been busy with this and this and this and Commissioner this and all we did was walk over here," you know. It's that kind of thing that's going on. The strongest communication I have found through the years that I worked with [the association] – six years – it has always been word of mouth. We literally just gotten on the phone with the whole list and brought in four or five people and just started calling. And, you know, "don't forget this and we need people to do this." I mean, this is just really how we always kept in contact with everybody. The emails have never been very efficient for us.

Carmella's response indicated a method of communication that is informal and often spontaneous. My researcher observation journal referenced instances of the alumni socializing and catching up regarding their community activities. This was particularly the case during an alumni reunion on August 18, 2012 in which alumni reviewed some of their recent activity and

in some cases planned future collaborative activities. This networking time appeared to be a productive way for the alumni to exchange information.

Carmella also mentioned calling all the membership. Other alumni stated concerns that this is time consuming, and that some phone numbers on file are not accurate. The interim president stated that alumni would often stop by the office to check in regarding what is taking place at the association. However, systematic communication is lacking, such as regular outgoing updates from the leadership, a regular means of retrieving updates from membership, and accurate contact information of membership. Nadia further described the communication issues:

I think the one thing that is really going to help us and remove some of the obstacles is communication. Once we get someone that's going to actually manage ... you know, we've got a lot of people to do the website but to get someone who's going to manage the website; that takes a lot of time and a commitment, between work and family, it's hard to make that commitment. So communication is, I think, our biggest issue.

Nadia proposed utilizing the organization's website as a communication hub. Carmella also expressed a desire to better use the website as a communication tool. However, Alicia mentioned that older members may struggle with the use of technology. My researcher observation journal referenced some alumni stating that not all of them received the email regarding the reunion on August 18, 2012. Although some intra-organizational communication is taking place, an improved system would benefit the community aspect of this CoP.

Group interaction. This theme includes collaboration on community initiatives, SCNLI functions such as retreats and annual picnics, and social functions. Carmella detailed the significance of the annual picnic:

But when we did the picnic, we'd come back and meet the new members. They liked that because they'd get up, share their stories, and connect with some of the new members that are coming out that may have some of the same goals, so now we need to connect them up and exchange phone numbers. So they liked the picnic and I remember one year, boy, that ... it had to have been 110 degrees out at that park.

Nadia and Veronica likewise remembered these gatherings as a means of connecting with one another and forming a bond. Unfortunately, there has been a struggle to incorporate such regular events since the relationship with SCNLI was dissolved.

At times, group interaction included seeking help from other alumni and collaboration on community activities. Nadia explained an example of this:

So there are times that members will reach out to us, but the ones that are really involved, which there is a group made up of about twenty of us that are very active. So we just pretty much know and we have the network to say, "Hey, I need help with this," and XYZ will say, "Well, I can participate that day," or whatever. So we kind of network within our network.

Collaborative community change initiatives continued for many alumni after graduating from SCNLI. Mary offered an example of such collaboration:

When I talked about the food boxes, it was because of alumni that happened. Because of my relationship and knowing, you know their ties and what they were doing in their community that I was saying can I piggyback off of that. You know from the food program that we were bringing into the community when the kids were getting out of school, it's because of relationships with alumni.

The relationships formed during SCNLI training and alumni functions offered opportunities for future collaboration. Some alumni have continued to collaborate well beyond graduation from SCNLI. Similarly, Nadia mentioned small groups working together to obtain grants. Previously, the association planned and facilitated SCNLI's monthly training sessions. However, the recently dissolved relationship with SCNLI reduced opportunities for interaction. As Carmella explained:

Because everyone pretty much has their community projects going on, the alumni association as a whole has not come together and did a project. They discussed it and they had two or three put on the table that would have just been an alumni association project but yet and still they always seem to go back to just going to whatever issue is in this community – support that alumni.

Carmella was referring to the struggles the association had regarding gathering around new causes after the split from SCNLI. My observation journal referenced the alumni interaction that took place when they facilitated the SCNLI training sessions. I noticed more experienced facilitators training the newer alumni, and group decision making with respect to planning the training session as the day evolved. Additional references to group interaction included Ronald who referred to a concern for other alumni when he said, “people have feelings and they project sometimes that they have this strength but in reality, they're just like everyone else.” Beatrice and Mary also spoke of close interactions and seeking advice from other alumni. Only recently has the alumni executive committee begun to plan future community initiatives in which collaborative activities can continue to take place.

Diagnosis of community aspect of CoP. Referring to the community aspect of a CoP, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) reported that a CoP “is a group of people who interact, learn together, build relationships, and in the process develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment” (p. 34). They go on to indicate that such a community that shares the views of the domain, yet brings individual perspectives, can create a powerful social learning system. In such a community, knowing one another makes asking for help and information easier. Mundel and Schugurensky (2008) found in their research that, “regular engagement in community organizations produces learning that generates new skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are important for the personal development of volunteers, for the interaction among volunteers, and for the well-being and effectiveness of the organization” (p. 58). Regular interaction is essential to a shared understanding of the domain and the approach to practice.

From the perspective of the community aspect of SCAA as a CoP, the analysis revealed a few indications of a strong community, with many areas of improvement needed. There were instances of the alumni connecting with one another to check in, obtain updates, or solicit help. However, the utilization of a systematic communication structure was lacking. Some alumni referred to the use of a website as a communication tool. Although this proposal would be only one of many aspects of communication to be considered for intervention plans.

Similarly, the group interaction theme revealed both positive and negative aspects. The participants often reported the same events as being instrumental in the formation of relationships and shared memories. These events included the planning and facilitating of SCNLI training sessions, the annual picnic with the new class, and the retreat week at SCNLI. However, the dissolved relationship SCNLI meant plans for new regular events will need to be

scheduled. In summary, although there are some concerns with the community aspect of this CoP, there appears to be an adequate foundation to build upon.

Domain Aspect of CoP

The domain included themes that represent the common interests of the group. A wide variety of themes were uncovered through the interviews. Although the interests of the alumni vary, as this section will demonstrate, the domain themes have commonality. The predominant domain themes included (a) diversity in the community, (b) economic issues, (c) financing of initiatives, (d) organizing and facilitating events, and (e) politics. This wide variety in the domain revealed the assortment of issues the alumni take on. This broad spectrum may also cause potential challenges regarding rallying a large team of alumni for a specific cause.

Diversity in the community. The ethnic and cultural diversity of the community in which the alumni practice was referenced often in the interviews. Mary made reference to the relevance of diversity as it related to her interaction in the community:

Like my example when, you know, me being a facilitator of these community conversations, having a diverse community and I'm saying to them I particularly don't like this label that we put on each other as people in our society - can we remove it so that we can kind of even the playing ground? And then someone says to me, "But wait a minute. I like that label."

Mary was referring to a community meeting in which she questioned the use of the label "refugee." Nadia initiated an annual diversity festival in her community, in which various ethnic groups have food and music booths, and local government officials distribute public service information. Charles recalled his work regarding the gentrification of his neighborhood:

When I called a meeting concerning the height of the houses that's being built it brought both sides, black and white, together and that was the discussion that we took down to the county, and we got an overlay to be able to build not more than a certain size house.

Carmella mentioned the diversity of the community in which she is actively involved, and further observed that the various ethnic groups remain somewhat separated. Lisa expressed a willingness to understand the various cultures in her community. Diversity is a theme that emerged in a variety of contexts.

Economic issues. In addition to diversity issues, the alumni are often involved in various initiatives related to economic issues, such as food or clothing drives, summer lunch programs for children, and affordable housing. In some instances, the alumni were directing citizens to public resources that match their need. In other cases, they were initiating solutions to problems. An example is Harvey's work with energy assistance. He said, "since I've been in the leadership program I've got one hundred and twenty some seniors lights, who didn't know that even existed, you know, so just ... it's being around the people that impacts me the most." Mary explained her involvement in a United Way campaign:

And what that group does is focus on families from, children from zero, you know a baby to twenty-one to try to capture to see if we can try to steer families into becoming self-sufficient, obtain an education, the ability to obtain a job, health.

Similarly, Carmella has assisted job seekers with finding employment. Beatrice worked with an energy assistance program. Ronald has done work with food assistance.

Financing of initiatives. The financing of initiatives is another domain for the alumni. With many of the alumni's initiatives, finding the financing to accomplish their goals is a central concern. In some instances, they have created non-profit organizations in order to

obtain grants and accept donations. In other instances, they have solicited local businesses for donations. Harvey offered such an example:

I always let them know what I'm doing in the community, and that I'll be calling on them in the not-so-distant future for support. Some of them tell me, 'well, we can't give a lot but we'll give something.' And I always go back and they always give a little more than what I had anticipated because it is such a great need and it's the good that they're doing to help me help the community.

Harvey collected food and clothing which he distributed to those who need them in the community. When asked what her biggest struggle in the community is, Alicia said, "financing. Funding for a new organization. You have to prove yourself and demonstrate that you have the experience, and that's one of my biggest challenges." Additionally, Ronald spoke of the struggle to raise funds in the current economic climate. Whether sophisticated or simple, financing the various initiatives is a significant aspect of SCAA's domain.

Organizing and facilitating events. An additional theme within the domain Category was organizing and facilitating events. No matter what the particular community issue, the alumni often organized and facilitated an event regarding that issue. Before the relationship with SCNLI dissolved, the alumni would organize and facilitate the monthly SCNLI training sessions. They also had a major role in the yearly graduation ceremonies. On many occasions the relationship with SCNLI allowed for the alumni to develop teams for a particular purpose. Ronald explained what that was like:

A lot of our sessions were about teamwork, sorting out those things and finding solutions for those things as well as trying to deal with whatever the session was, whether it was business, maybe health, and that sort of thing. So that was extremely valuable.

Within the organization and facilitation of events theme, coding often included references to working in teams, whether it is with other alumni, other members of the community, or organizations. Charles referred to his coordination with the neighborhood association president that replaced him when he said:

As far as working with the people in the community, they have Halloween carnivals now ... she has feeding the hungry down there, and all those people of both sides an color, black white, come together for those events. And that's what it takes to bring the community together. We have joint involvement in different activities.

Similarly, Nadia shared the details of coordinating and facilitating SCNLI's training sessions. Carmella gave details of a drug march. Harvey explained his lunch and learn sessions for teenagers. Beatrice detailed the alumni advanced training sessions. During the alumni executive meetings in January, February, and March of 2013 the executive team began to discuss which type of community event they would initiate next as an alumni group. My research journal indicated the executive team was very excited to begin a new community initiative.

Politics. Politics is another recurring theme in the domain category. In particular, many alumni had interaction with local politicians. For many, the training received from SCNLI provided information about, and introductions to, local politicians. In some instances, this connection to local politics is carried through after graduation from SCNLI. When Alicia was asked what she learned most working in the community, she responded:

The most important lesson ... everything's political. That's probably the most important lesson, because you know, that's one of the things where I was like, 'Oh, I really don't like politics; I don't want to be involved and I don't want to do this.' But everything's political.

At times, a focus on politics can cause disagreement. Carmella expressed frustrations regarding the alumni's focus on the presidential race when she said:

They put a lot on the presidential race, and I'm not understanding that either. I understand that's important, but locally, you know, is where we need to be making a lot of these changes. So it just throws me off too, but that's just where it's at right now.

A few alumni have had great success utilizing political relationships to further their particular causes. Charles had success expediting the installation of street signage in his neighborhood. Nadia utilized her political connections to obtain speakers for SCNLI's training sessions. Ronald explained that the monthly training sessions often included local politicians as guest speakers. My observation journal referenced speakers from the office of economic development and the chamber of commerce giving presentations. The participants commented that they obtain substantial information from these presenters.

Diagnosis of the domain aspect of CoP. Based on their experience and research regarding CoPs and learning communities, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) asserted, "the members' shared understanding of their domain – its purpose, its resolved issues, its open questions – allows them to decide what matters. The domain guides the questions they ask and the way they organize their knowledge" (p. 30). They go on to say, the domain entails complex and long-lasting issues, rather than short term decisions, and that the insider's view of the domain will guide the learning of the community.

From the perspective of the domain aspect of SCAA as a CoP, the interview analysis revealed a broad set of interests in the community. Although the alumni are involved in a variety of causes, the themes represent a number of commonalities within the domain. These themes are (a) diversity in the community, (b) economic issues, (c) financing of initiatives, (d) organizing

and facilitating events, and (e) politics. In conclusion, although the alumni are involved in a variety of causes, their domain is common in the aforementioned ways.

Practice Aspect of CoP

The themes that fall into practice are the alumni's ways of doing things and their way of being in the community. As Wenger (1998) explained, "practice entails the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context" (p. 149). Although the analysis separates ways of doing and ways of being, the two are inseparable according to CoP framework.

Ways of being. The themes for ways of being describe what it means to be a member of SCAA. CoP framework places an important emphasis on that it means to be part of a community. From an adult learning perspective, Su (2011) explained, "the being approach employs a gestalt, one that holistically captures learning and make impossible the separation of process from content and self from context" (p. 59). The two themes that emerged are approach preference, and networking and relationship skills. The participants described a particular approach to community action as well as the significance of networking and relationship skills as part of their being and alumni.

Approach preference. The relevance of approach preference with respect to the alumni's practice came forth in a number of interviews. Some alumni expressed the importance of approach with respect to accomplishing their goals in the community. Harvey explained his approach of servitude:

That's my opportunity to give. To be so simple, just to serve. I don't know ... I just don't know how else to put it. I just want to do what's right. I sleep very good at night, when I do go to sleep. I sleep good because I know I've made a difference in somebody's life and I want to pass that integrity and role on to our community.

A range of approaches were discovered, such as boldness, compassion, entrepreneurship, and servitude. Ronald explained his entrepreneurship approach:

I knew the importance of having a business, having the entrepreneurial spirit. With our leadership organization, even though you talk about community, you start to realize that being an entrepreneur is like being a leader.

Carmella described boldness as an attribute she utilized. Lisa provided an example of compassion leading her actions. Mary mentioned how spirituality impacted her approach. Boldness and compassion also were referenced in my researcher observation journal as attributes I noticed. These codes demonstrate how approach is an element of the alumni's practice.

Networking and relationship skills. Another theme in the practice category is networking and relationship skills. A number of alumni have explained the value of attending community functions in order to meet other people to connect with. In particular, making political connections was highly valued in the interviews. The networking and relationship skills theme included a variety of skills, including but not limited to obtaining support, public speaking, and working with other organizations. Beatrice explained the benefits of networking:

If we reach out to the people that need the help, and they find out about it, you know, that it will get to the program because they end up a lot of them supporting the program. And sometimes that's what some members come from, not just the seniors, but the people come in and see what the program is about. That makes us more successful and the community knows what we are doing.

In this example networking resulted in gaining supporters for the alumni. Networking and relationship skills emerged with each of the interviewees. The alumni mentioned networking in order to get word out about a program, meet influential people in the community, and garner

support. Veronica explained that she learned, “sometimes the approach is the key” regarding obtaining support in the community. Charles spoke about the benefits of nurturing relationships in community, some of which began during the SCNLI training sessions. Carmella explained the importance of networking:

One of the things I’m learning is that it’s about who you know and you know, you always hear that. I used to be upset about that but when it started working to my advantage; I say that it’s OK. You know, sometimes you have to position yourself properly. It wasn’t easy getting to that position.

Two interviews with Mary were particularly relevant to networking and relationship skills. Each interview was in a public space and included situations in which we encountered people she knew in the community. After one of our interviews, she introduced me to a number of business owners she knows in the shopping plaza in which the interview took place.

Ways of doing. The themes that emerged as ways of doing included the alumni’s practice. These themes were fundraising, organizing and facilitating events, and resource awareness and information distribution. These themes were what the participants do as alumni.

Fundraising. The practice of fundraising came forth with many of the alumni during interviews. This included applying for grants and asking for donations. Some alumni have discovered the benefits of collaborating for grants. As Nadia explained:

There’s about four or five that I work with on a pretty regular basis. They all have different companies and we work together sometimes on grant processes, especially large grants that my organization might do a part of and their organization might do another part, so there is some collaboration there.

Mary described an incident, in which she was part of a grant distribution forum:

We received a grant, we were in competition for a little bit of money. And while sitting in the room with some of the decision makers, you know I'm watching them, we're all in competition with one another, we can't give the money to everybody.

Alicia and Ronald also detailed the importance and challenges of raising funds. Whether it comes in the form of collaborating for grants, or asking for donations, fundraising on various scales was a significant aspect of the alumni's practice.

Organizing and facilitating events. The alumni are often involved in organizing and facilitating various community events. This skill was fostered in SCNLI when each class is divided into smaller groups to plan and execute a group community initiative. Examples of these group initiatives included remodeling a youth center, designing an international neighborhood festival, and a neighborhood clean-up drive. Charles offered an example:

So we got a neighborhood watch program set, because a lot of people that were moving in seen this type of action going on next door, behind their house, and we needed to get the people together so we could have a security in their own homes, so people came down, we got a neighborhood watch program set up.

He went on to explain some of the planning involved in setting up the neighborhood watch.

Nadia detailed a time in which the alumni were called upon to set up and facilitate a SCNLI graduation ceremony. She explained:

Well, I know one graduation a couple of years back when some of the staff at PCA kind of left [Name] hanging with setting up for the graduation. So she called and said, 'Hey, I need help putting up the tables, blah, blah, blah.' So two or three of us ran over, helped her set up the room and decorate the room, rushed home, showered, and came back to graduation.

This example demonstrates a small group of alumni solving a need that arose quickly. Similarly, Ronald explained how the alumni used to facilitate the monthly training sessions. Carmella detailed a community drug march she organized and participated in.

Resource awareness and information distribution. The alumni made efforts to understand the types of resources available for the community in order to benefit the initiatives in which they were active, and in order to direct other citizens to resources. As Harvey explained:

We make sure we give out resources to the community and if they knew ... I've given out free dental or low-cost dental help and there's some I didn't even know about. And most of them, none of the community knows about.

Many alumni demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of what community resources are available, and were able to match the needs of the community with the appropriate resources. Beatrice explained a utility assistance program: "I would direct them to the program in the area ... where they could get the help they needed. They could stay home and be comfortable instead of worrying about the bills." Likewise, Carmella and Harvey detailed how they practiced directing those in need to local resources.

Diagnosis of the practice aspect of CoP. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) stated that practice "denotes a set of socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain: a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a bases for action, communication, problem solving, performance, and accountability" (p. 38). This may include reference materials such as books or websites, ways of behaving, thinking styles, or ethical positions.

Although not all alumni were partaking of the same practices, some common themes emerged. The themes were approach preference, collaboration, fundraising, networking and

relationship skills, and resource awareness and information distribution. This aspect of the CoP framework is somewhat lacking for the alumni. Although there were themes that pertain to their practice, there were no common systems for each theme. When asked, the alumni struggled to express the ways in which things are done. For example, although networking and relationship skills were revealed frequently, a common approach to networking was not discovered. Likewise, a common system of fundraising or collaborating was not expressed. There are common tools the alumni utilize, but not a mutual practice of the tools.

Summary of Research Question Three

The analysis of the interview data has revealed the extent to which SCAA is operating as a CoP. With respect to community, some alumni communicate regularly, however they were lacking a systematic communication structure that takes advantage of technology such as an interactive website or social media. Regular events have proven to be instrumental in the formation of community relationships. However, the recently dissolved relationship with SCNLI hindered this aspect of the community. South County Alumni Association's domain is broad, yet has commonalities which they can take advantage of to strengthen the community ties. South County Alumni Association's practice has a number of common themes. Unfortunately, they were lacking a common system for each practice. In conclusion, despite these significant weaknesses, there is a reasonable foundation to build upon to assist the alumni in becoming a stronger CoP.

The Relative Power of the Researcher and the Community Stakeholders

Since there was a small AR team in this case, and stakeholders other than Veronica participated less often than I had hoped for, I decided to investigate the role of power relations in the case. By doing so I hoped to gain a better understanding of the role of power, and how this

information could benefit future AR projects. When I mentioned my interest in this topic to Veronica, she expressed curiosity as well. Since AR is a collaborative process, I was particularly interested in critiquing the relationship between researcher and stakeholders. In this case analysis, I represented the researcher and Veronica represented the community stakeholder. I found Foucault's view of power relations to be helpful in answering this question. As the following section will detail, I had an opportunity to present many of the outcomes of this analysis to the major stakeholder, Veronica.

Applying a Foucauldian View of Power to the Action Research Project

The aim of this section is to answer the fourth research question, which was in what ways did the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders influence this AR project? This inquiry explicated the rationalization of power relations. Hopefully, doing so will provide action researchers with a means of analyzing their research and having a richer understanding of the role of power.

Both researcher and stakeholders enter into an AR project with pre-existing power relations, and subsequently form new power relations through the collaborative research activities. Since this dissertation is an AR project, educational groups could be of most interest with respect to probing power relations. These entities include the university in which I am pursuing my doctorate, the program department, the adult education program, the university's institutional review board, the faculty in the program, my committee, the cohort members, and other university administrators and students. I bring each of these power relations into the AR process with the stakeholders. Next, I set out to inquire how these power relations have impacted the research.

As the previous discussion demonstrates, the stakeholders and researcher enter into the AR process with pre-existing power relations. The next question is how that impacts research. Foucault offered some guidance regarding analyzing power relations. Power relations exist where actions are in response to another person's action(s), and by necessity the other person has a field of responses available to choose from. He viewed power relations as a system spread throughout society, not as isolated incidents confined within institutions, and not necessarily easy to detect. Because of this, he discouraged attempting to observe power within an institution. Institutions often centralize power relations. However, they should not be seen as their container or originator.

Foucault offered five points to the analysis of power relations ([1982] 2000), p. 344). These five points are: (1) *the system of differentiations* that permit actions upon actions, such as economic, linguistic, cultural, or competence differences, (2) *the types of objectives* such as maintaining privileges, accumulating profit, or an exercise of authority, (3) *instrumental modes* such as threat of arms, the effects of speech, surveillance, or through economic disparities, (4) *forms of institutionalization* which can include legal structures, family, specific localities, hierarchical structures, and complex multifaceted structures, and (5) *degrees of rationalization* which is "the bringing into play of power relations as action in a field of possibilities." This fifth point of analysis is more difficult to identify on the surface, and requires deep reflection and dialogue to uncover, as it references the varying degrees of elaboration of the act of power, based upon the anticipated results, cost, or certainty of results. Next, I reviewed these five points and considered the aspects of my power relations with the stakeholders. I will review the aspects that are most apparent to me. However, the following does not represent a comprehensive list.

Table 12

Power Relations in Action Research Case

RQ4: In what ways did the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders influence this AR project?		
Point of analysis	Researcher	Veronica (Primary stakeholder)
Systems of differentiation	Educational Racial Regional (Northern and Southern United States)	Educational Racial Regional (Northern and Southern United States)
Types of objectives	Degree completion	Giving the alumni a “shot in the arm”
Instrumental Modes	Research methods Being primary author of case	Promoting grassroots identity
Forms of institutionalization	University in which I am completing dissertation, and all its subgroups	Grassroots community groups
Degrees of rationalization (actions)	Avoiding certain subject matter (such as obtaining demographic data) with goal of completing research in timely fashion.	N/A

System of differentiations. There were a number of differentiations between myself and the stakeholders. One of the most obvious to me is educational. Although I don’t know with certainty the educational levels of all the research participants, I know that I am pursuing a doctorate degree and the nature of SCAA is one in which pursuing a doctorate is relatively rare. One research participant lamented, “over the years, we’ve had different agencies come to visit us, and to do analysis of us, using our funded dollars to promote somebody’s book, Ph.D. study, whatever, for whatever agency or for their own business.” I later notated in my journal that I “wondered what it’s like being on the other side of the research.”

Although I'll mostly highlight the educational factor for the sake of brevity, racial differences existed to the extent most of the participants are African American and I am Caucasian. Veronica referenced racial differentiation when she said, "we had at least one Caucasian person and a couple of Hispanic people in the training, but that first year that you became connected to us, I don't think we had any that year at all, which was rare." My researcher journal references one memorable occasion I was the only Caucasian present at one of SCNLI's graduation ceremonies in which I felt "very welcomed and embraced." During my last interview with Veronica, I had an opportunity to speak about the role of race in the study. She conceded that, "[the alumni] may have been more open with an African American interviewer."

Additionally, I am from the northern United States and SCAA is in the south, although not all participants are from the south. During an interview Veronica stated, "I don't know the right word to use, but there's this stigma or whatever about Northerners coming down here and trying to tell Southerners what to do." These are just a very few of the *systems of differentiations* that make up the power relations in the AR study.

Objectives. In addition to wanting to help the alumni become more effective in the community, my other chief objective was to complete my research in order to graduate. I consider these two objectives to be predominant. Illustrating the importance of my objective to complete my degree, my journal had multiple references regarding my frustrations with an interim president who was less responsive to the needs of the research. On one occasion I wrote, "I hope I don't take too long to complete this program." The *objective* of completing my degree must be considered as a part of the power relations that make up the AR study. Beyond the objective of completing my degree, a more thorough analysis would entail other objectives that I

may be less aware of, such as whether I am motivated to promote white privilege, the privilege of being educated, maintaining gender or class standing.

During our final interview, I asked Veronica about her objectives taking on the AR project. She said that because of the relationship with SCNLI being dissolved, “the organization was at a crossroad . . . and needed a shot in the arm.” This comment was a small glimpse of the *objective* of the most involved stakeholder. She did not offer insight into how this *objective* impacted her actions throughout the research.

Instrumental modes. As the researcher I had a number of *instrumental modes*, many of which were in the form of research methods, such as interviews, observations, documentation review, and analysis. Although the project is collaborative, my status as researcher and doctoral student at the flagship university of the state in which the study took place afforded me more authority when collaboratively planning the standards of evidence. Further, prescribed standards of evidence can be an instrument of power (Freeman, et al., 2007). Although the stakeholders were involved in the write-up of the case by offering input and points of clarification, I had the privilege of being the author of the dissertation and progress reports to my committee. This positioned me to be the primary person who will tell their story. I consider this privilege to be my most powerful instrumental mode, however, there are surely more I could explore.

The stakeholders also made use of instrumental modes. On numerous occasions Veronica attempted to arrange interviews with the niece of the organization’s founder and a graduate of twenty years past. She had mentioned wanting those interviews to take place because they both had a good understanding of the grassroots nature of the organization. However, neither of them was available due to health reasons. She stated a number of times that it is important that the alumni keep their grassroots identity.

Forms of institutionalization. The primary form of institutionalization I brought to the research is the educational groups previously mentioned. This included the university I attended, the department, the program, the faculty in the program, my committee, the cohort members, and other students. These various educational institutions influenced how I interacted with the stakeholders pertaining to the institutional standards I must comply with. In my journal, there were a number of references to educational institutionalization, such as when I queried, “I wonder if my progress reports regarding the stakeholders are influenced by the expectations of the program?” A better question might be to ask to what extent the expectations impact my reports. Certainly, other institutions have an impact as well I could consider, such as religion, career, and family.

A few forms of institutionalization were revealed during my final interview with Veronica. After explaining to her that I am in the process of reflecting upon the issues mentioned in this section, I asked her what institutions may have had an impact on the AR project. She first said she couldn't think of any, and then responded, “interestingly enough, just before you started the research piece, the [foundation] had convened a series of sessions with the other supposed grassroots leadership programs in the area.” She went on to explain that this session was instrumental in her desire to make sure the organization remain grassroots. Additionally, she went on to reference other leadership groups the alumni would like to collaborate with in the future. She stated proudly that the alumni are, “truly grassroots” compared to other leadership institutes.

Degrees of rationalization. This point of analysis is where the actions of power came together and were rationalized in the relationship. The next section will detail some of the actions in order to reveal the rationalization of power during the research. The goal is to better understand the role of power relations in the AR process.

The actions of power. With a better understanding of the power relations involved with me and stakeholders, I set out to consider the actions during the research with the perspective of power relations. I mostly detail my actions, since it would be speculative to critique stakeholder actions. The five points of *system of differentiation, objectives, instrumental modes, institutionalization, and degrees of rationalization* helped to reveal the actions of power during the AR process.

Although it is overly simplistic to disconnect the various objectives in the analysis of power relations, for the sake of this analysis I will focus on one primary *objective*: completing the research in order to fulfill the degree requirements. This objective led to AR decisions that were most likely to promote that goal, such as taking on a research problem that can be solved within a reasonable time frame. Although the goal of our intervention plan is to position the alumni for long term success by promoting a CoP, research topics that would have unreasonably extended the completion of my degree were taken off the table. However, what if those other options were more beneficial to the alumni?

My journal references the importance of this objective a number of times. On one occasion in which the interim president took a long time to return calls I noted, “not answering my calls again, annoying,” and when an AR meeting was rescheduled I noted, “rescheduled next meeting, frustrating.” Additionally, there are numerous references to my emphasis to the AR team regarding the ideal time frame of the research. I can remember having some anxiety

regarding collaboration with SCAA because of potential delays in the completion of the research, and therefore my degree completion. Although the AR team, and my committee, ensured quality research was taking place, the organizational intervention had a superficial deadline imposed in order to complete the degree in a timely fashion. If I had not constrained the intervention from these deadlines, the AR process would have had more flexibility regarding timing.

The *instrumental mode* I utilized to promote that objective was my influence with the research team regarding what research actions and interventions to take on. For example, Veronica asked if I could obtain demographic information for the county. I skirted this issue because it was not of interest to me at the time. In retrospect, demographic information could have prompted other possible research questions and interventions. Although AR is a collaborative process, I had the advantage of being viewed as the primary research expert. Finally, although the stakeholders have had opportunities to review the research write-up, I had a powerful *instrumental mode* of writing up the story. My journal referenced number of occasions, particularly in the early phases of the research, in which more than one stakeholder asked to what extent they would be involved in the write-up. I explained they would be able to read the write-up. Their concern may represent an awareness of the power of writing the story. In short, although the AR project is collaborative, I believe I had greater control regarding research planning and actions.

One *system of differentiation* that relates to this objective is my educational status of pursuing a doctoral degree at a respected institution. This provided me more credibility regarding research decisions, and the knowledge of the appropriate discourse from the literature base. This could cause the other members of the AR team to feel uncomfortable raising questions or objections if I have a perceived level of mastery of the language pertaining to the

study. This was a significant *differentiation* as my level of educational pursuit was higher than the AR team and participants.

This differentiation was reinforced by the educational program in which I was a student, and all the accompanying resources such as my committee, professors, classmates and learning materials. I noted in my journal that Veronica often refers to my educational institution when introducing me. She too may have been reinforcing this differentiation. One alumna expressed awareness of this differentiation when she said, “over the years, we’ve had different agencies come to visit us ... be our friend to get this information, this data and then they’re gone.” This comment was revealing to me because it exposes the notion that a researcher can exit upon completion, although the organization is left with the consequences of the research and organizational interventions.

For me, the *forms of institutionalization* that related here is academic institutions that uphold AR methodology, the qualitative methods we employed, the institutional review board at my university, and the doctoral program of which I am enrolled. These entities each have power relations embedded within them, and I am impacted by my relationship with them. For example, action research, qualitative research, and the expectations of the doctoral program each may have a panopticon effect on my actions. My actions with the stakeholders are guided by the expectations of the institutions I will report those actions to. I reported my progress to the committee, who had expectations within a field of possibilities that fall within the methodological and departmental guidelines. In turn, the outcomes I produced reinforced the institutionalization of these power relations. My journal included a number of entries in which I reflected upon “power and organizations” such as the IRB and program faculty, and questioned “in what ways the research outcomes would be different if I were studying in a different

program.” My actions during research were partially formed by what I was taught at the academic institution.

During an interview with Veronica, I explained that I have been considering the role of power and AR. I revealed to her my reflections, many of which are mentioned here, and asked her what institutions may have impacted her regarding the AR. She mentioned a grassroots leadership conference she attended that impacted her. As she described, “but in a way that might have, because again, trying to hold on to that grassroots piece, being able to offer people who wouldn’t ... first of all, couldn’t get into [a fee based program].” Her comment provided a glimpse of the forms of institutionalization on the part of the stakeholders.

Finally, the *degrees of rationalization* were the overall exercises of power in this particular context. On my part, I could have overlooked a more beneficial intervention for the alumni if I hadn’t promoted the primary objective of completing my degree. This rationalization of power had a significant influence on the AR project by influencing the problem that would be solved and the resulting intervention plans. Although the outcome of the research is ideally positive by positioning the alumni as a more cohesive CoP that utilizes the learning that is taking place, I managed the possibilities in order to ensure my goals were met as well. I rationalized the path of the AR project by influencing outcomes based on not only the research goal, but also my objective of completing the research in a suitable time frame for my purposes, in accordance with institutional expectations.

Using my *instrumental modes* and *differentiation* to promote my *objective* of completing my degree promoted the institutionalization of the researcher / stakeholder power relations. Additionally, although the stakeholders had an opportunity to review my final write-up, my role as author of the dissertation afforded a final and very powerful *instrumental mode*.

The stakeholders could partake in a similar analysis. Doing so would further reveal the influences of power that are part of the complex web of power relations. The stakeholders spending time reflecting on this and dialoging with the researcher, would enrich the collaborative relationship and provide further insight into the influence of power relations on actions and the resultant outcomes. Again, the goal is not to treat power as a force that needs to be removed from the process, rather to understand this “productive network that runs through the whole social body” (Foucault [1977] 2000, p. 20).

Final Thoughts Regarding Power and AR

AR affords the opportunity for collaborative action that leads to organizational change while informing practice and theory. My interaction with the stakeholders is in a field of complex relationships and actions, many of which both the stakeholders and I were aware of, and others we were not aware of. The interactions that take place in an AR project can be viewed as relations of power. With a goal of promoting quality action research, I analyzed the power relations interwoven in the AR study, and critiqued some of the actions of power. The intention was not to make formal causal statements about the relationships between actions of power and the research outcomes. The purpose of the analysis was to draw attention to relations embedded in the AR study.

Foucault raises the larger question of how relations of power are rationalized. This analysis was a step in the direction of understanding the rationalization of power relations, in particular the researcher / stakeholders power relations in AR. This analysis prompts me to consider my objectives, how I promoted those objectives, the institutions that influenced them and what this means for AR. Practitioners of AR should consider that each researcher and stakeholder action can fortify power relations and facilitate their institutionalization. The five

points of analysis (1) *system of differentiations*, (2) *types of objectives*, (3) *instrumental modes*, (4) *forms of institutionalization*, and (5) *degrees of rationalization* offers a guide and source of reflection and dialogue to bring these issues to light. For my practice, I have now discovered a structure in which I can reflect upon and dialogue with stakeholders. Lack of consideration of these factors could result in researcher / stakeholder interaction in AR that is not critiqued. In such a case new power relations are constructed and/or existing power relations are reinforced undetected.

Researcher Reflections

Participating in AR provided many learning experiences. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) referred to “meta-learning” (p. 13), in which the researcher is not only learning about the theories involved in the research question(s) but additional learning as a result of the process.

Throughout the process I began to consider the relevance of power in relation to the AR process. By analyzing the power relationships involved in the research, I discovered that power relations had a significant influence on the direction of the research. An additional area of reflection was the significance of race throughout the process.

Throughout the research I made a number of journal entries pertaining to the impact of differences in race on the research. One consideration is the impact of race difference and research outcomes. I don't believe the research outcome of this case is inferior because of difference, only dissimilar from what other potential researchers might experience.

Considering the demographics of the research participants and my race, I need to contemplate societal privileges associated with being white. Tascon and Ife (2008) stated, “privilege is hence seen as that which positions someone to be provided with the benefits necessary to ‘enable’: agency, decision-making, production and reproduction, sociability and

belonging” (p. 316). I assume the participants I conducted research with may not have the same benefits that I take for granted. From a research perspective, race and power may have a role. Since white males are often in authority positions, there certainly must have been an impact when interviewing African American females. An African American female likely would not divulge the same information to me as she would an African American female researcher.

While studying the lived experiences of female women of African and Caribbean heritage, Agyeman (2008), a white female, lamented regarding her ability to represent a group of a different race:

Sensitive research should be a journey of discovery in which the researcher becomes ‘sensitized’ to the potential challenges and dilemmas that their chosen topic may hold.

When researching the *Other* (italics original) in the role of an outsider, this also means addressing the role of self in research and engaging in critical questioning of one’s own role and scope. (p. 82)

She suggested that the researcher critically questions his or her role and scope. Further, she advocated using ethnographic methods to enable the voices of participants to be heard. My research journal referenced a couple occasions in which I questioned my ability to represent the alumni’s story, due to the race differences.

As a white researcher on a multi-racial team studying school reform, Gordon (2005) analyzed her role as a researcher and found she dodged race discussions. She found she used “colorblindness, avoidance of race-talk, selective attribution of race, containment, and Whitewashing” (p. 298) as five logics during data collection. She raised concerns regarding resistance to privilege which affects data collection and analysis and reinscription of privilege through various logics such as the five mentioned. She suggested reflexivity that includes help

from outside reviewers. As Gordon (2008) asserted, “it is probable that most of us are unaware of the variety of logics and attendant strategies that we draw upon in order to reinscribe white norms through our work in qualitative research and evaluation” (p. 299).

Researchers have found various models useful regarding this issue. As part of an all-white research team conducting an oral history with black participants, Petersen (2008) used the Helms model (1994) to reflect upon her racial identity as a researcher. As Petersen (2008) explained, “the model delineates six statutes that characterize the development of white racial identity” (p. 46). These statutes are the first contact with people of color and obliviousness to being white, disintegration or increased awareness race issues, reintegration which can lead to feelings of guilt, pseudo-independence or believing whites have the correct answers, immersion / emersion which is attempting to fix people of color, and autonomy which entails emotionally internalizing race issues. This is one of many means researchers have used to examine the racial facets of their research.

Summary

This case investigated the alumni’s learning as they attempted to solve community problems, the content of their learning, and to what extent they are a CoP. We found learning taking place through experiential learning, formal training, past experience, and social learning. Regarding the content of their learning, functional skills, relationship skills, and self emerged. With respect to their functioning as a CoP, community, domain and practice were evaluated. The alumni are lacking as a CoP in many ways, however there is a reasonable foundation to build upon to assist the alumni in becoming a stronger CoP.

With a goal of promoting quality action research, I analyzed the power relations interwoven in the AR study, and critiqued some of the actions of power. The intention was not

to make causal statements about the relationships between actions of power and the research outcomes, rather to draw attention to power relations embedded in the AR study. The five points of analysis of systems of differentiations, types of objectives, instrumental modes, forms of institutionalization, and degrees of rationalization were reviewed. This exercise primarily revealed underlying power relations on my part, since further dialogue and reflection on the part of stakeholders would be needed to reveal the employment of power relations on their part.

The reflections section of the chapter offered considerations of the impact of a white researcher with mostly African American participants. Considering the racial makeup of the AR team is an important aspect of the case. A number of models have been applied to research cases to assist with analyzing the role of race in research.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This case entailed a qualitative AR case study in which I worked collaboratively with the alumni of a neighborhood leadership institute to facilitate organizational change. The purpose of the study was to investigate how a community leadership group learns to plan and take action on community problems. The study was guided by four research questions, which were: (1) What types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community? (2) What are the alumni learning through their leadership efforts in the community? (3) To what extent are the alumni operating as a community of practice (CoP)? and (4) In what ways did the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders influence this AR project?

The case contributes to the fields of adult learning, CoP framework, and AR methodology. South County Alumni Association is positioned to benefit from the interventions with a goal of becoming more effective through the CoP model. Although retrospectively viewing the research, we may not have chosen CoP framework if we had known the disruptive change was coming. This change hindered progress regarding establishing the alumni as a CoP. Further, it may be challenging for grassroots organizations to function as a CoP without consistent financial backing and infrastructure. The remainder of this chapter will summarize the findings, present the conclusions, detail implications, suggest future research, and offer final reflections.

Summary of Findings

This AR case entailed a collaborative effort to examine how a community leadership group learns to plan and take action on community problems. Quantitative analysis resulted in findings in the areas of adult learning, organizational learning in the form of CoP framework, and the relative power of the researcher and the community stakeholders.

Alumni Learning in Community Problem Solving

We found that the alumni learned in four ways while taking action in the community. These ways are (a) experiential learning, (b) formal training, (c) past experience, (d) social learning. Regarding experiential learning, the findings referred to “learning processes in which the experience of the learner is used as the prime source of stimulus for learning” (English, 2008). Formal training was an effective setting for learning to take place. This came in the form of training at SCNLI, alumni advanced training events, and mentoring. Additionally, past experience was relevant for the alumni’s learning, and how those experiences shape learning and actions. Finally, learning was fostered through social interaction. Although learning was singularly categorized, these categories may overlap. For example, the advanced alumni training included formal training, social interaction, and past experience influence learning throughout the training.

Content of Learning

Regarding the content of the alumni’s learning, we identified functional skills, relationship skills, and learning about self. Analysis revealed a wide array of learning content garnered as the alumni are active in the community. The functional skills included community bureaucracy, facilitation, researching, and resource awareness and information distribution. The relationship skills included communication, managing differences, networking, understanding

and concern, and working in teams. The self category included abilities, approach preference, and community role. These themes demonstrated that the alumni learned how to carry out community activities, while learning how to interact with other people and learning about themselves.

Alumni as a CoP

Interventions were designed in consideration of SCAA's strengths and weaknesses as a CoP. With respect to the community aspect of the alumni as a CoP, we found communication was lacking and group interaction was impacted by the dissolved relationship with SCNLI. Regarding the domain aspect, we found common issues the alumni are concerned with. These issues were diversity in the community, economic issues, financing of initiatives, organizing and facilitating events, and politics. With respect to their practice, their ways of being entailed approach preferences and relationship skills. Their ways of doing included fundraising, organizing and facilitating events, resource awareness, and information distribution.

The diagnosis of the alumni as a CoP revealed a lack of systematic communication structures that take advantage of technology such as an interactive website or social media. Additionally, the recently dissolved relationship with SCNLI hindered the community aspect of SCAA. Their domain is broad, yet had commonalities which they could have taken advantage of to strengthen community ties. Their practice had a number of common themes. Unfortunately, they were lacking a common system for each practice.

The Relative Power of the Researcher and the Community Stakeholders

The last research question inquired into the role of power relations in the AR case. My interaction with the stakeholders was in a field of complex relationships and actions, many of which both the stakeholders and I were aware of, and others of which we were not aware. The

interactions that take place in an AR project can be viewed through the lens of relations of power. With a goal of a quality action research project, I analyzed the power relations interwoven in the AR study, and critiqued some of the actions of power. The purpose of the exercise was to reveal the power relations embedded in the AR study. Five points of system of differentiation, objectives, instrumental modes, institutionalization, and degrees of rationalization helped to reveal the actions of power during the AR process. I found that my objective of completing my degree led to AR decisions that were most likely to promote that goal, such as taking on a research problem that can be solved within a reasonable time frame.

Conclusions

The research set out with a goal of enabling SCAA to better utilize the learning that is taking place so as to become a problem solving group through application of AR interventions. Although the AR case was set in a particular context designed for targeted and informed interventions, the findings of this research inform adult learning theory, CoP theory, and the practice of AR. The case offered a unique example of adult learning taking place in an informal community setting. Four conclusions can be made from the findings.

Conclusion 1: Learning takes place as a rhizomatic network of learning types including but not limited to experiential learning, formal training, past experience, and social learning.

Learning may take place formally, informally or incidentally (Marsick & Watkins, 2001), and may incorporate a complex network of factors that include often overlooked elements such as body (Amann, 2003), spirit (English & Gillen, 2000; Tisdell, 2003), and emotion (Dirkx, 2008). The foremost factors that promoted learning in the case were (a) experiential learning, (b) formal training, (c) past experience, and (d) social learning. This variety of factors resulted in many learning moments for the alumni. The data indicating that formal training resulted in

learning should not be surprising, rather it would be concerning if it had not. Similarly, past experience emerging as a connection to learning is expected. The experiential learning and social aspect is most significant in the study. By being active in the community and maintaining social interaction, the alumni are learning.

Combining a traditional “adjective-plus-learning-theory” with Kang’s (2007) proposed postmodern rhizoactivity approach offers a more comprehensive view of adult learning. Both approaches inform adult learning. As Hill (2008) explains, “learning in the postmodern is not simply a break from the past but rather comprises the past’s elements in motion” (p. 91).

Approaching the network of factors entailed in adult learning may take the form of the following diagram.

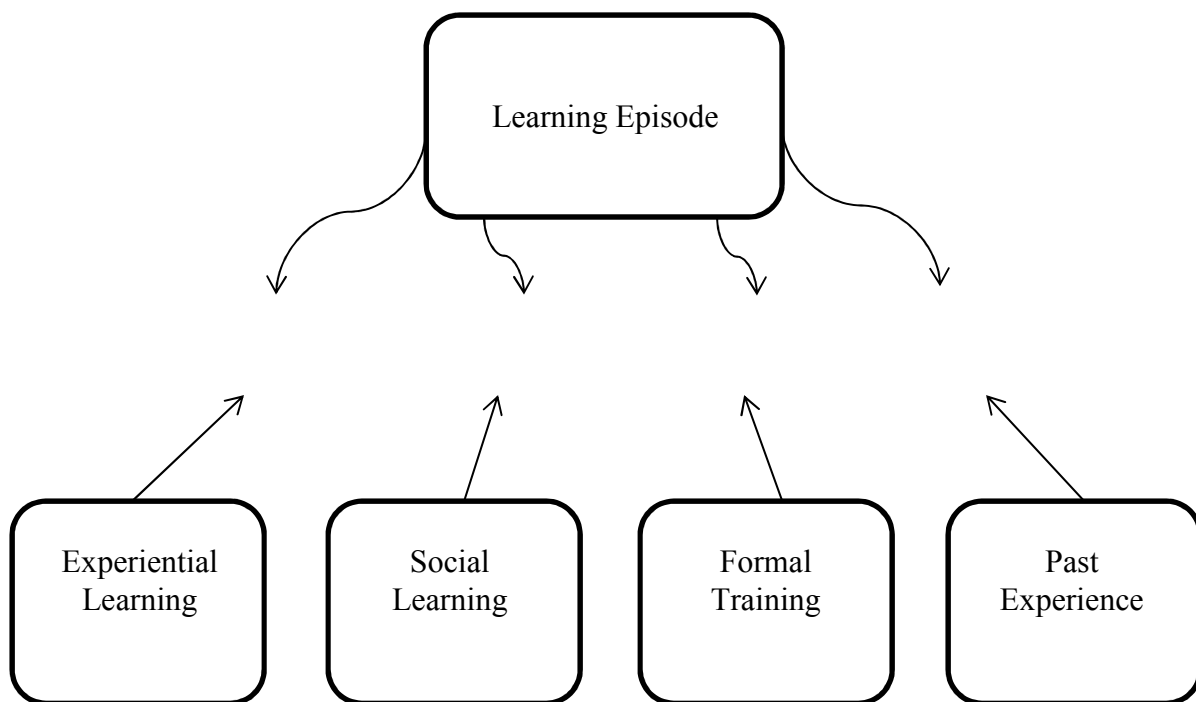


Figure 2. *Incorporating a Rhizomatic Perspective to Adult Learning*

Figure 2 represents a network of learning from two conjoined perspectives. The bottom of the figure represents the four prevalent modes of learning in this case. A more complete diagram would include many additional modes of learning. As an example, social learning is depicted with an arrow indicating a path towards an episode of learning, although the learning is pictured as one episode in order to simplify the example. Many learning episodes may come from one experience. From this perspective we might inquire into what factors of social relations prompt learning. This approach traces the root, whereas a postmodern rhizoactivity approach sees a tentative map (Kang, 2008), much like “lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). These “lines of flight” have no beginning or ending, and as Kang explained, can help produce a map. However, this map cannot be finalized since the object of the map is ceaselessly changing.

Rhizoactivity is borrowed from the field of botany. A rhizome is both a root and a stem since it pushes out roots and shoots. The term was used by Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) to reconfigure the view of the author, the book and the world, and reject the idea that an author can depict the world in a book. A rhizome sprouts or pops up and makes connections with whatever is available, has no fixed departure and return points, and starts up again when broken up. A rhizomatic approach would see an episode of learning reaching out to take root with whatever is available. For example, Robert mentioned that he learned to facilitate the monthly training sessions. Viewing this learning episode as a rhizome, we would map where it reached and took root upon, such as, but not limited to his past experiences, the people involved, and any formal training components.

Incorporating both the traditional perspective and a postmodern rhizoactivity perspective provides an expanded means to map learning. By mapping learning with linear connections, we

can make pedagogical assertions regarding what factors and practices promote learning.

Approaching learning rhizomatically, which reach out and take root with whatever it can, allows us to draw a tentative map of the learning terrain. Next, I will focus on two of the predominant modes of learning in this case, experiential and social. Reflection is also addressed since it was lacking in the findings.

Experiential learning. Experiential learning here referenced, “learning processes in which the experience of the learner is used as the prime source of stimulus for learning” (English, 2008, p. 243). Experience is referenced as present tense, although this is not to say present tense experience can be disconnected from previous experiences of a learner. Often the alumni expressed experience as stimulation for learning, such as the experience of obtaining grant funding or presenting to groups. In some cases the act of doing was with other alumni. Other instances of experiential learning included guidance from other alumni, such as Robert learning how to conduct the monthly SCNLI sessions. Additional instances of experiential learning took place independent of other alumni, such as Charles who learned to work on community issues while dealing with diverse opinions. Experiential learning did not necessary need to take place in association with other people. An example of this would be Alicia who learned while researching on the internet.

Experiential learning, both with and without other alumni, provided learning that may benefit SCAA. If the alumni were to only practice community activities solely with each other, there would be no opportunities to experience outside perspectives and means of solving problems. Learning theories such as transformational learning (Merzirow, 1991) express the value of disorienting dilemmas which may prompt a transformation in one’s beliefs, attitudes, or habits of mind. Experiencing community activities with non-alumni may prompt such

disorienting dilemmas, or simply demonstrate other ways of doing things. Conversely, if the alumni did not have opportunities to experience together, they would not be able to learn what it means to be a member of their learning community.

In addition to an experience stimulating learning, a postmodern rhizomatic perspective might view an episode of learning and consider a tentative map of what experience the learning instance takes root in. There may be multiple experiences taking place at one time for a learner, such as the physical relationship with the environment, or an emotional reaction. When learning takes place, which experiences does that learning take root in? The experiences in which it takes root may impact other learning episodes as the learner makes additional connections to experiences in the future.

The relationship between experience and learning is promising since the vast majority of these educational experiences are non-formal, and not all members of the community have access to formal education. Since community experiences, such as the many types the alumni are involved in, are not labeled educational, they may not receive the same recognition as formal education. However, the adult education field would benefit from continued research regarding the learning that takes place in the community through experiences of men and women who are working towards social action and change.

Social learning. The social aspect of learning has been discussed for some time. Dewey (1916) emphasized learning in a social context as an individual that “shares or participates in some conjoint activity” (p. 26). Further, Kolb (1984) proposed a cycle of learning from experience. Experience is both personal and social, and people can be viewed not only as individuals, rather individuals to be understood in the social context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Similarly, with situated learning, the learning is inseparable from the context in which it occurs, and the learning takes place in the doing, with an emphasis on the social construction of knowledge. Scholars taking a cognitive approach are likely to acknowledge the social element of learning but see the individual as the container of learning (Niewolny & Wilson, 2011). Observation of others is often a factor here, which can impact people's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

Situated learning contends that learning cannot be separated from the situation in which learning is taking place. This idea takes learning outside of solely the learner and incorporates the environment and social interaction that accompanies learning. Learning in a particular situation entails attention to the people involved, the tools utilized, and the context in which it occurs. This case is not claiming the data confirms situated learning, since it is more of a philosophical view of learning.

The social dimension of learning came through for the alumni through interaction with other alumni, the example of others, and dialogue. These three aspects provided opportunities for the alumni to learn. As alumni socially interacted with one another, learning was fostered through encouragement, observation, and being trained in a social setting. These factors that emerged are promising with respect to a healthy social learning environment. The diverse manner in which social learning took place for the alumni demonstrates that a variety of social connections can impact learning. For example, it would be troubling if there were no indications of dialogue or alumni interaction.

In conjunction with a social interaction stimulating learning, a postmodern rhizomatic perspective might view an episode of learning and consider a tentative map of what social relations the learning instance takes root in. Since there may be many individuals involved in a

social setting, we might ask what social relations does that learning take root in, and which are excluded? Further, can a learning episode take root in a social relation not present, such as a memory or expert in the field? In turn, the social relations a learning episode takes root in may impact future learning. In this way, a particular learning episode could be mapped as a network.

Although the social aspect of learning has a rich history in adult education, there are opportunities to further investigate social learning particularly in the informal community setting. The social interaction that takes place in the community when people solve problems can prompt learning (Ollis, 2011). In turn, research regarding the learning that takes place in these settings can provide a better understanding of the multi-dimensional field of adult learning. With a greater understanding, adult educators can collaborate with community groups to help foster learning which may enhance the practice of such groups.

Lack of reflective learning. Many learning models include reflection on the part of the learner (Brookfield, 1995; Mackeracher, 2004; Mezirow, 1991; Moon, 2004; Schön, 1983). Lacking from the data was an indication that reflection was an influential aspect of learning. This could be explained in a few ways, such as lack of probing into this area during interviews or simply lack of expressing reflection by interviewees. Further, it is difficult to uncover reflection (Marsick & Volpe, 1999). It is not suggested that reflection has not taken place with respect the alumni's learning, rather it was not expressed in interviews. As my involvement with SCAA continues, I plan to speak to the AR team regarding incorporating reflection, particularly in correlation with group dialogue and in conjunction with organizational assessments. The AR team will collaborate regarding what form this reflection may take, such as journaling or group activities that allow sharing of reflective activities.

In conjunction with reflection stimulating learning, a postmodern rhizomatic perspective might view an episode of learning and consider how learning takes root in reflection. Not only does this mean the prompting of reflection due to the learning, but also connections to other reflections. For example, what connections does the learning make to other reflective activities that are not directly related to that learning experience? If the learner is in the process of making meaning of a life event, a learning episode may take root in that meaning making process.

Conclusion 2: Through community leadership, adults learn functional skills, relationship skills, and gain personal insights.

Only some of the alumni's activities had learning as an explicit goal. An example of one such activity is the advanced learning sessions, which were formal training events. The majority of the learning took place informally as the alumni were active attempting, and at times being successful at, leading community change. As this case demonstrated, community leadership is a rich context for adult learning. Adults may learn the functional skills of how to successfully implement community change, relationship skills of how to garner support and make strategic connections, and learn about themselves.

The adult education field has roots in the community in a variety of ways. Community groups may take many forms and have various labels associated with them, such as social entrepreneurs. Tracey and Phillips (2007) identified two stands in the literature regarding social entrepreneurs. For some scholars, social entrepreneurship pertains to creating positive social change, regardless of the structures or processes entailed. These groups typically rely on philanthropy or government funding to achieve their social goals. A second strand in the literature focuses on generating income while pursuing social goals.

Public pedagogy is another form of learning in the community, which at times is linked to community change and activism (Sandlin & Milam, 2008). Sandlin, O'Malley, and Burdick (2011) explained public pedagogy is “a concept focusing on various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning occurring beyond formal schooling and is distinct from hidden and explicit curricula operating within and through school sites” (p. 338). The sites of learning in these instances could be formal institutions such as libraries, museums, and zoos, or in informal educational sites such as commercial space, the internet, the media, and popular culture.

Often community groups partner with governments, educational institutions, and various funders in order to implement change. Whatever the setting, in some instances community groups are contending with issues such as hegemony, which Livingstone (1976) defined as, “a social condition in which all aspects of social reality are ... supportive of a single class” (p. 235). In this case of this study, an *Intercultural Task Force Report* (unknown, n.d.), from the county in which SCAA operates, offered demographic data as well as recent intercultural concerns. The report identified five major intercultural issues, which were day laborers, gangs, refugees, public health, and economic development. Each community has unique challenges. The field of adult education, and organizational learning frameworks such as CoPs, can help frame the issues community groups contend with, and provide collaboratively generated solutions.

As members of the community collaborate and take action, they are participating in an informal learning community, with varying levels of sophistication. These learning communities can prompt learning in a variety of subjects. Helping these groups to make the best use of learning can increase their ability for informed planning and action. As a result, other groups can learn from their successes, assuming that knowledge is shared.

Conclusion 3: Disruptive change can impact a COP's definition of community, purview, and organizational practices.

Disruptive change impacts the core of organizations and how they go about their practice (Louis & Sutton, 1991; Morgeson, 2005). Change can prompt learning on an individual basis as the world reveals new ways of working. Change also provides opportunities for organizations to learn in new ways, or potentially thwart learning. Assessing a CoP's community, domain, and practice can reveal the impact of such change.

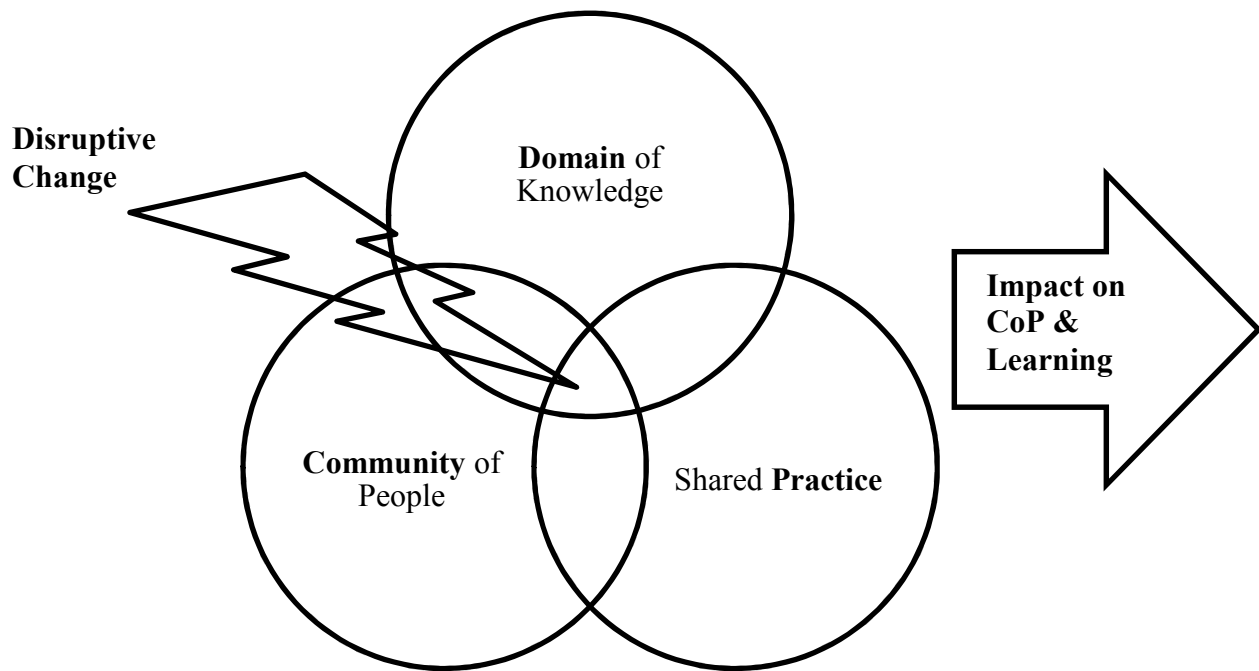


Figure 3. *Disruptive Change Impacting a CoP*

This case study investigated organizational learning, specifically utilizing CoP framework. We introduced CoP framework into the study without knowing SCAA's relationship with SCNLI would be dissolved. Community of practice framework has a strong emphasis on the social aspect of learning, in which there is a shared history behind the practice

of a community. Further, CoPs are influenced by situated learning theory, in which learning is inseparable from the context in which it occurs, and the learning takes place in the doing.

Finally, CoPs include a shared domain of issues that matter to the group.

Central to the CoP model is what Wenger (1998) called “legitimate peripheral participation” (p. 11), which entails the peripherality in which there is approximation of full participation within a group. In time newcomers to a group must be granted enough legitimacy to be treated as full members. Learning takes place at the periphery first, and through a social process further learning takes place with full participation. The dissolved relationship with SCNLI impacted each of these CoP aspects.

Unlike gradual change, which may be easier to manage, SCAA’s relationship with SCNLI being dissolved was a disruptive change that impacted the core of the organization and how they would continue to go about their practice (Louis & Sutton, 1991; Morgeson, 2005). This case analyzed the three major aspects of a CoP, which were community, domain, and practice, while the site endured the change. Members of a CoP spend time together in their practice, negotiate accountabilities, and develop a shared repertoire. A major disruption to a CoP may demand a re-negotiation of what it means to be part of the community. Additionally, it may impact who is part of the community and/or where new members come from or who can be a member. Likewise the CoP’s domain, which is the issues they care about, could be altered. Communities of practice need to address these issues and incorporate them into their domain, or risk losing the ability to be involved in the issues they care about. Finally, a disruptive change may result in a loss of access to certain tools or resources, or introduce the need to learn new practices.

Consideration of the three major aspects of a CoP with respect to organizational change is a means of assessing the impact of change on organizational learning. Change may come from within or from without an organization. When change impacts the community, domain, or practice of a CoP, there is potential impact on learning for that CoP. Impacts can be opportunities for learning as well as hindrances to learning. Communities of practice should inquire into how they can move forward in lieu of such changes.

Conclusion 4: The entwined relationship between actions and power defined the AR process.

Researcher / stakeholder interactions are within a field of complex relationships and actions, many of which the researcher and stakeholders are aware of. There are others they are not aware of. The interactions that take place in an AR project can be viewed as relations of power. Foucault ([1982] 2000) presented power relations not as solely negative, rather part of a productive network.

Foucault's five points of analysis, (1) system of differentiations, (2) types of objectives, (3) instrumental modes, (4) forms of institutionalization, and (5) degrees of rationalization offered a guide and source of reflection and dialogue to bring power relations to light. An analysis of these points can prompt researchers and stakeholders to consider how various objectives were promoted, the institutions that influenced them, and what this means for AR. Practitioners of AR should consider that each researcher and stakeholder action can fortify power relations and facilitate their institutionalization. Lack of consideration of these factors could result in researcher / stakeholder interaction in AR that is not critiqued. In such a case new power relations are constructed and/or existing power relations are reinforced undetected.

Power relations are not solely a negative aspect to AR, rather an inevitable aspect of human relations. Foucault ([1979] 2000) raised the larger question, “how are such relations of power rationalized? Asking it is the only way to avoid other institutions, with the same objectives and same effects, from taking their stead” (p. 325). By analyzing power relations in AR, we are able to have a better understating of its institutionalization. For example, what norms are being reinforced or created between researchers and stakeholders?

Implications

This AR case has implications for three main areas. Implications are related to the stakeholders and the practice of AR, adult learning theory, and organizational learning pertaining to CoP framework. This broad set of implications is detailed in the following section.

Implications for Site: “Cautiously Optimistic”

South Count Alumni Association is at the beginning of a delicate new phase. They have created a new vision and mission statement and are in the process of rebuilding the organization. The medium and long term interventions have not been implemented, however dialogue has begun for these interventions and the association has “adopted [me] as a member,” as stated in an email from Veronica. Our goal is for the AR cycles to continue in order to complete all interventions, and review the progress in order to make adjustments to the plan as needed. As it may take a year or two to accomplish the long term interventions, I plan continued participation in SCAA’s monthly meetings in order to facilitate this work.

In my final interview with the most active stakeholder, Veronica, I asked how she felt about the future of the organization. Veronica responded:

I think I would call it ‘cautiously optimistic’ because I still want us to get that base back.

I still want us to get people back in place who were really committed to functioning in the

organization and helping to make some things happen. I'm cautious as well because I know sometimes when you have to rebuild, there's that time frame in there that you have to give people to get back involved, and you have to give them a reason to get back involved. That's where I am – cautiously optimistic.

Veronica has many years of experience in the community and continues to be active today. Her appraisal of the situation is insightful. On an individual basis, the alumni are involved in a variety of community activities, however it is essential that momentum builds and the alumni become reengaged in SCAA. Hopefully, the healthcare event planned for the fall of 2013 will prompt reengagement.

The collaborative nature of the AR process resulted in learning opportunities pertaining to AR and power relations. Power relations are present in the AR process and may reinforce or create new power relations. The analysis of this aspect revealed how objectives in addition to the research agenda play out. The implication for AR regarding power relations is an acknowledgement that power relations are present and impact actions.

Implications for Adult Learning

The types of learning that emerged from analysis in this case were experiential, formal training, past experience, and social learning. Formal training and past experience have an influence on learning although it is less notable. Particularly interesting in this study was the social and experiential aspect of learning. The outcome corresponds with CoP framework, with its focus on situated learning. This outcome further demonstrates the wide range of factors that influence learning. This is not to say episodes of learning fit into one category, rather multiple factors impact learning. Although some factors such as the role of emotions, spirituality, and the body were minimally mentioned in the interviews, they may have had a role in the alumni's

learning. Noticeably absent were references to the role of reflection and learning, which may be explained by lack of probing into this area during interviews and the difficulty detecting reflection.

This AR case may prompt the question of, to what end? Regarding adult learning, Mackeracher (2004) offered the six questions of “Who is learning what? From whom? By what approaches? For what purpose? Under what circumstances? With what consequences?” (p. 17). Adult education, in its various forms, has the potential to assist community groups with making community change. Community groups can be seen as learning sites as well as sources of social change. English and Mayo (2012) reported, “change and reform of the political and social order have often been key priorities for a number of adult educators” (p. 109). With a newly established vision and mission statement and the medium and long term interventions, the alumni are positioned to continue their impact in their community. The community is a source of learning, most often in informal settings. This case demonstrated that adults that are actively working towards solving community problems are learning in a variety of ways, and learning a range of topics.

Implications for CoPs

CoPs are one of many frameworks of adult learning in organizational settings. For members of a community practice, meaning is constructed socially, experiences are shared, and repertoires of practice are communally developed. Organizations are continually changing at various degrees, through membership turnover, evolving relationships with outside organizations, and a multitude of external factors. Regularly assessing the wellbeing of a CoP can reveal appropriate interventions that take into account the constant impact of change. In this case, we analyzed the community, domain, and practice aspects of the CoP. By providing

community organizations a means of assessing their wellbeing as a CoP, the prospects for learning can concurrently be evaluated.

Future Research

This AR case raised a number of issues for future study. These four areas are understanding the rhizomatic networks of adult learning, community groups as a CoP, social policy and grassroots community leadership, and power relations in AR. The following section details future research suggestions.

Understanding the Rhizomatic Networks of Adult Learning

Networks of adult learning references the various modes of learning such as experiential, formal training, past experience, or social learning. Networks represent the connections of the many types of learning and episodes of learning that take place. Individuals and groups learn in a variety ways, and the learning that takes place may make connections across individuals, contexts, and organizations.

Adult learning has been studied from a wide range of perspectives and theories. The literature review section included andragogy, self-directed learning, Kolb's and Taylor's cycles, Illeris's three dimensions of learning, transformative learning, the role of emotions, body, and spirit, informal incidental learning, experiential learning, and the social and situated perspective. Kang (2007) drew attention to the limitation of categorizing learning into "adjective-plus-learning-theory" (p. 206). He proposes incorporating a rhizoactivity perspective in adult learning. A rhizome sprouts or pops up and makes connections with whatever is available. Further research is needed to help us understand what a learning episode latches on to. For example, if learning takes place in a social setting, which individuals and social interactions does the learner associate with that learning moment? Which individuals and social interactions are

excluded? Further, a learning episode may take root across multiple domains, such as the social or experiential.

Incorporating a rhizomatic perspective can enrich our understanding of the network of adult learning. This does not disregard previous methods of researching learning, rather broadens the perspective. By viewing learning as a rhizome that connects to whatever is available, such as social relations, past experiences, or the context in which it takes place, we have a broadened perspective to analyze adult learning.

Community Groups as a CoP

Research regarding organizational learning often focuses on business and educational settings. Additional research regarding learning within grassroots community groups is needed. Each community group has different goals, functions, and membership guidelines. Applying an organizational learning model to community groups may help such groups utilize their learning more effectively. Grassroots community groups have potential to function as a CoP, however they have unique challenges. Many do not have the funding and infrastructure of their business or educational counterparts. How can grassroots community groups effectively function as a CoP?

Additional research is needed to understand how community groups can endure change and remain a learning organization. It would benefit community groups to better understand how external and internal changes impact learning. With a better understanding of this impact, such groups can be more equipped to solve community problems.

Social Policy and Grassroots Community Leadership

Further analysis of community leadership through a social policy lens could reveal the connection between policy and the role of grassroots community leadership. As Guzman, Pirog, and Seefeldt (2013) explained:

Social policy is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of policy interests including means-tested and social insurance programs that offer cash and/or in-kind assistance to individuals and families for the purposes of providing a basic income; maintaining and improving physical and mental health; providing food and housing security; and mitigating the adverse consequences of domestic violence, other crimes, or disasters. (p. S53)

Grassroots community leaders often have concerns that are congruent with social policy agenda. Influencing policymakers and other public leaders and entities to improve the conditions of community members is frequently of interest for community leaders. Economic growth, wellbeing, and happiness in the community are often analyzed in order to measure the impact of policy (Ahn, Choi, & Kim, 2012). Grassroots community leaders can partner with public and private entities to share resources and exchange ideas. Future research into these partnerships, and subsequent outcomes, can help us to better understand the role of social policy in grassroots community leadership.

Participation, Collaboration and Power Relations in AR

Reason and Bradbury (2008) defined AR as a “participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview” (p. 1). Action research places significance on participation and collaboration. However, focusing attention on the results of AR without

critiquing the interactions that took place between researchers, stakeholders, and other parties is to neglect an important “worthwhile human purpose” (p. 1). In addition to research outcomes, we need to consider the social outcomes of an AR case. For example, what was the nature of the participation and collaboration? How was collaboration defined, and what expectations were discussed? Research is needed regarding the human interactions that take place in AR. Such research would help unravel the complex web of human interactions in AR, and bring clarity to participation, collaboration, and power relations within AR.

Final Reflections

This case entailed employing AR methodology to assist a neighborhood leadership association to better utilize the learning that is taking place so as to become a problem solving group. Because of the unexpected dissolved relationship with SCNLI, the AR project incorporated interventions that took into account the impact of this disruptive change. The outcome of this AR case is an alumni association that is positioned to move forward from this change as a stronger CoP. However, the future of SCAA is uncertain, as they continue to struggle to regroup as a cohesive team.

Applying CoP framework and adult learning theory to the case provided a unique opportunity to analyze how a grassroots community group endures a disruptive change. Organizations are continually faced with change on various levels. Disruptive change is sudden and alters the organization at the core. Burke (2008) called such change revolutionary and said it requires “a dramatic modification of mission and strategy” (p. 21).

Most of the short term interventions have been implemented, which are designed to set a foundation to guide future organizational actions. The medium and long term interventions will build from this foundation, and the last intervention of a regular organizational assessment

allows for continued improvement. The stakeholders are poised to continue organizational change initiatives using the AR model they've participated in. Although I hoped for greater progress during the twenty-eight month time frame, I will work with SCAA in future collaboration. This continued collaboration will be important since there is still much work to be accomplished.

In addition to learning the practice of AR, this case prompted me to reflect upon the racial make-up of the research. Since I am Caucasian and the stakeholders are mostly African American, this consideration cannot be avoided. It is hard to know how the racial make-up of the AR team impacted research. However, not reflecting upon the situation would mean avoiding a significant aspect of the research.

By considering the case with respect to Foucauldian power relations, I was able to better understand how power is intertwined in the AR process. This power analysis can be a useful tool for researchers and stakeholders to contemplate. Careful consideration of the system of differentiations, types of objectives, instrumental modes, forms of institutionalization, and degrees of rationalization can inform the researcher and stakeholders with a better understanding of the role of power relations in AR.

Action research is a viable means for people to collaboratively solve a variety of problems. The issues of our day demand an informed participatory approach to defining, analyzing, and solving problems. Grassroots community leaders can solve an array of problems when all stakeholders are included and have input. Working in partnership with skilled action researchers may give grassroots community leaders the framework to be more successful at community change.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval



Human Subjects Office (HSO)
612 Boyd GSRC - Athens, GA 30602-7411
Phone: 706-542-3199 - Fax: 706-542-3360 - irb@uga.edu
DHHS Assurance No.: FWA00003901

**Institutional Review Board (IRB)
HUMAN RESEARCH APPLICATION**

To submit: <http://www.ovpr.uga.edu/hso/how/application>

<p><i>IMPORTANT: Please respond to all the questions. Do not leave items blank; if not applicable, mark N/A. Please note that incomplete applications may result in delayed review. Click on the hyperlinks (text underlined in blue) to obtain additional information.</i></p>	<p><i>For Human Subjects Office Use Only</i></p> <p>Project #: _____ Date Received: _____</p> <p>Type of Review: <input type="checkbox"/> Exempt <input type="checkbox"/> Expedited <input type="checkbox"/> Full Board</p>
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Section A: PROJECT INFORMATION

1. **Study Title:** Community Leadership Networking
2. **Application Type:** New Project Response to Initial Review *(All revisions must be in italics or different font color.)*
 5-Year Renewal; Previous IRB number: _____
3. **Principal Investigator:** *(Must be UGA faculty or senior staff. See [Eligibility to Serve as PI](#).)*
Name: Robert J. Hill **Title:** Dr.
Department Name: College Of Education Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
Mailing Address: 416 River's Crossing Athens, GA 30602
Phone: 7065424016 **UGA E-mail (Required):** bobhill@uga.edu
4. **Co-Principal Investigator:** *(Required only if for thesis/dissertation or other student project.)*
Name: Michael Dillon **Title:** Mr.
Department: College Of Education Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
Mailing address: 416 River's Crossing Athens, GA 30602
Phone: 7708831227 **UGA E-mail (Required):** dillonm@uga.edu
5. **Anticipated Start Date:** *(Must be at least 4 weeks after application is received.)* May 9, 2011

Section B: PROJECT FUNDING

1. **Funding Status:** Funded Pending No Funding
2. **Funding Source:** Internal Account #: _____
 External Funding Source: _____ OSP Proposal or Award #: _____
3. **Name of Proposal or Award PI** (if different from PI of IRB protocol): _____
4. **Proposal or Award Title** (if different from title of IRB protocol): _____

Section C: STUDY PERSONNEL / RESEARCH TEAM

Including the PI, identify all personnel who will be engaged in the conduct of human research. *Important Note: All researchers listed below are required to complete the [CITI IRB Training](#) prior to submission of this application. This application will be returned to PI for resubmission if training requirement has not been satisfied. To add more names, bring cursor to outside of last row, and press "enter" key.*

Name	E-mail	*Institution
Michael Dillon	dillonm@uga.edu	The University of Georgia
Robert J Hill	bobhill@uga.edu	The University of Georgia

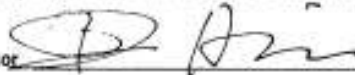
**Submit an [Individual Investigator Agreement](#) for all study personnel affiliated with an institution that does not have an assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections or DHRP (typically, local schools, private doctors' clinics).*

Section D: PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR'S ASSURANCE

As the Principal Investigator, I have the ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the study and the protection of the rights and welfare of human participants. *By affixing my signature below,*

- I assure that all the information contained in this Human Research Application is true and all the activities described for this study accurately summarize the nature and extent of the proposed participation of human participants.
- If funded, I assure that this proposal accurately reflects all procedures involving human participants described in the grant application to the funding agency.
- I agree to comply with all UGA policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable federal, state, and local laws on the protection of human participants in research.
- I assure that all personnel listed on this project are qualified, appropriately trained, and will adhere to the provisions of the approved protocol.
- I will notify the IRB regarding any adverse events, unexpected problems or incidents that involve risks to participants or others, and any complaints.
- I am aware that no change(s) to the final approved protocol will be initiated without prior review and written approval from the IRB (except in an emergency, if necessary to safeguard the well-being of human participants and then notify the IRB as soon as possible afterwards).
- I understand that I am responsible for monitoring the expiration of this study, and complying with the requirements for an annual continuing review for expedited and full board studies.
- If human research activities will continue five years after the original IRB approval, I will submit a new IRB Application Form. (Exceptions: If the research is permanently closed to the enrollment of new participants, all participants have completed all research-related interventions, and the research will remain active only for long-term follow-up of participants; or if the remaining research activities are limited to analysis of individually-identifiable private information.)
- I understand that the IRB reserves the right to audit an ongoing study at any time.
- I understand that I am responsible for maintaining copies of all records related to this study in accordance with the IRB and sponsor guidelines.
- I assure that research will only begin after I have received notification of final IRB approval.

Signature of Principal Investigator



Date (mm/dd/yyyy):

05/20/2011

Section E: CONFLICT OF INTEREST (COI)

1. Is there any real, potential, or perceived conflict of interest on the part of any study personnel (e.g., financial or business interest, stock or stock options, proprietary interest, inventorship, consultant to sponsor)? Yes No
2. If yes, please identify personnel and explain. *Important Note: Please review the [UGA Conflict of Interest Policy](#). Final IRB approval cannot be granted until all potential conflict matters are addressed.*

Section F: LAY PROJECT SUMMARY

Briefly describe in simple, non-technical language a summary of the study, its specific aim(s)/objective(s), and its significance or importance. This will be an Action Research study at the DeKalb Neighborhood Leadership Institute. The goal is to determine the ways in which the Alumni of the program are networking in the community to solve problems. The aim is to recommend and implement changes that promote greater success for the program, based on the data from this research. A more successful program would be one in which the Alumni are showing leadership and networking ability by taking demonstrable actions to improve the community. The attached instrument may be tested in a pilot study. This study is important because it could assist not only The DeKalb Neighborhood Leadership Institute, but

similar community leadership programs, in becoming more effective and empowering people in the community to navigate political, economic, and educational systems.

Section G: HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

1. Provide a general description of the targeted participants (e.g., healthy adults from the general population, children enrolled in an after-school program, adolescent females with scoliosis), and indicate the estimated total number, targeted gender, and age. To add a row, bring cursor to outside of last row, and press "enter" key.

Targeted Population	Total Number	Targeted Gender	Specify age or age range
Employees, Students and Alumni of ██████████ ██████████	100	Male and Female	18 and up

2. Identify the inclusion and exclusion criteria. If two or more targeted populations, identify criteria for each.
- a. List inclusion criteria. n/a
 - b. List exclusion criteria. n/a
3. If the research will exclude a particular gender or minority group, please provide justification. n/a
4. Will participants receive any incentives for their participation (e.g., payments, gifts, compensation, reimbursement, services without charge, extra class credit)? Yes No
- a. If yes, please describe. For multiple sessions, include scheme to pro-rate incentives. There is a possibility of a small gift card for participation in an interview, focus group, or survey, not to exceed a value of \$25.00.
 - b. If offering extra class credit, describe a comparable non-research alternative for receiving incentive. n/a

Section H: RECRUITMENT AND ELIGIBILITY OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Describe how potential participants will be initially identified (e.g., public records, private records, etc.). Records from the DeKalb Neighborhood Leadership Institute.
2. Describe when, where, and how participants will be initially contacted. Once IRB approval is obtained participants will receive an email, letter or phone call asking if they would like to participate.
3. Advertisements, flyers, and any other materials that will be used to recruit participants must be reviewed and approved before their use. Check all that apply below and submit the applicable recruitment material/s.
 - No Advertising Bulletin boards Electronic media (e.g., listserv, emails) Letters
 - Print ads/flyers (e.g., newspaper) Radio/TV Phone call Other (please describe)
4. Describe any follow-up recruitment procedures. Participants may recommend additional potential participants.
5. Describe how eligibility based on the above inclusion/exclusion criteria will be determined (e.g., self-report via a screening questionnaire, hospital records, school records, additional tests/exams, etc.). n/a

Section I: RESEARCH, DESIGN, METHODS AND PROCEDURES

1. Describe the research design and methods of data collection. Qualitative research design will be employed for this Action Research project, especially focusing on interviews. Additionally, organizational documentation will be reviewed.
2. If applicable, identify specific factors or variables and treatment conditions or groups (include control groups). n/a
3. Indicate the number of research participants that will be assigned to each condition or group, if applicable. n/a
4. Describe in detail, and in sequence, all study procedures, tests, and any treatments/research interventions. Include any follow-up(s). *Important Note: If procedures are long and complicated, use a table, flowchart or diagram to outline the study procedures from beginning to end.* n/a
5. Describe the proposed data analysis plan and, if applicable, any statistical methods for the study. n/a
6. Anticipated duration of participation.
 - a. Number of visits or contacts: up to 150
 - b. Length of each visit: up to 8 hours
 - c. Total duration of participation: up to 18 months

Section J: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

List and describe all the instruments (interview guides, questionnaires, surveys, etc.) to be used for this study. **Attach a copy of all instruments that are properly identified and with corresponding numbers written on them.** To add a row, bring cursor to outside of last row, and press "enter" key.

	Instrument	Brief Description	Identify group(s) that will complete
N/A	Document Review	Review of existing organizational documentation	Michael Dillon
1.	Interview	Interviews with Employees, Students and Alumni of ██████████	Employees, Students and Alumni of ██████████

Section K: RISKS AND BENEFITS

1. Risks and/or discomforts

Describe any reasonably foreseeable psychological, social, legal, economic or physical risks and/or discomforts from all research procedures, and the corresponding measures to minimize these. *Important Note: if there is more than one study procedure, please identify the procedure followed by the responses for both (a) and (b).*

 - a. Risks and/or discomforts. It is very unlikely that any psychological, social, legal, economic or physical risks or discomforts will occur. There is a very small risk that participants will discuss uncomfortable work / program experiences, but this is minimal.
 - b. Measures to minimize the risks and discomforts to participants. n/a
2. Benefits
 - a. Describe any potential direct benefits to study participants. If none, indicate so. *Important Note: Please do not include compensation/payment/extra credit in this section, as these are "incentives" and not "benefits" of participation in research; any incentives must be described in Section G.4.* Participants will have the potential to better understand their performance / role at the DeKalb Neighborhood Leadership Institute.
 - b. Describe the potential benefits to society or humankind. The benefits include a potentially improved community program, and participants having a better understanding of effective leadership and networking skills. This can result in a more effective network of DeKalb Neighborhood Leadership Alumni for the betterment of the DeKalb County, GA community. Throughout the Action Research process there will be multiple learning opportunities for participants which will allow them to improve their practice.
3. Risk/Benefit Analysis
 - a. Indicate how the risks to the participants are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits, if any, to participants and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result from the study (i.e., How do the benefits of the study outweigh the risks, if not directly to the participants then to society or humankind?). The only risk, which is minimal, is the potential that participants will discuss uncomfortable work / program experiences. For example, situations in the program when

things did not go as planned, or relationships with peers were not ideal. The benefits in section 2.b. far surpass the potential risks mentioned.

4. Sensitive or Illegal Activities

a. Will study collect any information that if disclosed could potentially have adverse consequences for participants or damage their financial standing, employability, insurability, or reputation (includes but not limited to sexual attitudes, preferences, or practices; HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases; use of alcohol, drugs, or other addictive products; illegal conduct; an individual's psychological well-being or mental health; and genetic information)?

No

b. If yes, explain how the researchers will protect this information from any inadvertent disclosure. n/a

5. Reportable Information

a. Is it reasonably foreseeable that the study will collect or be privy to information that State or Federal law requires to be reported to other officials (e.g., child or elder abuse) or ethically might require action (e.g., suicidal ideation, intent to hurt self or others)? No

b. If yes, please explain and include a discussion of the reporting requirements in the consent document(s). n/a

Section I: DATA SECURITY AND FUTURE USE OF INFORMATION

1. Data Security

Check the box that applies.

Anonymous – The data and/or specimens will not be labeled with any individually-identifiable information (e.g., name, SSN, medical record number, home address, telephone number, email address, etc.), or labeled with a code that the research team can link to individually-identifiable information.

Confidential – The responses/information may potentially be linked/traced back to an individual participant, for example, by the researcher/s (like in face-to-face interviews, focus groups). **If necessary, provide additional pertinent information.**

Confidential – Indirect identifiers. The data and/or specimens will be labeled with a code that the research team can link to individually-identifiable information. If the data and/or specimens will be coded, describe below how the key to the code will be securely maintained.

Paper records will be used. The key to the code will be secured in a locked container (such as a file cabinet or drawer) in a locked room. The coded data and/or specimens will be maintained in a different location.

Computer/electronic files will be used. The key to the code will be in an encrypted and/or password protected file. The coded data file will be maintained on a separate computer/server.

Other (please specify), or provide additional pertinent information.

Confidential – Direct identifiers. The data and/or specimens will be directly labeled with the individually-identifiable information.

Paper records will be used. The information will be secured in a locked container (such as a file cabinet or drawer) in a locked room.

Computer/electronic files will be used. The information will be stored in an encrypted and/or password protected file.

Other (please specify), or provide additional pertinent information.

If "Confidential" is marked, please answer all the following:

Explain why it is necessary to keep direct or indirect identifiers. For the purposes of obtaining follow-up information during the study.

Identify who will have access to the individually-identifiable information and/or the key to the code. Robert J. Hill and Michael Dillon

Public. Information will be individually-identifiable when published, presented, or made available to the public.

2. Future Use of Information

If individually-identifiable information and/or codes will be retained after completion of data collection, describe how the information will be handled and stored to ensure confidentiality. Check all that apply.

All data files will be stripped of individually-identifiable information and/or the key to the code destroyed.

All specimens will be stripped of individually-identifiable information and/or the key to the code destroyed.

- Individually-identifiable information and/or codes linking the data or specimens to individual identifiers will be retained. *If this box is checked, describe:*
 - a. Retention period. 5 years
 - b. Justification for retention. Follow-up research papers
 - c. Procedure for removing or destroying the direct/indirect identifiers, if applicable. This data will be deleted from the computer
- Audio and/or video recordings (if applicable) will be transcribed/analyzed and then destroyed or modified to eliminate the possibility that study participants could be identified.
- Audio and/or video recordings (if applicable) will be retained. *If this box is checked, describe:*
 - a. Retention period. 5 years
 - b. Justification for retention. Follow-up research papers
- Other (please specify), or provide additional pertinent information.

Section M: CONSENT PROCESS

Important Note: The IRB strongly recommends the use of consent templates that are available on the IRB website to ensure that all the elements of informed consent are included (per 45 CFR 116). If more than one consent document will be used, please name each accordingly.

- The PI is attaching a copy of all consent documents that participants will sign.
- The PI is requesting that the IRB waive requirement to document informed consent. A signed consent form may be waived if one of the following criteria is met, *check the box that applies.*
 - 1. The only record linking the participant and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each participant will be asked whether the participant wants documentation linking the participant with the research, and the participant's wishes will govern; or
 - 2. The research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to participants and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

The consent script or cover letter that will be used in lieu of a consent form is attached. No

- The PI is requesting that the IRB approve a consent procedure which does not include, or which alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent set forth in 45 CFR 116, or waive the requirement to obtain informed consent. An informed consent may be waived if the IRB finds that all of the following have been met:
 1. The research involves no more than minimal risk to the participants;
 2. The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the participants;
 3. The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration; and,
 4. Whenever appropriate, the participants will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

Provide justification for requesting a waiver.

Describe how, where, and when informed consent will be obtained from research participants (or permission from parent/s or guardian/s and assent from minor participants), if applicable. Consent will be obtained from participants before participation.

Section N: VULNERABLE AND/OR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

1. Check if some or all of the targeted participants fall into the following groups. *Important Note: Some targeted populations require compliance with additional Subparts and the completion of an Appendix or of specific section (see last column).*

Population Type	Required to Complete
<input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant women, neonates, or fetuses.....	Appendix for Subpart B
<input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners.....	Appendix for Subpart C
<input type="checkbox"/> Minors	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mentally-disabled/cognitively-impaired/severe psychological disorders	
<input type="checkbox"/> Physically-disabled	
<input type="checkbox"/> Terminally ill	
<input type="checkbox"/> Economically/educationally-disadvantaged	

- A specific group based on religion, race, ethnicity, immigration status, language, or sexual orientation
 - UGA Psychology Research Pool/Other UGA students/employees
 - Other (please describe)
2. Explain justification for including the group(s) checked above in this particular study. N/a
3. Is there a working relationship between any researchers and the participants (e.g., PI's own students or employees)?
No
a. If yes, please describe.
4. Describe any additional safeguards to protect the rights and welfare of these participants and to minimize any possible coercion or undue influence. For example, amount of payment will be non-coercive for the financially disadvantaged, extra-careful evaluations of participants' understanding of the study, advocates to be involved in the consent process, or use flyers to recruit participants instead of directly approaching own staff or students. N/a

Section O: COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OR OUTSIDE PERFORMANCE SITE

Check one of the two boxes below:

- This project does not involve any collaboration with non-UGA researchers or performance in non-UGA facilities.
- This project involves collaboration with non-UGA researchers or performance in non-UGA facilities (e.g., local public school, participants' workplace, hospital). ***If this box is checked, list all sites at which you will conduct this research. Attach authorization/permission and/or current IRB approval. Checkboxes below are not clickable so place "X" before or over the box. To add a row, bring cursor to outside of last row, press "enter" key, and copy/paste the previous cells.***

Name of Institution	Location (County/State/Country)	Authorization/permission letter and/or current IRB approval.	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Attached	<input type="checkbox"/> Pending
		<input type="checkbox"/> Attached	<input type="checkbox"/> Pending

IMPORTANT NOTE: If none of the following applies to your research, this is the END of the application form.

Section P: METHODS AND PROCEDURES THAT REQUIRE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Check all that apply. **Important Note:** The items listed below are **NOT** an inclusive list of methods and procedures that may be used in research studies. Some procedures require the completion of an Appendix or of specific sections (see last column).

- | Method/Procedure | Required to Complete |
|---|----------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student research (For student's thesis/dissertation/others) | Section Q (below) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deception, concealment, or incomplete disclosure | Section R (below) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Internet research | Section S (below) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blood sampling/collection | Section T (below) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clinical trial (Drugs, biologics, or devices) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Genetic analyses | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Data/Tissue repository | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HIPAA (Protected health information) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> DXA/X-RAY | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MRI/EEG/ECG/NIRS/Ultrasound | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe) | |

Section Q: STUDENT RESEARCH

Important Note: The IRB recommends submission for IRB review only after the appropriate committee has conducted the necessary scientific review and approved the research proposal.

1. This application is being submitted for: Undergraduate Honors Thesis Doctoral Dissertation Research

- Masters Thesis Research Other (please describe)
2. Has the student's thesis/dissertation committee approved this research? Yes No

Section R: DECEPTION, CONCEALMENT, OR INCOMPLETE DISCLOSURE

1. Describe the deception, concealment, or incomplete disclosure; **explain** why it is necessary, and how you will debrief the participants. **Important Note:** *The consent form should include the following statement: "In order to make this study a valid one, some information about (my participation or the study) will be withheld until completion of the study."*
2. Debriefing Form is attached. Yes No; if no, please explain.

Section S: INTERNET RESEARCH

- If data will be collected, transmitted, and/or stored via the internet, the level of security should be appropriate to the level of risk. Indicate the measures that will be taken to ensure security of data transmitted over the internet. *Check all that apply.*
- A mechanism will be used to strip off the IP addresses for data submitted via e-mail.
 - The data will be transmitted in encrypted format.
 - Firewall technology will be used to protect the research computer from unauthorized access.
 - Hardware storing the data will be accessible only to authorized users with log-in privileges.
 - Other (please describe), or provide additional pertinent information.

Section T: BLOOD SAMPLING / COLLECTION

- If blood will be collected for the purpose of this research, please respond to all the following:
1. Route/method of collection (e.g., by finger stick, heel stick, venipuncture):
 2. Frequency of collection (e.g., 2 times per week, for 3 weeks):
 3. Volume of blood for each collection (in milliliters):
 4. Total volume to be collected (in milliliters):
 5. Are participants healthy, non-pregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds? (Choose YES or NO)
 - a. If no, indicate if amount collected will exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8-week period and if collection will occur more frequently than 2 times per week.
 6. Will participants fast prior to blood collection(s)? (Choose YES or NO)
 - a. If yes, describe how informed consent will be obtained prior to fasting.

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in an Action Research study titled "COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP NETWORKING" conducted by Michael Dillon doctoral student from the College of Education, Department of Lifelong Education Administration and Policy, at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Robert Hill, College of Education, Department of Lifelong Education Administration and Policy, at the University of Georgia. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

Purpose of the Study. I understand the purpose for this study is to determine the results / outcomes of the DeKalb Neighborhood Leadership Institute in the context of how the Alumni of the program are networking in the community to solve problems. The aim is to implement changes to the DeKalb Neighborhood Leadership Institute's program based on the data in order to promote a more successful program. This study is important because it could assist not only this program, but similar community leadership programs, in becoming more effective and empowering more people in the community to navigate political, economic, and educational systems.

Procedures. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Participate in interviews
- 2) Participate in focus groups
- 3) Complete surveys
- 4) Someone from the study may call me to clarify my information

Discomfort/Stresses. I understand I may experience some discomfort or stress when answering questions about the program. This discomfort will be minimized by a guarantee of confidentiality and a safe research environment.

Risks. No risks are expected.

Benefits to me and the larger community. The benefits for me are a better understanding of what I and others have experienced in the program. By providing information that may be used to improve the DeKalb Neighborhood Leadership Institute, there is a potential benefit to the DeKalb community as well.

Confidentiality. No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Michael Dillon
(Researcher)
Telephone: 770-883-1227
Email: Dillonm@uga.edu

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Share a story in which community problem solving was successful for you.

What made it successful?

What did you learn?

Whom did you learn from?

Share a story in which you have struggled with community problem solving.

How have you dealt with that?

What did you learn?

Whom did you learn from?

What is your greatest barrier to solving problems in the community?

How have you dealt with that?

In what ways can the alumni association assist you with community activities?

With learning?

What would you teach aspiring community leaders?

What has been your most important lesson?

How do you define your role as a community leader?

How has this evolved over time?

Who impacts your learning?

What is relationship with other alumni like?

How many do you typically see and how often?

Can you tell story?

How many other alumni do you collaborate with regularly?

Can you tell story?

What common ways do the alumni do things together, such as projects?

How does information flow with the alumni?

Can you tell a story of innovation with the alumni?

What is it like to engage in conversation with other alumni, are there introductory preambles, or ways of greeting one another?

Can you tell a story of the alumni solving a problem as a team?

Is there a quick set up of the problem?

How many alumni do you know?

Do you know what they do and contribute to the group?

How would you define a member of the alumni association?

Is there a code of appropriate actions?

Can you tell a story?

Do alumni have specific tools and artifacts?

What shared stories are there?

What common jargon do alumni have?

(Subsequent probes may follow)

Appendix C: Sample Coding

Past experience	Community activities	Alicia	Well, I've learned over the years to not judge people. Be nonjudgmental; once you meet someone, just get to know them for who they are and not go on your own assumptions.
Past experience	Community activities	Alicia	Just ... without the relationship, if I just sat in the background and not talk to people or do anything I would never progress or get anywhere. Just over the years, I just learned that I guess. Here, I just ... in California, some things ... honestly, I felt it was more merit based there, where here it's more relationship-based.
Past experience	Community activities	Beatrice	How to interact with them, sometimes they come in with problems and you don't meet fire with fire, and stuff like that because you don't know what kind of problems they are having in their day to day life so you learn how to be professional about that.
Past experience	Community activities	Lisa	over the years and the different places where I lived I have seen for myself that the African American community as a whole has the poorest health

Past experience	Community activities	Lisa	What it taught me was I shouldn't be focused on what a person has as far as a piece of paper. That doesn't ... it means that person is qualified in that subject, because it means that person took the time to study that, but it doesn't mean that just because that person has that, that person has this global background of so many different subjects
Past experience	Leading in community	Carmella	Unfortunately, what I have found is when things get really, really bad it's when people start saying, "OK, we might need to do something." We could have avoided all the bad stuff had we just maintained or exceeded before all the bad stuff happened
Past experience	Personal Struggles	Ronald	I'm 61 and a half years old and you could never ever have told me that I've gone through what I've got through and tried to get a job ... never in a thousand years. My eyes have ... I've seen a lot. I've learned a lot about myself, my family, my community, and my friends. I now have a question mark about every one of those things I just said because all of that changes when you start seeing things through difficulties.

Appendix D: Intervention Report to SCAA

GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY LEADERS AS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: UTILIZING LEARNING AND ENDURING DISRUPTIVE CHANGE

Research Report and Recommendations

Beginning in 2011, an action research study began with [SCAA]. Twelve alumni interviews took place in which the questions of (a) how the alumni operate as a community of practice, (b) what type of learning takes place in the group, and (c) what is being learned were explored. Please see appendix A for interview guide. The interviewed revealed that alumni are accomplishing many impressive grassroots activities in their communities. The recommendations in this report are meant as a guide to assist the association with moving forward with increased effectiveness as a learning organization. Recommendations are designed to be a source of continual dialogue and organizational improvement. Research findings will be published at the University of Georgia's College of Education in late 2013. The organization and all participants will remain anonymous.

Adult learning is a broad field often criticized for lacking a unified theory. Adult learning can take place in a variety of settings, and encompass a diverse set of beliefs and values. Many adult learning theories include a cycle in which adults have experiences, reflect upon those experiences, and take new actions (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 2001; Taylor, 1987). Learning is a complex phenomenon involving our brain, emotions, body, spirit (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007), taking place in formal and informal settings. The following recommendations are based upon one type of learning organization literature: Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al, 2002). A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people with a common goal and practice, in which learning is fostered and shared.

A. Three Research Questions:

1. *Research question one: To what extent are the alumni operating as a community of practice?*

Community aspect of CoP. Referring to the community aspect of a CoP, Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002) report that a CoP “is a group of people who interact, learn together, build relationships, and in the process develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment” (p. 34). They go on to indicate that such a community that shares the views of the domain, yet brings individual perspectives, can create a powerful social learning system. In such a community, knowing one another makes asking for help and information easier. Regular interaction is essential to a shared understanding of the domain and the approach to practice.

From the perspective of the community aspect of the alumni association as a CoP, the interview analysis reveals some indications of a strong community, with some areas of improvement needed. There are instances of the alumni connecting with one another to check in, obtain updates, or solicit help. However, the utilization of a systematic communication structure is lacking. Some alumni referred to the website as a communication tool; however this proposal would be only one of many aspects of communication to be probed for intervention plans.

Similarly, the group interaction theme reveals both positive aspects and areas of improvement. The participants often reported the same events as being instrumental in the formation of relationships and shared memories. These events include the planning and facilitating of the institute training sessions, the annual picnic with the new class, and the retreat week at the institute. However, the break-off from the institute will mean new plans for regular events will need to be scheduled. In summary, with some systems put in place, the community appears to have an adequate foundation to work with regarding the community aspect of a CoP.

Domain aspect of CoP. Based on their experience and research regarding communities of practice and learning communities, Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002) assert, “the members’ shared understanding of their domain – its purpose, its resolved issues, its open questions – allows them to decide what matters. The domain guides the questions they ask and the way they organize their knowledge” (p. 30). They go on to say the domain entails complex and long-lasting issues, rather than short term decisions, and that the insider’s view of the domain will guide the learning of the community.

From the perspective of the domain aspect of the alumni association as a CoP, the interview analysis reveals a broad set of interests in the community. Although the alumni are involved in a variety of causes, the themes represent a number of commonalities within the domain. The most common themes are: (a) diversity in the community, (b) economic issues, (c) financing of initiatives, (d) organizing and facilitating events, and (e) politics. In conclusion, although the alumni are involved in a variety of causes, their domain is common in the aforementioned ways.

Practice aspect of CoP. Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002) state that practice “denotes a set of socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain: a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a bases for action, communication, problem solving, performance, and accountability” (p. 38). This may include reference materials such as books or web sites, and ways of behaving, thinking styles, or ethical positions.

This aspect of the CoP framework has some opportunities for improvement. There are common themes that came forth, however there is little in the way connecting the various themes as a means of practice. The predominant themes revealed include approach preference, collaboration, fundraising, networking and relationship skills, and resource awareness. When asked, the alumni struggled to express the common ways in which things are done. For example, although networking and relationship skills were revealed frequently, a specific and common approach to networking was not revealed. Likewise, a common system of fundraising or collaborating was not expressed. There are common tools the alumni utilize, but not a mutual usage of the tools.

2. Research question two: *What types of learning are taking place with the alumni as they make efforts to solve problems in the community?*

- a. Experiential Learning:
 - Activities with alumni
 - Activities outside of alumni
- b. Formal Training:

- Institute training
 - Alumni advanced training events
 - Being mentored
 - c. Past Experience
 - d. Social Learning:
 - Alumni interaction
 - Example of others
 - Dialogue
3. **Research question three: *What are the alumni learning through their leadership efforts in the community?***
- a. Improvements to the association
 - b. Instrumental skills learned in the community
 - c. Relationship skills
 - d. Role in the community
 - e. Self

B. Recommendations:

The recommendations are intended to enhance the alumni's practice as they transition. These recommendations will allow the alumni to become a stronger community of practice. The long term goal is an organization in which learning is optimized in order to benefit as many members as possible. In turn this will result in membership that is even more equipped for community change initiatives individually and as a team.

1. **Create / revise Vision Statement:** A short statement of what the ideal situation would be. Short and to the point. Examples: *Wal-Mart*: "Worldwide leaders in retail".
Microsoft: "A personal computer in every home running Microsoft software". The vision helps connect the organization with the passions of the people who are members or would like to be a member.
2. **Create / revise Mission Statement:** The reason the organization exists. The goals and philosophies. How you will bring the vision into existence. This can be a little more specific, but flexible to allow for change. Example: *Initiative Foundation*, "The Initiative Foundation's mission is to unlock the potential of the people of central Minnesota to build and sustain healthy communities."
3. **Define future membership guidelines:** Alumni only, others? What will bring in new members?

4. **Enhance communication:**
 - a) Discuss possibility of social media: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Website.
 - b) Systematic phone, email, and mail communication plans.
 - c) Consider a means of managing incoming information from members.

5. **Create a system for integrating newcomers:**
 - a) mentoring
 - b) training programs

6. **Plan regular social events.** This creates new common experiences and fosters continual learning, identity, and community interaction.

7. **Regular advanced training events.** This can help distribute knowledge to current members and encourage new membership. Document training materials, which can turn into a manual in time.

8. **Create opportunities to have group dialogue** after community activities. This allows for learning to be shared through reflection and dialogue, and best practices to emerge.

9. **Assign locality liaisons and/or subject matter experts** for various issues.
 - Localities around the [county] and surrounding area
 - Subject matter experts
 - Teams for various community concerns
 - Diversity issues liaison etc.

10. **Begin to organize and document systems of practice.**
 - Regular advanced training sessions
 - Newsletters – best practices

11. **Plan a regular organizational assessment.** Based on the ideas that come forth from these recommendations, determine what is working and where the areas of improvement are.