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Building a Community of Practice**

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Constructing a Non-Formal Learning Environment in an Applied Graduate Training Program: Building a Community of Practice

James L. Galipeau

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to enhance student learning outside of the classroom through the creation and facilitation of a community of practice. Using the social constructionist and communities of practice frameworks and employing a modified collaborative inquiry methodology, the objective was to provide a non-formal learning environment (i.e., regular meetings) where students could openly and candidly engage in group discussions with their colleagues on topics related to their learning and education.

The results - based on interviews with students and professors, meeting recordings, meeting notes, and personal reflections of the researcher - report on a variety of different aspects of the research. First, the progression of the participant group in becoming a community of practice is described and evaluated. This is followed by an examination of students' perceptions of the utility of the non-formal learning environment as a forum for collaborative meaning-making. This non-formal environment is then compared and contrasted by the student participants with their formal, in-class learning experiences to understand how they complement each other. Next, the facilitation of the non-formal learning environment is investigated, looking specifically at students' perceptions of the differences in power dynamics between their relationships with professors and their relationship with me, in my multiple roles as a collaborative researcher, co-participant, group facilitator, resource person, doctoral student, and former student in their program. Finally the importance of having a physical place where non-formal learning can occur is discussed.

Based on the findings, it is proposed that in order for students to achieve their highest potential in their educational endeavours, it is essential to provide them with the

opportunity to engage regularly with colleagues and knowledgeable others in a facilitated, non-evaluative, non-formal learning environment. This research points to the fact that despite professors' best efforts to create an ideal learning climate in and out of their classrooms, many students are not willing to risk appearing incompetent in front of them.

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**PART ONE: INTRODUCTION, REVIEW OF LITERATURE, AND
METHODOLOGY**

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the social dimensions of the learning processes in non-formal situations among master's students in an applied, graduate-level professional program in sport psychology. A non-formal learning context is one in which the learning is mediated by another person, however the emphasis is on a less structured, learner-centered, present-time focused process. Recently the concept of non-formal learning (e.g., Eshach, 2007) has emerged as a legitimate form of learning. Unlike informal learning, which is completely unplanned and unstructured, non-formal learning is planned but highly adaptable and flexible. While it can be argued that teaching (at least ideally) is also planned but highly adaptable and flexible, a non-formal learning environment is not bound by the same requirements that are compulsory to formal education systems, in particular the need to cover a specific curriculum.

The idea and motivation for this research comes from my own experiences as a master's student in the same applied graduate program and the impact that my colleagues in that program had on my learning. The primary reason for wanting to conduct this research is to better understand some of the processes that led to my own positive learning experiences - both in and out of the classroom - and to find ways to provide similar opportunities for future graduate students. My own learning progression has had a major influence on how the current study was conceived and conducted; therefore telling the story of my own process of learning at the graduate level is an integral part of this research.

Background

In the fall of 2000, I began my studies as a master's student in an applied sport psychology program after graduating with an honours degree in psychology. I was not particularly knowledgeable about the field or the practice of sport psychology but I knew that it combined two of my biggest passions: sport and psychology. I moved to a new city where I knew virtually no one and began my master's program with six strangers who were to be my colleagues for the next two years. I was a somewhat shy individual who was very reluctant to share my opinions in a group or ask any questions in front of the class for fear of appearing incompetent. I was enrolled in the thesis option of the program where I studied the development of communities of practice in two sport teams. However the two other students enrolled in the thesis option and I decided to participate in the courses, training, and internships associated with the professional training option as well, where we met four students beginning their studies in the same stream of the program. What followed over the next two years with my six new colleagues entirely re-shaped my views and understanding of education and learning.

Very shortly after meeting each other, it became clear that the seven of us were forming a very strong bond as a group. There were certainly individuals who gravitated more toward each other and formed smaller sub-groups based on interests, backgrounds, and other commonalities; however the majority of our time was spent as a group of seven. Our social activities overlapped with our projects and papers and classroom discussions often spilled out into the halls and continued long past the end of class. Quite frequently we would even stay in our classroom for up to 30 minutes after the end of the course and continue a discussion started during class time. Learning was not viewed or

treated as being separate from the rest of the activities in which we engaged as a group. Instead, it was simply a part of how we interacted with each other, whether in or out of the classroom. For me, the learning that I did outside of class was equally and on some occasions more important than the learning that occurred in the classroom. This is not to say that the learning in the classroom was not important – in fact I think it is essential – rather that the learning outside of the formal context with my colleagues is what helped me to understand and apply what I was learning in the classroom. I was able to take the information from the classroom and dissect it with my colleagues without any of the fear or constraints with regards to time, process, content, language, or evaluation that can sometimes occur in classroom settings.

After numerous discussions with friends, other graduate students at the university, and students that I met at various conferences, I discovered that my learning experiences at the master's level were not typical for most people at the graduate level. The majority of them did their learning on their own or with one or two colleagues. They rarely met with their classmates as a larger group and the majority of those encounters were strictly social in nature. Students spoke of having to “figure everything out” on their own and not feeling a sense of community when it came to their learning.

After hearing the same story so many times from other students, I wondered what was causing so many of them to have less than optimal learning experiences during their graduate studies and what led to my peers and I to have such an enjoyable and effective learning experience. There was no doubt in my mind that part of the reason was having a great team of professors and support staff in my program; however this didn't explain why, based on my informal polling, the group of students the years before and after mine

didn't have the same experience that I had with my group. I also knew that good group dynamics contributed significantly to our learning experiences in and out of class and that chance (and possibly good choices by the program's selection committee) played a large role in the seven of us meeting and getting along so well. But I wondered if it was possible for other students who may not have the same group dynamics to still benefit from similar learning opportunities, particularly outside of the classroom. More specifically I wanted to know if it was possible to create a non-formal environment that could foster learning between students, instead of leaving this type of learning purely to chance.

This research can be seen as the culmination of the learning in informal and formal contexts that I experienced over the course of my master's degree. The learning experiences in informal settings that I had with my colleagues in the professional stream of the program showed me that there is a way to enhance learning in formal contexts by engaging informally or non-formally with other students outside of the classroom. My research and learning experiences in the classroom as a thesis student provided me with an ideal paradigm and framework for understanding, creating, and nurturing learning in a non-formal environment through a community of practice approach.

Paradigm and Conceptual Frameworks

As my own graduate learning experiences have unfolded and led me to the current research, I have discovered a number of bodies of literature and research that have helped me to better understand them. At the paradigmatic level, my understanding of learning and knowledge has been shaped by the postmodern movement, particularly the tenets of social constructionism (e.g., Gergen, 1999), which stipulate that knowledge is co-

constructed socially through discourse between people, as opposed to the traditional view of knowledge as being transferred from one person to another. This resonates with my own experiences of feeling like I learned as much outside of the classroom with my colleagues - who presumably were at or near the same level of understanding and experience in our field of study as I was – as I learned in the classroom from the professor. Despite the fact that none of the seven in our group were “experts” in our field of study, we were able to co-create knowledge, negotiate the meaning of our experiences, and thoughtfully discuss the skills and practices involved in our area of study. Although there are notable differences between learning in formal (i.e., learning that takes place in formally structured, institutionally sponsored, classroom-based activities) and informal or non-formal (e.g., learning from experience that takes place outside formally structured, institutionally sponsored, classroom-based activities) contexts, I feel they both contributed equally to me learning how to become a competent practitioner in my field.

Another related (although not identical) framework that shares the same view of knowledge as social constructionism is the communities of practice framework (e.g., Wenger, 1998a). A community of practice can be defined as a group of “people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion... and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). Wenger (1998a) explains that “the primary focus of this theory is on learning as social participation” (p. 4). In this framework, the term “knowing” is used instead of knowledge (e.g., Sfard, 1998; Shotter, 1993b; Wenger, 1998a), emphasizing the importance of active participation in learning communities as a way of accessing and fostering knowledge – particularly “tacit” knowledge (Wenger, 1998a). As the narrative

above illustrates, my participation in a community of practice with my fellow graduate students played a major role in my learning and becoming a competent graduate student and practitioner. The community of practice also seems to be what was missing from the experiences of many of the students who spoke to me about feeling as though they were learning on their own during their master's degree.

Key to both social constructionism and communities of practice is the notion that learning requires active engagement with others in the co-creation of knowledge. While there has been ample research conducted over the years on education in formal (educational) settings, studies on learning in informal or non-formal settings are comparatively sparse. Recent research (e.g., Malcolm, Hodgkinson, & Colley, 2003, Paavola, Lipponen, & Hakkarainen, 2004) has begun to show that there are significant elements of formal learning in informal situations, and elements of informality in formal situations and therefore they should not be viewed as two separate conceptual categories for a context of learning. However, in the education literature there seems to be little or no emphasis placed on the benefits of learning outside of formal contexts at the graduate level. This lack of research on the prevalence and impact of informal or non-formal learning situations and the strategies to enhance them then leaves this aspect of student learning to chance, or at best, it leaves students to figure it out on their own.

One way to create a non-formal environment among students would be to add a facilitator to an existing informal community of practice or to facilitate the development of a new community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Smith & McKeen, 2003; Wenger, 1998a). The addition of a specific person designated as a facilitator has been used successfully in many different types of learning contexts (e.g., Culver, 2004).

However the question of whether learning can actually be facilitated in an informal context is debatable, since it can be argued that facilitating it renders it formal.

While all of the bodies of literature mentioned above share many similarities, they also have important distinctions and come from somewhat different theoretical bases. However, despite the diversity among them, all of these bodies of literature are compatible at the foundational level of epistemology and each one serves an important role in supporting and informing the present research. Thus, while combining them into one research project may pose some possible theoretical challenges, I felt the benefits of doing so outweighed the potential risks.

An important aspect in being able to combine these bodies of literature into a process that is workable within the paradigms and perspectives of each of them is the selection of an appropriate methodological framework. This research adopted a modified collaborative inquiry (CI) methodology, as it incorporated many of the major tenets that are shared by both traditions (e.g., collaboration, social construction of meaning) while still allowing enough flexibility for their differences. Chief among these tenets is the focus on learning as a participatory and democratic process aimed at improving practice (Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000); a view that is also shared by social constructionism and the communities of practice framework. Collaborative inquiry also has, as one of its main goals, to demystify research and make it accessible to everyone interested in gaining a better understanding of his or her world. This resonates well with both communities of practice and social constructionism, which also focus on the practical and utilitarian aspects of the learning process under broadly defined and flexible frameworks. As Bray and colleagues point out:

One of the tenets of collaborative inquiry is that there is no dogma or an orthodox way of conducting one. An inquiry should proceed based on the experience that emerges...Methods should be developed that allow the inquirers to effectively pursue their question within the context of their setting. (2000, p. 13)

It is precisely this flexibility, combined with foundational ideas of how meaning and learning are created and propagated within a community, that allow research such as this one to emerge in a more natural way, without having preconceived notions of what will occur or trying to control the process. This allows both the participants and the researcher to focus their energy and attention on allowing the emergence of the processes and outcomes that will lead to the co-creation of meaning, instead of adhering to a specific and detailed methodology.

The purpose of this research was to enhance student learning outside of the classroom through the creation and facilitation of a community of practice. The objective was to create a non-formal learning environment where students could openly and candidly engage in group discussions with their colleagues on any topic related to their education. The goal is to increase opportunities for students to meaningfully engage with one another in a setting void of any type of evaluation. With students entering post-secondary education feeling more pressure than they once did and being too focused on grades (Kadison, 2004), there is a need to provide graduate students with an environment in which they can comfortably engage in meaningful dialogue with each other, share their knowledge, and work together toward becoming competent practitioners in their field of study. While it is certain that some students have had the good fortune of benefiting from such an environment by having a great dynamic among their colleagues, this chemistry

was more likely due to chance than careful planning to create such an environment. Using both a social constructionist framework and a communities of practice framework, as well as a collaborative inquiry methodology, this research attempted to go beyond those chance opportunities by creating and facilitating the development of a community of practice focused on students becoming better practitioners in their field of study and more competent at what one former president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) has described as the “game” of academics (McNay, 2003; Resnick, 1987).

This research advances knowledge in my field of inquiry in a number of ways. First, and most importantly, it gives an in-depth account of the learning process of graduate students with their colleagues outside of the classroom and the challenges that are associated with navigating the requirements of the university education system in pursuit of their degree. There are very few detailed accounts of the fears and barriers that students perceive as they enter the realm of graduate studies and how these limit their learning. Therefore, using a research methodology that allows the depth of relationship between the researcher and participants needed to gain access to such personal information may help to better understand the experiences of graduate students. This research employs a modified collaborative inquiry methodology and extends the data collection period over almost two years, allowing both the time and the intimacy that is necessary if one is to engage people in discussions and action on such personal topics.

The second way that this research advances knowledge in my field of inquiry is through the detailed examination of the power dimensions that exist in the student-teacher relationship and how this contrasts with the power dimensions in the student-

facilitator relationship. Professors' responsibility to formally evaluate their students can sometimes lead to students being hesitant to talk to their supervisors about their academic struggles (McNay, 2003). However when power dimensions were lessened in a non-formal setting with a facilitator in this research, this encouraged students to talk more openly about their challenges and fears with their colleagues and the facilitator.

A third way in which my research advances knowledge in my field is by examining alternative contexts (i.e., informal, non-formal) for learning which complement the formal educational environment. This research challenges traditional notions of formal education being sufficient for preparing future professionals in their respective fields by giving a collective voice to the students' hidden fears and struggles as they navigate through the graduate school context (Gazzola & Theriault, 2007). Viewing learning and education from the perspective of the student allows a more holistic understanding of their learning needs and how we can develop better ways to accommodate those needs both in and out of the classroom.

A fourth way in which this research advances knowledge is by contributing to the body of research on learning as a co-constructed and social process. Most university programs still appear to favour individual learning; a fact that is made obvious by an extremely lopsided preference for individual testing measures, despite mounting evidence that the majority of our work contexts require a collaborative approach to accomplish most of the challenges faced in the work context.

Finally, this research advances knowledge in my field by expanding the research on communities of practice and exploring new ways of creating and cultivating them, as well as understanding which elements are the most critical for learning within these

communities. In particular this research provides an in-depth examination of the facilitation process within a community of practice. There is ongoing debate within the community of practice field on the merits of facilitation. This research looks not only at the role that a facilitator may play within the community of practice and the effectiveness of having a facilitator, but also how the characteristics of the facilitator (e.g., age, educational experience, positional power, likeness to the other community members) can impact the success of the facilitation process and ultimately the community's survival.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following review is focused on the bodies of literature that are relevant to the purpose and objectives of this research. The first part of the review introduces and explores the theory of social constructionism and the communities of practice framework. The two are compared and contrasted based on their ontology and epistemology. Based on this appraisal, collaborative inquiry is suggested as a suitable methodology for using social constructionism and communities of practice concurrently for this research. Next, literature on the construction of knowledge in a graduate training context is examined, with a focus on the shared and unique contributions of social constructionism and communities of practice to this body of literature. This is followed by a review of the literature on formal, non-formal, and informal learning and their relationship to graduate student training. The review then examines the topic of facilitation, explaining the dominant paradigms, and discussing the literature on the facilitation of discussions, learning, and communities of practice. Finally the issue of power and its influence on learning relationships is discussed.

Social Constructionism

The term “social constructionism” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) falls under the umbrella of postmodern theories of knowledge and is considered to be one of the more radical postmodern theories (Polkinghorne, 1992). Its chief concern is the critique of taken-for-granted “truths” that pervade our knowledge and understanding of the world (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 1995, 2003; Danziger, 1997; Gergen, 1985, 1999, 2001a, 2001b). This is reflected in the social constructionist claim that “the terms in

which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people” (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). In other words what we “know” is mediated by our engagement in particular social and historical groups or contexts, rather than being a set of objective “facts” that reflect the world as it is (e.g., Burr, 1995, 2003; Gergen, 1985, 1999, 2001a, 2001b; Kvale, 1995; Shotter, 1993a, 1993b). Thus knowledge is not said to exist in the “minds” of individuals, rather it is created and resides in the “spaces” between them since it is continually being co-created in dialogue (e.g., Anderson, 1997; Burr, 1995, 2003; Gergen, 1994; Hosking, 1999). Given the idea that knowledge is a product of social processes, the main focus of social constructionist theory then is on the use of language as the vehicle by which the world is constructed and understood (e.g., Shotter, 1993a, 1993b; Wittgenstein, 1958).

Consistent with its own principle of multiple realities, there is no single definition of social constructionism; however an examination of its four working assumptions (Gergen, 1999) sheds some light on the principles that guide it. In the context of learning and education (Smith, 1999), these four assumptions play a key role in understanding the processes involved in the co-creation of knowledge.

1. *The terms by which we understand our world and our self are neither required nor demanded by “what there is”.* Kenneth Gergen (1999), one of the originators of social constructionist theory, explains that: “for any state of affairs a potentially unlimited number of descriptions and explanations is possible. In principle... not one of these descriptions or explanations can be ruled superior in terms of capacity to map, picture, or capture the features of the ‘situation in question’” (p. 47). Burr (2003) offers a similar explanation, stating that social constructionism:

invites us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world. It is therefore in opposition to what is referred to as positivism and empiricism in traditional science. (p. 3)

Given this understanding, our ways of categorizing the world are perceived as being subjective as opposed to being a “true” reflection of how things really are (e.g., Burr, 1995, 2003; Gergen, 1985, 1994, 1999, 2001a, 2001b; Shotter, 1993a, 1993b). In applying this understanding to the context of education, the concept of learning then is no longer seen as being accomplished only through the transfer of knowledge of facts or “the truth” to the learner by teachers or experts in a formal setting. Rather it opens the door to a broader view of learning in all its various forms and contexts (e.g., Brown, 2002; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Gerber, Marek, & Cavallo, 2001; Resnick, 1987).

2. *Our modes of description, explanation and/or representation are derived from relationship.* Gergen (1999) elaborates on this assumption by saying that “language and all other forms of representation gain their meaning from the ways in which they are used within relationships” (p. 48). This assumption not only points to the importance of the social context as an essential part of the process of learning, it also asserts that different contexts provide different understandings and differing forms of knowledge. Thus, while the importance of the classroom context and the teacher cannot be denied when it comes to learning, one must also consider the contributions of other contexts (e.g., Brown et al., 1989; Burns & Schaefer, 2003; Gerber et al., 2001; Merriam & Cunningham, 1989;

Knapper & Cropley, 2000; Resnick, 1987) and people (e.g., Anderson & Boud, 1996; Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001) in student learning.

3. *As we describe, explain or otherwise represent, so do we fashion our future.*

“Language is a major ingredient of our worlds of action; it constitutes social life itself”, says Gergen (1999, p. 49). For students, education can be akin to learning a whole new language as they struggle with the technical and procedural jargon associated with their field of study. Moving forward then not only becomes a matter of being able to understand this new language, but also being able to translate it into something that is meaningful in students’ current contexts and future practices (e.g., Brown et al., 1989; Resnick, 1987). One way of doing this is through participation with others in creating new ways of interpreting the world: “Invited are *generative discourses*, that is, ways of talking and writing (and otherwise representing) that simultaneously challenge existing traditions of understanding, and offer new possibilities for action” (Gergen, 1999, p. 49, emphasis in original). While the possibility exists for such generative discourses to take place in the classroom setting with teachers present, issues such as power dynamics, limited class time, students’ fear of evaluation, and mandatory curriculum could impact the topics discussed. Thus, searching for other contexts in which generative discourses about one’s field of study can take place becomes an important part of the learning process from a social constructionist perspective (Brown, 2002).

4. *Reflection on our forms of understanding is vital to our future well-being.* Gergen (1999) writes:

If we are to build together toward a more viable future then we must be prepared to doubt everything we have accepted as real, true, right, necessary or essential.

This kind of critical reflection is not necessarily a prelude to rejecting our major traditions. It is simply to recognize them as traditions – historically and culturally situated; it is to recognize the legitimacy of other traditions within their own terms. And it is to invite the kind of dialogue that might lead to common ground.

(p. 50)

The longstanding traditions of the education system have provided some models for learning which draw on particular ideas and views about knowledge in the development and delivery of its curriculum. However, social constructionism encourages us to seek out other learning models that will contribute even further to the enhancement of student learning (Brown, 2002). This is not to completely discard the old ways but to develop a “both/and orientation” (Gergen, 1998), which is essentially adopting the view that multiple, and even contradictory ways of understanding or doing things, are possible, helpful, and sometimes needed. One way of doing this is through *reflexive deliberation*, “that is, the authoritative discourses must be opened up to evaluation from alternative standpoints, including both authoritative and informal” (Wortham, 2001, p. 132).

One “informal” standpoint that is not often consulted with regard to curriculum design and implementation is that of the student (Tudor, 1993). Student learning does not begin or end at the classroom doorway or when the student opens or closes a textbook at home or in the library. However “other” forms of student learning (e.g., informal, non-formal, incidental, tacit) are generally not accounted for in the “standard” educational curriculum and their importance and contributions to learning are not generally recognized by the institutions (McGivney, 2000; Viskovic, 2006). Still, there is no doubt that some students only want the “standard” educational curriculum (e.g., lectures, Power

Point slides, text book readings) because it either suits their learning style and/or they are only interested in doing the bare minimum to survive as a student and graduate. Moon (2004) refers to this as adopting a “strategic approach” to learning.

Another important form of what Wortham (2001) calls reflexive deliberation is the kind that occurs between students. This can be summarized as “the attempt to place one’s premises into question, to suspend the ‘obvious’, to listen to alternative framings of reality, and to grapple with the comparative outcomes of multiple standpoints” (Gergen, 1999, p. 50). Similar to the discussion on generative discourses above, in many circumstances the classroom is not an ideal place for reflexive deliberation, particularly when that deliberation involves a critique of the course, the professor, or the program of study. In these instances, students may feel compelled instead to discuss issues without authority figures present in a context that enables them to better reflect on and explore ideas (Boud, 2001; Boud & Walker, 1998). Thus the people who have the power to make real changes to the curriculum (i.e., professors, administrators, etc.) may not gain access to the honest opinions of most of the students and are therefore unable to make the necessary changes to the curriculum to accommodate some of the challenges that students face. Some students may then attempt to find alternative ways to supplement the learning they receive in the classroom in order to develop a suitable level of competence both in the subject matter and its application to their practice. Others will simply try to “survive” by adopting a “strategic” approach to their classes (Moon, 2004). One context that provides an appropriate forum for both supplementing learning and sharing strategies for academic survival is within a community of practice.

Communities of Practice

Similar to the social constructionist view that our modes of description, explanation and/or representation are derived from relationship, the communities of practice framework is built on the premise that learning is a social activity that involves active engagement in the world with others who share the same enterprise (Wenger, 1998a, 1998b). As Etienne Wenger (2000) explains,

Since the beginning of history, human beings have formed communities that share cultural practices reflecting their collective learning: from a tribe around a cave fire, to a medieval guild, to a group of nurses in a ward, to a street gang, to a community of engineers interested in brake design. Participating in these “communities of practice” is essential to our learning. It is at the very core of what makes us human beings capable of meaningful knowledge. (p. 229)

While social constructionism examines the meaning-making relationship at a culture-wide level, the communities of practice literature takes a more focused view of learning within particular groups or communities of people engaged in a particular practice together. One could understand this level of analysis as a form of *applied* social constructionism or an expression of social constructionism *in action*.

Communities of practice are normally created informally as people work together to address particular issues or challenges common to all of them. Wenger (1998a) describes this situation as it often occurs in the educational context:

Students go to school and, as they come together to deal in their own fashion with the agenda of the imposing institution and the unsettling mysteries of youth, communities of practice sprout everywhere – in the classroom as well as on the

playground, officially or in the cracks. And in spite of the curriculum, discipline, and exhortation, the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice. (p. 6)

As the author points out, communities of practice can exist in both formal and informal settings. Although they are normally created informally and the prevailing belief is that they cannot be controlled or managed, many researchers, particularly those in the business field, (e.g., McDermott, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Brown & Gray, 2001; Sharp, 1997; Snyder, 1997; Stamps, 1997) believe that communities of practice can be created and “assisted” by those outside the community, through the provision of various types of resources and allowances. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) explain this in the organizational context, saying “you cannot cultivate communities of practice in the same way you develop traditional organizational structures. Design and development are more about eliciting and fostering participation than planning, directing, and organizing their activities” (p. 13).

Communities of practice revolve around three dimensions: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire:

First, members are bound together by their collectively developed understanding of what their community is about and they hold each other accountable to this sense of *joint enterprise*...Second, members build their community through *mutual engagement*. They interact with one another, establishing norms and relationships of *mutuality* that reflect these interactions...Third, communities of practice have produced a *shared repertoire* of communal resources – language,

routines, sensibilities, artifacts, tools, stories, styles, etc. (Wenger, 2000, p. 229, emphasis in original)

These three dimensions help to forge the links between participation in practice and the formation of particular communities.

Dimensions of Practice

The first dimension - mutual engagement of community members - is the fundamental element that connects communities and practice to each other (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Wenger explains that practice does not exist in the abstract but rather “it exists because people are engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with each other... Membership in a community of practice is therefore a matter of mutual engagement” (1998, p. 73). Engagement is what differentiates communities of practice from other types of communities because membership is exclusive to those who are actively involved in the enterprise of the community. Thus, there is a very intimate link between mutual engagement and the joint enterprise of members in a community of practice.

The second dimension - the joint enterprise of a community of practice - is what differentiates it from other communities of practice that may have a different practice as their enterprise (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Wenger et al., 2002). Communities of practice are normally formed precisely because of the need to work together in particular circumstances to overcome difficulties associated with the enterprise. Wenger explains that a joint enterprise results from a collective negotiation process: “It is defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it...It is not just a stated goal, but creates among participants relations of mutual accountability that

become an integral part of the practice” (1998a, p. 77). Thus, not only are all members of the community invested and engaged in pursuing the community’s enterprise, they are also all accountable for its success or failure. Knowledge and responsibility are both diffused among all community members and while none are expected to know everything, all are responsible for contributing to the pursuit of the community’s enterprise through the construction of knowledge and the negotiation of meaning.

One way that enables members to engage in the pursuit of the community’s enterprise is through Wenger’s third dimension - the creation of a shared repertoire of words, actions, and ways of doing things (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Wenger et al., 2002). As community members engage in the negotiation of meaning with each other, they create resources that facilitate communication and functioning within the community. Wenger explains that the elements of the repertoire can be very heterogeneous: “They gain their coherence not in and of themselves as specific activities, symbols, or artifacts, but from the fact that they belong to the practice of a community pursuing an enterprise” (1998a, p. 82). One benefit of having a shared repertoire is that community membership becomes quite apparent. Members of a particular community of practice will know how to act, talk, and engage with other community members while outsiders and newcomers may not. Therefore in order to become full members of the community of practice, newcomers must first engage as *legitimate peripheral participants* (Hay, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wolcott, 1996). Lave and Wenger explain that: “*peripherality* is ... a positive term... The partial participation of newcomers is by no means ‘disconnected’ from the practice of interest...

Peripherality, when it is enabled, suggests an opening, a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement” (1991, p. 37).

Components of Learning as Social Participation

Building on the three dimensions of communities of practice, which help to link participation in practice to community formation, we can now turn to the examination of how the concepts of meaning, practice, community, and identity inform the view of learning as social participation. In communities of practice literature, meaning is produced by engagement in social processes and is located in the *negotiation of meaning* (Brown et al., 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998a) of persons within (and outside) communities of practice. As Wenger (1998a) explains: “human engagement in the world is first and foremost a process of negotiating meaning.... Meaning exists neither in us, nor in the world, but in the dynamic relation of living in the world” (p. 53). This view is echoed in social constructionist writing by Paré (1995) who states that:

Social constructionism is primarily concerned with the process whereby meaning is arrived at communally. It emphasizes neither the biology of the observer nor the ontology of the observed world, focusing instead on knowledge as a function of communal textual interpretation. (p. 5)

Thus knowledge is understood as being both historically and culturally produced and constantly changing through the continual process of negotiating meaning (Wenger, 1998a, 2000).

Negotiating meaning involves both participation and reification between community of practice members. The term participation is used to describe “the social experiences of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and

active involvement in social enterprises (Wenger, 1998a, p. 55). The term reification is defined as “circumstances in which social phenomena become endowed with thing-like properties which they do not in fact have” (Giddens, 1984, p. 180). The reification process displays the “performative” (Gergen, 1998b; Holzman, 1997; Newman & Holzman, 1996, 1997) power of language, that is, its ability to “[bring] people and things into being” (Hosking, 1999, p. 119). Wenger describes the utility of reification, saying that it is “the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into ‘thingness’. In so doing we create points of focus around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organized (1998a, p. 58). We can therefore speak of “knowledge [as] situated, being in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used” (Brown et al., 1989, p. 32). This is similar to Shotter’s (1993b) social constructionist notion of language - built on the work of Wittgenstein (1958) that “the meaning of a word is its use in language” (section 20e) - which views language as a structuring tool for co-constructed meanings:

Rather than simply representing “reality”, speaking and writing should... be “seen as” (talked of as) “giving”, or “lending” a form or structure to a state of affairs, a situation, or circumstance appropriate to it having currency, so to speak, in the way of life in which the language is used. (Shotter, 1993b, p. 100)

In a community of practice such as graduate students in training, this points to the importance of creating “local” practices, language, and ways of doing things that are related directly to the context and community (Wenger, 1999).

Examining communities of practice at the level of negotiating meaning provides a better understanding of how practice can be understood as a social phenomenon. It

emphasizes how communities of practice are defined by their focus on action and the engagement of the community in an enterprise that is shared by all of its members. Given this view, practice is understood as being a social phenomenon:

The concept of practice connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In this sense, practice is always social practice. (Wenger, 1998a, p. 47)

For community of practice members, engagement in the community's practice is not only an important element of participation, it is the defining feature of membership within the community.

A sense of community is essential for the functioning and survival of communities of practice: "In the course of helping each other, sharing ideas and collectively solving problems, community members often form strong bonds" (McDermott, 1999b, p. 4). It is precisely these bonds that allow community members to function together and construct knowledge with each other. As with most other types of communities there are varying levels of involvement in communities of practice, ranging from being a newcomer or legitimate peripheral participant to being a central member of the community or full participant.

The result of community involvement is the formation of an identity as a participant in the community of practice. Wenger (1998a) explains that identity formation is a dual process of identification and negotiability, whereby the former provides experiences and materials for building one's identity and the latter determines the degree to which one can have some control over the meanings being negotiated. Thus one's identity as a community member is not fixed; rather it is a fluid, continual process of

participation and reification centred around the community's practice: "Identity in practice is defined socially not merely because it is reified in a social discourse of the self and of social categories, but also because it is produced as a lived experience of participation in specific communities" (Wenger, 1998a, p. 151). Identity within the community of practice framework is then understood as a way of being in the world rather than a way of thinking about oneself. A community member's identity is therefore no longer viewed as a cognitive process; rather it is seen as being formed through a person's experience of him or her self as a participating member in the community's practice.

Studies on Designing and Cultivating a Community of Practice

Designing and cultivating a community of practice is a delicate process given that participation in communities of practice is voluntary and that most communities of practice are formed naturally out of a common interest in a particular area. However, Wenger et al. (2002) explain that: "organizations need to cultivate communities of practice actively and systematically, for their benefit as well as the benefit of the members and communities themselves" (p.12). One example of designing a community of practice comes from the development of the Guided Inquiry supporting Multiple Literacies (GIsML) community of practice, which consisted of teachers who were interested in improving their classroom practices by working with other teachers, a science educator, a researcher, and a number of doctoral students (Palincsar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford, & Brown, 1998). The authors elaborated three principles for designing their specific community of practice and described the main activities that guided the first year of the community's existence, which included collaborative planning, implementing

GIsML in the classroom, and debriefing with community members. The authors concluded by providing a few examples of evidence that the group was becoming a community of practice. The move from being a community of learners (Brown & Campione, 1994) to a community of practice represented a significant shift in a community's identity, focused on the mutual engagement of members in the community's main practice.

A second pertinent example of the development of a community of practice comes from a journal article entitled *The Odyssey of Ph.D. Students Becoming a Community of Practice* (Janson, Howard, & Schoenberger-Orgad, 2004). In this article the authors described the journey of eight doctoral students in management communication as they jointly worked through the challenges and isolation of their doctoral studies. The article chronicles the group's creation and students' reflections on their progression through their degree using Wenger's five stages of community development model (Wenger, 1999; Wenger et al., 2002 – For more information see “Wenger's Five Stages of Community Development” in the Discussion section below) and discussing the particular challenges and benefits that were present through each of the stages. Based on their experience, the authors also added a “prepotential” stage, which they referred to as the “critical point” in their shared experience that led them to the realization that they all had something in common. This realization is ultimately what led to the *potential* for the community of practice to be created, the *coalescing*, *maturing* and *stewardship* of the community, and finally its *transforming* (Wenger et al., 2002).

Janson et al. (2004) concluded by making two sets of recommendations. First, they recommended to students to take ownership of the learning process:

Students need to identify the point at which normal feelings of isolation in independent, postgraduate work become abnormal and counterproductive and then move beyond that critical point. To do so, they should engage in conversations with other students and with supervisors to discover their shared experience. We all share the same or similar processes... If we talk further, we may find that we have experienced similar (mixed) feelings about the challenge we have undertaken. (p. 178)

Second, they recommended to universities to facilitate student-led initiatives and to suggest such initiatives whenever isolation is observed. They suggested that supervisors can reveal the “loose network” (Wenger, 1999) that exists for students but that may lay hidden, and also to encourage these links early on in Ph.D. programs in order for students to develop, maintain, and have access to them once their coursework ends. The authors also suggested that universities need do their part in helping students by fulfilling their obligations to respond to specific requests from postgraduates and to step in when asked to offer appropriate resources (such as time from teaching, space to meet, computers, and computer support from graduate online student-led seminars). Jansen et al. (2004) however did caution that universities and supervisors can’t be expected to provide all of the solutions for student community of practice formation: “Rather, the responsibility for becoming aware and developing a community of practice rests with students in their lifelong quest for knowledge” (p. 180).

Once a community of practice has been designed, the next essential step is to cultivate it. Wenger et al. (2002) liken the cultivation of a community of practice to the cultivation of a plant:

You cannot pull the stem, leaves, or petals to make a plant grow faster or taller. However you can do much to encourage healthy plants; till the soil, ensure they have enough nutrients, supply water, secure the right amount of sun exposure, and protect them from pests and weeds. (p. 13)

One way of cultivating a community of practice is by facilitating the development of the community and the growth of its members through a process of collaboration. As mentioned above, communities of practice evolve through five stages of development: Potential, coalescing, maturing, stewardship, and transformation (Wenger, 1999; Wenger et al., 2002). Understanding the markers of growth and ways to facilitate collaborative learning within these stages and easing the transition into each subsequent stage is essential for the continued development of the community of practice.

Combining Social Constructionism and Communities of Practice

Given the similarities between social constructionism and communities of practice it is important to examine their compatibility as complementary theories for research possibilities. In order to examine this question, the convergences and divergences between them must be understood by comparing and contrasting the ontological and epistemological assumptions of each theory and how they relate to the graduate training context. Doing so reveals critical points where the two theories intersect and generate the parameters for an appropriate methodology to combine the two.

Ontology

Ontology and Social Constructionism

Burr (2003) explains: "Ontology is the study of being and existence in the world. It is the attempt to discover the fundamental categories of what exists in the world" (p.

92). Interestingly though, the question of ontology for most social constructionists is actually an irrelevant one. According to Gergen (1994), social constructionism is “ontologically mute”, meaning that it doesn’t make any claims as to the nature of “reality”:

Constructionism makes no denial concerning explosions, poverty, death, or “the world out there” more generally. Neither does it make any affirmation... Whatever is, simply is. There is no foundational description to be made about an “out there” as opposed to an “in here”, about experience or material.

(p. 72)

Gergen (1994) continues on to argue that the key question with regards to the “reality” of the world is a question of epistemology, not ontology: “Once we attempt to articulate ‘what there is’ ... we enter the world of discourse. At that moment the process of construction commences, and this effort is inextricably woven into process of social interchange and into history and culture” (p. 72). Thus, Gergen is saying that it’s irrelevant to try and argue over whether an “ultimate reality” exists independently of our experiences because as soon as we begin to talk about it, we are now engaged in a social process (of meaning making) – which is an epistemological issue, not an ontological one.

Ontology and Communities of Practice

In contrast to social constructionism, the communities of practice framework situates itself in the social constructivist paradigm (Bruner, 1991; Hay, 1991, 1993), which generally entails a “critical realist” ontological stance (Bhaskar, 1986; Collier, 1994).

Critical realists do not deny the reality of events and discourses; on the contrary, they insist upon them. But they hold that we will only be able to understand – and so change – the social world if we identify the structures at work that generate those events or discourses. (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 2)

Thus, while social constructionism does not make any claims as to whether an ultimate reality exists, the community of practice framework does make the claim that an ultimate reality exists, but that we can only get to know it better by looking at the social processes that govern our understanding of the world. Lave and Wenger (1991) allude to this critical realist stance in explaining that the communities of practice framework is built on the premise of “the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing” (p. 50). Here we can see the interplay between elements of realism (e.g., agent, cognition) and social constructions (e.g., world, meaning, and knowing).

Delving a little deeper into the social constructionism literature reveals that, while the ontologically mute position is the one most commonly associated with social constructionism, it is not the only one (Parker, 1998). Some social constructionist researchers (e.g., Collier, 1998) argue that the critical realist position (adopted by social constructivists) is actually more in-line with their ontological perspectives. For example, Collier (1998) claims “language can only be learnt by reference to reality. That indicates that there are other, prior means of access to reality” (p. 48). This debate within the social constructionist paradigm exemplifies its stance on multiple realities while also serving to lessen the perceived distance between constructionism and constructivism.

While the critical realist views of social constructionism are contested by many commentators in the field who identify more with constructionism, they do point to attempts at seeking new ways of understanding theories about the world and our ability to function within it. Gergen (1998) supports this notion, advocating three ways of getting beyond the ontologically mute/critical realist debate. His first suggestion is to search for non-confrontational modes of action that will lead to the de-intensifying of potential conflict. His second suggestion involves the separation of persons from discourse through the view that discourse is a *tool* for understanding people, not an accurate representation of the “true” essence of individuals. Gergen’s third suggestion – the most pertinent to this discussion - is to consider explorations in commonality.

Epistemology

Epistemology and Social Constructionism

Most social constructionists agree that we come to know the “realities” of the world through a “social epistemology” (Gergen, 1994). This stance implies that knowledge doesn’t reside in the individual mind but rather in patterns of social relatedness. This is made clear in two of the fundamental assumptions that underlie social constructionist theory (Gergen, 1985, p. 267):

1. *The terms by which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people.*
2. *The degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes (e.g., communication, negotiation, conflict).*

Simply put, social constructionism engages in a social epistemology, which argues that our “reality” is created and understood through social processes and is mediated or negotiated by the use of language (including written, spoken, gestural, etc.). Thus, what is “real” or “true” is so designated subjectively through convention in a particular time and context.

Epistemology and Communities of practice

Although it is not clearly stated in the literature, the community of practice theory also appears to adopt a social epistemological view of knowing in the world. However the epistemological focus of communities of practice is on engagement in practice as the key to learning and knowledge as opposed to a focus on language in social constructionism: “The activity in which knowledge is developed and deployed... is not separable from or ancillary to learning... rather, it is an integral part of what is learned” (Brown et al., p. 32). While social constructionism also shares the view that knowing is a product of active engagement in various practices in the world (Gergen, 1998), it is not the focal point of the theory, as is the case for communities of practice. The emphasis on practice is evident in two of the fundamental assumptions of the communities of practice framework (Wenger, 1998a, p. 4):

1. *Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises – such as singing in tune, discovering scientific facts, [and] fixing machines.*
2. *Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world.*

Methodology

Considering the overlap in epistemologies between social constructionism and communities of practice and the suggestions made by Gergen on ways to get beyond the ontologically mute/critical realist debate, there does appear to be enough commonality between the two theories to find a way to incorporate them into a single research methodology. One methodology that seems to align with the tenets of both theories is the collaborative inquiry research methodology (Bray et al., 2000; Gergen, 1999), which has evolved from the work of Heron (1981) on cooperative inquiry and research by Reason and Rowan (Reason, 1988; Reason & Rowan, 1981) on participatory human inquiry. A collaborative inquiry is defined as “a process consisting of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which a group of peers strives to answer a question of importance to them” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 6). More specifically, Peter Reason (1999) explains that collaborative (or co-operative) inquiry is

an inquiry strategy in which all those involved in the research endeavour are both co-researchers, whose thinking and decision-making contributes to generating ideas, designing and managing the project, and drawing conclusions from the experience; and *also* co-subjects, participating in the activity which is being researched. (p. 207, emphasis in original)

According to Reason (1999), there are two purposes to collaborative inquiry:

The first purpose is to articulate and offer democratic and emancipatory approaches to inquiry – relinquishing the monopoly of knowledge held traditionally by universities and other institutes of “higher learning” and helping ordinary people regain the capacity to create their own knowledge in the service

of their practical purposes. At the same time our purpose is to contribute to a complete revision of the Western mindset – to add impetus to the movement away from a modernist worldview based on a positivist philosophy and a value system dominated by crude notions of economic progress toward an emerging “postmodern” worldview. (p. 207)

This first purpose relates to the social constructionist understanding that learning, as it is defined and administered by institutes of higher learning, is a dominant discourse (e.g., Gergen, 1999), thus, one “reality” among many other forms of learning. One of the goals of collaborative inquiry then is to empower (e.g., Applebaun, Hebert, & Leroux, 1999; Bernstein, 2003; Johnson, 1991; Wallerstein, 1988) “ordinary” people, in this case students, to re-define (or co-create) learning in their own terms and discover ways of learning and knowing that serve their practical purposes as individuals and as a group. The second purpose also falls in line with social constructionism in that it challenges the Western worldview, which does not allow for the existence of multiple realities or generative theory based on a “both/and” philosophy.

Current Learning Trends in the Field of Applied Sport Psychology

While the literature and research on social constructionism and communities of practice has been growing in other “consultation-based” disciplines such as educational counselling (Pare, in press; Pare, in press) and organizational development (e.g. Raelin, 2000), the field of sport psychology has been slow to investigate and adopt these and other similar theories into its mainstream practice. In addition, some insiders in sport psychology have made the claim that the field of sport psychology is “ill-equipped to support... trainees in learning the requisite humanistic skills to provide athlete-centred

services” (Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004). Thus, while the young field of sport psychology is continually growing in range and scope and has innovated in a number of ways, some important issues related to learning and training still remain unresolved. Little research has been conducted on the status of graduate student training in sport psychology since 2000, therefore it is difficult to say for certain how much the field has changed since then. However, the research from that time period suggests that many programs were leaving students untrained (or undertrained) and on their own to learn how to consult. These students were subsequently working as practitioners with little, poor, or no training or supervision, just as many of their supervisors did when they were students and neophyte consultants (Silva, Conroy, & Zizzi, 1999). A closer examination of the research on graduate student training, the supervision process, and the students’ learning context provides a more thorough description of the most current research in those areas.

Training

In 2000, one of the biggest challenges facing the field of applied sport psychology was the inadequacy of training for graduate level students, which was believed to lead to their impairment (Anderson, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 2000) in consulting with athletes. A few studies (Andersen, Williams, Aldridge & Taylor, 1997; Silva, 1996; Williams & Scherzer, 2003) showed that, while the situation was improving somewhat, applied experiences remained underdeveloped in most applied sport psychology programs. However, the bulk of the information about the lack of training did not come from research, rather it has come from anecdotal accounts at conference presentations (e.g., Cogan, Petrie, Richardson, & Martin, 1998; Conroy, 1997; Murphy, 1996; Silva, 1997,

1998; Weichman, 1998; Yukelson, 1998; Zaichowski, 1997). This lack of research, even at that point in time, reflects Silva, Conroy, and Zizzi's (1999) statement that:

Very little energy has been directed toward a number of professional development issues which influence the current quality of training and practice and how the field will progress in the future.... Existing deficits in applied sport psychology graduate training must be eliminated if science and practice are to be integrated in training programs. (p. 300)

Supervision

A second major challenge arising from the most recent research on the status of learning and training in applied sport psychology is the quality and availability of supervision in applied experiences for graduate students in training. While the benefits of supervision are generally agreed upon, the details of supervision in the field have been lacking clarity. In a somewhat dated article, Andersen and Williams-Rice (1996) pointed out that: "little discussion of what constitutes adequate supervision of trainees and practitioners is available in the applied sport psychology literature" (p. 278). This has led to improper and/or non-existent supervision experiences for many of the graduates of applied sport psychology programs.

Research from the mid-1990's suggested that by the end of their graduate education, most students had not even completed half of the required supervision hours for certification (Andersen, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 1994). While the lack of supervision in training was seen as detrimental practice, it was nothing new to applied sport psychology: A very large number of the current supervisors in the field said they had no supervision of their own graduate consulting work (Anderson et al., 1994) and had no

formal training in supervision (Pettipas, Brewer, Rivera, & Van Raalte, 1994). While the situation may have improved since the mid-90's, some more recent evidence supports the notion that deficits in sport psychology consultant development still exist (Tod, 2007), that sport psychology students may still feel that their supervisors' skills need to be improved (Tod, Marchant, & Andersen, 2007), and that some students still feel unprepared for their first consulting experiences (Tonn & Harmison, 2004, Watson, Zizzi, Etzel, & Lubker, 2004).

Learning Context

A third major pedagogical challenge for graduate student learning and training relates to the context in which learning takes place. Sfard (1998) describes two metaphors that help to describe two common approaches to learning and education. While the prevalence of these metaphors in the context of sport psychology has not been examined, they nevertheless provide a useful framework for understanding some of the most common approaches to learning that may exist at the administrative and/or teaching level in many Western universities.

The first metaphor for learning is based on the concept of "knowledge acquisition": "The language of 'knowledge acquisition'... makes us think about the human mind as a container to be filled with certain materials and about the learner as becoming the owner of these materials" (p. 5). This view positions students as passive learners engaged in an individualized and decontextualized process of acquiring (i.e., being "filled" with) knowledge from various sources, such as books, journal articles, and lectures. For example, in a graduate program where this metaphor is dominant, the focus on individual learning could leave students with few opportunities to interact with

supervisors and peers on the topic of their learning. Students would then be forced to figure out how to be competent consultants on their own, the same way that most of the more experienced practitioners in the field did when they were neophyte consultants (Orlick & Partington, 1987; Silva et al., 1999; Simons & Andersen, 1995)

In contrast to the acquisition metaphor, Sfard's (1998) second metaphor takes into account the social nature of learning and knowing. The "participation metaphor"

suggests that the learner should be viewed as a person interested in participation in certain kinds of activities rather than in accumulating private possessions...

Learning a subject is now conceived of as a process of becoming a member of a certain community. (Sfard, 1998, p. 6)

Simply put, this new metaphor for learning sees students as active agents who engage with each other in the creation of knowledge. While this metaphor is slowly entering the literature in applied sport psychology (e.g., Brustad & Ritter-Taylor, 1997), it has not yet been examined within graduate training literature in the field. However, this issue remains a growing topic in other applied fields (e.g., Brown, & Duguid, 1993; Raelin, 2000; Wenger, 1998a).

The reason social learning processes are so important in applied sport psychology is that students who may not have access to important "others" (e.g., professors, fellow students) for proper training and supervision "may rely on a 'cookbook' approach dependent on 'psychological skills training'" (Silva et al., 1999, p. 303). In other words, because of the socially negotiated character of learning and knowing, graduate students who are unable to access important others to engage in the co-construction of meaning (Hosking, 1999) could be left to rely solely on techniques and books. This situation could

be further compounded if students attempt to navigate alone through the opposing or contradictory techniques and advice that they may find in a variety of books and articles which all claim to have the “right” way to consult. Silva and colleagues (1999) point to this problem, saying:

Many students continue to learn through trial and error just as previous generations of sport psychologists have learned how to practice. This training model is inefficient and outdated and no longer reflects the current evolution of the profession. (p. 301)

Students who begin consulting with inadequate training and/or supervision ultimately put their careers and the future of applied sport psychology in jeopardy: “The reputation of sport psychology as a practicing profession is at risk when untrained individuals (young or established professionals) are allowed to represent themselves to the public as competent sport psychology consultants” (Silva et al., 1999, p. 305).

Applications of Social Constructionism and Communities of Practice in Graduate Student Training

While the literature on social constructionism and communities of practice is virtually non-existent in the field of sport psychology, both of them can offer insight on some of the critical elements involved in the construction of knowledge in the graduate training context. Specifically, social constructionism and communities of practice share similar views on the importance of meaning making, reification, dominant discourses, and reflexivity in the process of social learning, as well as offering their own unique contributions.

Meaning

One of the most critical elements of both social constructionism and communities of practice theory is the focus on the co-construction of meaning (Hosking, 1999) or negotiation of meaning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) respectively. Hosking (1999) explains that for social constructionism:

relating (language, action, communicating) becomes understood as co-constructed rather than an individual affair. These arguments sustain talk of *co-ordination processes* and not individualized actors and non-human objects... This is the very particular meaning of “social” in social constructionism – it is not a reference to relations between people as entities. (p. 119, emphasis in original)

Similarly, for communities of practice “human engagement in the world is first and foremost a process of negotiating meaning... Meaning exists neither in us, nor in the world, but in the dynamic relation of living in the world” (Wenger, 1998, p. 53).

Both theories frequently employ the term “knowing” (e.g., Sfard, 1998; Shotter, 1993b; Wenger, 1998a) instead of “knowledge” in order to convey the importance of active engagement in the learning process. For graduate students in training, collaboration and the co-construction of knowledge and meaning are essential. Students can’t rely only on independent learning to know how to be competent in practice, they must collaboratively engage with professors, colleagues, and clients in the negotiation of meaning (Brown et al., 1989).

Reification

Once meaning has been co-created/negotiated, it becomes “reified” (Giddens, 1984; Wenger, 1998a). As mentioned above, reification refers to circumstances in which

social phenomena become endowed with thing-like properties which they don't inherently possess. The reification process displays the "performative" power of language, or its ability to bring people and things into being. Thus, in understanding knowledge creation in social constructionism and communities of practice as being a process of social construction, we can therefore speak of "knowledge [as] situated, being in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used" (Brown et al., 1989, p. 32). While these practices can be informed by some of the larger, dominant discourses (Hare-Mustin, 1994) in the field, the knowledge produced "locally" within the immediate training context - through the negotiation of meaning - is equally important since it is a product of local cultures, practices and negotiated meaning.

Dominant Discourses

Dominant discourses are described in social constructionism as those discourses having "a privileged and dominant influence on language, thought, and action" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 19). Most often, dominant discourses are the result of power issues. In particular, disciplinary regimes (Foucault, 1979), such as educational systems, religions, and professions (e.g., psychology, medicine, etc.), generate a vocabulary of descriptions and explanations for why things are the way they are, which become taken-for-granted, unquestioned truths. However, in the process, the power of these regimes serves to silence the "voices" (Bakhtin, 1986) of competing ideas. Thus alternative ideas or ways of doing things are rejected without even being considered since they are viewed as a threat to the dominant discourse.

Talk of dominant discourses is similar to the issue of alignment in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998a). Alignment refers to our positioning and engagement with

certain ideas and/or ways of doing things and the coordination of our energy and actions within a particular group (e.g., Catholics align themselves with the teachings of the Bible). While many critical realists take the view that reification and dominant discourses are negative and to be avoided, the social constructionist and communities of practice frameworks focus on simply recognizing the role that each plays in one's culture and practice. For example, Wenger (1998a) explains the importance of alignment, saying:

“Going along” – through willing allegiance or mere submission – is a form of identification because it shapes the way we experience our own power and thus contributes to defining our identity.... Aligning our efforts with the styles and discourses of certain institutions, movements, or systems of thought can be a very profound aspect of how we define ourselves. (p. 196)

Thus for graduate students in training, understanding how they are aligned (or not aligned) with disciplinary regimes and recognizing who or what is being silenced or privileged by these regimes can lead to an understanding of how what they “know” is impacted by the dominant discourses involved. Full participants (Wenger, 1998a) in a community of practice can also have an impact on a newcomer's ability to access to certain elements of the community's practice (Hogan, 2002). This can take the form of gate keeping, non-access to participation, non-access to information, or any other practice that does not allow access to all of the elements of full participation in the community. While this initially seems negative, it can, in some cases, be a good thing for legitimate peripheral participants if they are not prepared to take on the responsibilities of full membership in the community's practice. All of these power issues can have a very

significant effect on student's identity as competent members of their community of practice (Wenger, 1998a).

Reflexivity

One way of getting beyond dominant discourses and subjugation by regimes is through reflexivity (e.g., Chia, 1996; Woolgar, 1988). Reflexivity in social constructionism “refers to the issue of explicitly acknowledging the personal and political values and perspective informing [our thoughts and actions]” (Burr, 2003, p. 157). Similarly, Wenger (1998a) explains the notion of “reflective practice” (Schön, 1983) in communities of practice as combining the ability to “identify with an enterprise as well as to view it in context, with the eyes of an outsider” (p. 217). Both of these definitions point to the ability to evaluate one's own involvement in the co-creation of knowledge, which can be a valuable asset for graduate students who fail to see the performative nature of their own use of language, as well as their involvement in issues of power.

Unique Contributions of Social Constructionism

One of the most significant contributions of social constructionism is its critical stance (Danziger, 1997). Taken-for-granted, modernist views of reality are challenged on the grounds that they are arbitrary, that is, not reflective of any ultimate reality beyond words. This critical stance toward knowledge can be a powerful tool for guiding graduate students through the task of trying to decipher through hundreds of books, journal articles, and people's opinions, each proclaiming a (different) version of reality. The literature found for this review is a perfect example. Thus the critical stance enables students to re-conceptualize academia as a forum for “local” truth claims and a vehicle for disseminating “dominant” truth claims, as opposed to a battleground over who is

“really” right or wrong. This opens the door to new ways of viewing the world, which do not fit into the traditional binaries (Gergen, 1998) of understanding.

Bruner (1986) writes about how getting beyond our dualist (binary) representations of the world is achieved through a “polyvocal” approach to reality, where the existence of “multiple (and even competing) realities” is accepted and encouraged. This allows the voices of those previously subjugated by dominant discourses to be heard alongside the dominant ones. There is no attempt to privilege any of the voices, rather they are left to co-exist, despite their potential contradictions. This is referred to as moving from binaries (an “either/or” position) to generative theory (a “both/and” perspective) (Gergen, 1994). Thus knowledge is no longer examined for its ability to determine truth or mirror reality; rather it is understood for its use as a local tool for engaging in the social world (Gergen, 1998).

Unique Contributions of Communities of Practice

One of the most useful elements of the communities of practice framework is its focus on tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1983) as a key for learning in communities. Tacit knowledge (as opposed to explicit knowledge) is defined as being “implied and understood implicitly in the situation, without being definable and visible” (Kreiner, 2002, p. 114). It points to the locality of knowledge creation by being one of the distinguishing features between those people who are and are not community members. Engagement in a community of practice enables newcomers to gain access to the tacit knowledge that is part of the community’s practice through the process of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Swart & Pye, 2002). As legitimate peripheral participants engage peripherally in the community’s practice and gain

knowledge and competence, they move toward full participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and a more central and distinguished role in the community. This is especially important for graduate students training in fields where immediate (full) participation in the community's enterprise (consulting) could be damaging to clients and, thus, students' future careers in the field.

Informal, Non-Formal, and Formal Learning Environments

One of the key elements that is shared by both social constructionism and the communities of practice framework is an emphasis on the importance of informal learning contexts as a legitimate venue for knowledge building. This is traditionally contrasted with a formal learning environments, and more recently, a non-formal learning environment which situates itself between the formal and informal contexts. Since the first definition of informal education by Malcolm Knowles (1950), definitions of informal learning have been numerous and varied (See Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2002 for a detailed history of non-formal learning). In fact, Malcolm, Hodkinson, and Colley (2003) explain that "there is a complete lack of agreement in the literature about what informal, non-formal, and formal learning are, or what the boundaries between them might be" (p. 313). For example Burns and Schaefer (2003) state that "informal learning has been defined as learning that is predominantly unstructured, not taking place in an institution of learning" (p. 7), while Marsick and Watkins (2001) explain that "informal learning... may occur in institutions, but is not typically classroom-based or highly structured" (p. 25). Another definition posits that "informal learning can be either planned or unplanned and structured or unstructured (Lohman, 2006, p. 142). However, one theme that seems to be common to all of the definitions is that "informal...

learning take[s] place wherever people have the need, motivation, and opportunity for learning” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 28).

Another area in which there is a lack of consensus surrounding these forms of learning relates to the language that is used to describe them. In the literature, the terms formal, informal, and non-formal have been mainly used to refer to *learning* or *education*. Recently however, a few authors (i.e., Jarvis, 2006; Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, n.d.; Trudel, Gilbert, & Werthner, n.d.) have pointed out that it is more appropriate to talk about learning in *situations* that are formal, informal, or non-formal. This puts the emphasis on the context in which the learning or education takes places rather than the formality/informality/non-formality being a descriptor of the learning or education itself. While this may be seen as a minor languaging issue, it does have important implications in how the current research was carried out since it changed the emphasis from the content (i.e., contrasting formal versus non-formal learning) to the context (i.e., contrasting a formal learning environment versus a non-formal learning environment).

A second languaging issue relates to the use of the terms learning and education. While some authors do not appear to differentiate between the two terms in their writings (e.g., Coombs & Ahmed, 1974), there is a growing recognition of the distinctions between the two and their respective importance in the co-creation of knowledge (e.g., Mallett et al., n.d.) . In brief, the Western view of education positions it as the institutionalisation of learning or the social provision of the opportunities to learn and be taught formally, while learning is seen as the process that occurs within and among individuals (Jarvis, 2006).

Given the distinctions mentioned above, for the purposes of this research I have chosen to adopt the definition of a non-formal learning situation as one in which the learning is mediated by another person where the emphasis is on a less structured, learner-centered, present-time focused process. This is in contrast to an informal learning situation which, in this research, is considered as: “learning from experience that takes place outside formally structured, institutionally sponsored, classroom-based activities” (Watkins & Marsick, 1992, p. 288), in which “control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 25) and a formal learning situation, which I characterize as being formally structured, institutionally sponsored, and classroom-based. While I am trying to make these distinctions clear for this research, some authors have not always defined them the same way. Therefore, when referring to the works of authors on this topic, whenever possible I have preserved the terminology they originally employed in their writings.

Research on non-formal and informal learning has recently been flooded with a variety of alternate types of learning to formal education, such as peer learning (e.g., Anderson & Boud, 1996; Boud et al., 2001; Styhre, 2006), peer mentoring (e.g., Holbeche, 1996), proctoring (e.g., Anderson & Boud, 1996; Griffiths, Houston, & Lazenbatt, 1995), and collaborative or collective learning (e.g., Lee, 2003; Mittendorf, Geijsel, Hoeve, de Latt, & Nieuwenhuis, 2006), to name a few. All of these types of learning fall under the general umbrella of “informal learning”, the term commonly used to contrast this type of learning from formal learning.

While relatively new to the education literature, non-formal learning is quickly becoming recognized as a valuable middle ground between the formal and the informal. Eshach (2007) explains that:

Non-formal learning occurs in a planned but highly adaptable manner in institutions, organizations, and situations beyond the spheres of formal or informal education. It shares the characteristics of being mediated with formal education but the motivation for learning may be wholly intrinsic to the learner. (p. 173)

Non-formal learning is described as being more learner-centered, present time focused, responsive to localized needs and less structured, and often there is a non-hierarchical relationship between the learner and facilitator (Jarvis, 1987; Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004). Non-formal learning experiences can also pose a variety of challenges often not found to the same degree in formal learning settings, including the fact that participation is voluntary and participants can come and go as they please (Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004). The research on non-formal learning appears to be very scarce and Eshach (2007) notes that student perspectives on non-formal learning are even harder to find.

In recent years, research and consulting on learning outside of the formal training and education setting has been growing rapidly in the business world as companies try to find ways to gain an advantage over their competitors and increase worker productivity and satisfaction. The advent of increased research and attention on informal learning has helped to promote alternative forms of learning and contexts in which it takes place. However, most research of this type implies the view that formal and informal learning

are distinct and even opposite to one another. Recent findings by Malcolm, Hodgkinson, and Colley (2003) suggest that this may not necessarily be the case in practice: “We concluded that it is not possible to clearly define separate ideal-types of formal and informal learning, which bear any relations to actual learning experiences” (p. 314). The authors continue to explain that their findings suggest that all formal situations involve some degree of informality and vice versa. This finding highlights the relevance of non-formal learning as a context which combines the most beneficial aspects of informal learning and formal education and emphasizes the overlap between the two. It also supports the need for a generative view of education, raising many important questions regarding the current binary views in the education system on the relationship between informal and formal learning, and the importance of the former in the education process. This sentiment is reflected in a statement by Boud (2001), who says:

As teachers, we often fool ourselves into thinking that what we do is necessarily more important for student learning than other activities in which they engage. Our role is vital. However if we place ourselves in the position of mediating all that students need to know, we not only create unrealistic expectations but we potentially deskill students by preventing them from developing the vital skills of effectively learning from each other needed in life and work. (p. 2)

Based on this understanding, the examination of informal learning then complements the formal learning process, whereby formal education needs to be backed up by informal learning in order to be effective (Barnett, 1999; Elleström, 2001, Svensson, Elleström, & Aberg, 2004). This sentiment is echoed in research on workplace learning where many

studies have concluded that a very large portion of workplace learning is done through informal means (e.g., Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Sorohan, 1993).

One of the most common informal learning contexts where researchers are focusing their attention is in learning among peers (e.g., Anderson & Boud, 1996; Boud et al., 2001; Knapper & Cropley, 2000; Styhre, 2006). Whether at school, at work or in one's personal life, peers play a significant role in the learning process (Boud, 2001): "Peer learning is not a single, undifferentiated educational approach: it encompasses a diverse range of activities" (Anderson & Boud, 1996, p. 15). In the educational context, Anderson and Boud (1996) suggest that peer learning will become even more important in the future due to the demand of universities to improve teaching quality with minimal resources. They cite three major factors as contributing to the increase in importance. First, the nature of the higher education social context is changing whereby learners no longer consider themselves passive recipients of knowledge, but rather as being directly and actively involved in their education. Second, learning is now being understood as a social process, not only a psychological one, therefore learners are becoming more involved with each other and are shaping both the learning environment and the content of the learning. Third, learners are now subscribing to broader personal and social goals and the focus has turned to concepts such as lifelong learning (e.g., Jarvis, 2004; Knapper & Cropley, 2000): "The acquisition of knowledge and skill alone is no longer an adequate goal for a student today. At a time when much technical knowledge has a half-life of five years or less mastery of content is not sufficient" (Anderson & Boud, 1996, p. 17).

Technology has quickly become an important part of both formal and informal learning processes. Advances in technology over the last couple of decades have

significantly changed the way adults learn together. For example, Mason (2006) says online learning is particularly appropriate for adult continuing education because “it is more flexible than face-to-face teaching, it supports a self-directed approach to learning rather than a teacher-directed approach and it facilitates choice and the use of a wide range of resources” (p. 121). Weller, Pegler, and Mason (2005) expand on the prevalence and importance of technology in adult education, saying: “Many Internet technologies that were once seen as new and innovative are now considered mainstream, such as web sites, asynchronous text conferences, streaming audio/video and even synchronous collaboration tools such as shared whiteboards” (p. 61). Milheim (2007) points out that technology not only impacts students’ formal education, it can also play a significant role in the informal learning among students in an adult education settings as well.

One of the most important reasons for the recent attention on the various forms of informal learning is that organizations are finding that training alone is not enough to meet the demands of continuous learning (Watkins & Marsick, 1992). Facilitating informal learning through a non-formal structure may present a new way for organizations and educational institutions to progress and keep pace with industry and education. A variety of methods of “influencing” informal learning are possible. For example, Marsick and Watkins (1990) stipulate that informal learning strategies can include or involve mentoring, coaching, networking, modeling, effective leadership facilitation, inter-relational aspects of teams, and individual characteristics and capabilities. Many of these strategies point to a qualified other as a collaborator in the quest to harness or facilitate informal learning. Thus the question of who may serve as a facilitator in this type of learning context becomes as important as how it is facilitated.

Facilitation

The “facilitation” of learning has become the popular term for describing how a new learner-centred focus has come to dominate views on learning in many fields (e.g., Bentley, 1994; Brookfield, 1991; Heron, 1993, 2002; Marsick & Watkins, 1999):

“Teaching is no longer seen as imparting and doing things to the student, but is redefined as facilitation of self-directed learning. How people learn, and how to bring about this process, become the focus of concern, rather than the old-style preoccupation with how to teach things to people” (Heron, 1999, p. 2). Recently, there has been a growing interest in both the study and application of facilitation techniques, mainly in the fields of business and education (e.g., Claridge & Lewis, 2005; Hughes, 2002; Perry, 1995; Robertson, 1996). This has led to a wide variety of definitions and applications of the term “facilitation”. For example Brockbank and McGill (2000) explain that “for many people facilitation is just another way of teaching. The teacher behaves in a different way, encouraging the class or group to contribute, but ultimately tells them what to learn, how to learn it and how it will be assessed” (p. 145). Others (e.g., Kirk & Broussine, 2000) contend that facilitation is a value-laden, subjective, biased process and call for political awareness when dealing with facilitation.

Facilitation may be thought of as a part of the political dynamics at play in systems...Organizations are political, facilitation is political, and facilitators are political...[The goal is] to add to understanding about how facilitators may act more confidently, authoritatively, and ethically in the complex, dynamic and unpredictable role of facilitator. (Kirk & Broussine, 2002, p. 13)

Despite many different understandings and versions of facilitation, there do seem to be some common elements used in explaining its purpose. A number of these are exemplified in the statement by Kirk and Broussine (2000) that: “the aim of facilitation is, we believe, to establish and hold an environment within which learning is created. The task of facilitation is to enable the group to create learning and to be aware of the processes of doing so experientially through the dynamics of the group” (p. 13). This will also be the same aim and task of facilitation that I will be adopting in this research.

Facilitating Learning

In his book, *The Complete Facilitator's Handbook*, Heron (1999) describes the concept of tutelary authority in the facilitation of *whole person* learning in higher, continuing, and adult education. The author contrasts tutelary authority with political or charismatic authority, saying the former “involves mastery of some body of knowledge and skill and of appropriate teaching and learning methods for students to acquire it, effective communication to learners through the written and spoken word and other presentations, and guardianship of learners needs and interests, rights and duties” (p. 25).

Heron (1999) also advances a series of tutelary procedures for initiating or empowering people “through the *rituals of entry* into their inner resources, their wellsprings of freedom and wholeness, the heritage of their personhood” (p. 24). Although he appears to advance these procedures for facilitators who are also in a teaching role, Heron’s definition of a facilitator in this case is not exclusive to teachers: “What I mean by a facilitator in this book is a person who has the role of empowering participants to learn in an experiential group” (p.1). Thus the tutelary procedures advanced by Heron can be applicable outside of the teacher-as-facilitator role. Figure 1

represents Heron's eight procedures involved in tutelary authority. These procedures provide a helpful model for facilitating learning in higher education.

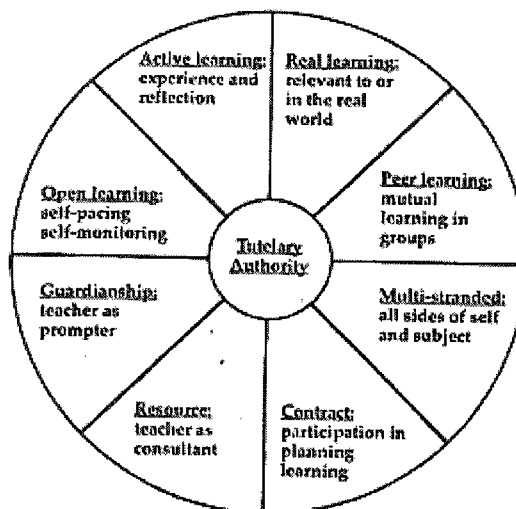


Figure A. Heron's (1999) tutelary procedures.

Briefly, open learning puts emphasis on the provision of open learning materials such as packages of information and exercises that take account of self-pacing and self-monitoring. Active learning involves participative methods such as games, simulations, role plays and other structured activities. Real learning includes projects and other work outside of the learning context. Peer learning connects students with their colleagues, reflecting the importance of co-operation in learning, experience, and reflection. Multi-stranded curriculum emphasizes a holistic view of learning that includes all sides of the self and the subject. Contract learning allows the student to participate in the design and assessment of their own learning. Resource consultancy places the facilitator in the role of resource person to the student when there is need for clarification, discussion, and support. Finally guardianship promotes the facilitator as the guardian of students' needs and interests, alerting them to unexplored possibilities, new and exciting issues, interests and concerns, all the while reminding them of the issues discussed and commitments

made. The combination of these eight procedures helps to promote learning in a broader context which is less limiting of the form and process that learning takes. The facilitator's role then becomes focused on providing a variety of possibilities in terms of learning contexts and opportunities and allowing the students to choose which ones they feel are most helpful and appropriate for the topic at hand.

Facilitating the Community of Practice

The issue of facilitation has recently become a central theme in the community of practice literature (e.g., Fontaine, 2001; Smith & McKeen, 2003; Tarmizi, de Vreede, & Zigurs, 2006; Wenger et al., 2002). The role of the facilitator has been signalled as being crucial to both the development and the maintenance of communities of practice (Tarmizi et al., 2006). Two aspects that are important to the facilitation of informal learning in communities of practice are the development of a process for learning and sharing knowledge, and a setting or context that is conducive to engaging in the process. As Wenger (1998a) explains: "Learning entails both a process and a place... To support learning is not only to support the process of acquiring knowledge, but also to offer a place where new ways of knowing can be realized" (p. 215). This includes both physical spaces such as meeting facilities and virtual spaces such as communications technology (Wenger, 1998a; 1998b).

Power

One issue that is central to all learning relationships is the topic of power. While some relationships such as peer learning may seemingly have only minor issues with imbalances of power, others such as the teacher-student relationship (Jamieson & Thomas, 1974; Schwarzwald, Koslowski, & Brody-Shamir, 2006) often cannot escape

them. As Boud and Miller (1996) explain: “in educational institutions the fact that teachers make assessments of learners to which the learners are not party, and which can have consequences for the lives of learners beyond the immediate situation, introduces a constraint on the kinds of learning relationships which are possible” (p. 15). Tisdell (1996) echoes this statement saying:

There are many implied assumptions about teaching and learning in [a university] context. While one may want to create a learning environment where power disparities are done away with, there is no getting around the fact that universities have some power over teachers and teachers always have some power over students. It is impossible to get outside of these particular power relations which are structured into the very life of the university. (p. 114)

Pettman (1996) gives a moving firsthand feminist account of her struggle as a teacher to minimize the power differential between her and her students while still respecting the demands of her role as a teacher:

I work very hard at giving up on authority, even while using both expert and referential power – what I’ve come to know and resources I use in this field... But I also have reward power, to pass, fail, to confirm or destroy chances and choices. Another describes the likes of me as ‘the bearded mother’ (Morgan 1987: 50), expected, and often wanting, to nurture, to be accessible and supportive on personal as well as education terms, asserting an ethic of care. But with assessment and grading ‘the mother’ becomes more like the stereotypical father, whose approval turns out to be conditional. I call attention to the power relations within which we work, which many are well aware of; inform them as best I can

about my expectations and the various tests through which they must pass, and encourage collaborative learning and endless conversations which prompt and cue and give feedback and encouragement. But the bottom line remains as my power, and paid responsibility, to judge. (p. 107)

This last statement speaks to the many different forms of power that are possible and their effects on the teacher-student relationship. In particular it refers to the power that is inherent and required in the position of teacher (i.e., position power). This is referred to as 'legitimate power' (e.g., Erchul & Raven 1997; French & Raven, 1959). Basically position or "legitimate power is rooted in [person] B's obligation to accept [person] A's influence attempt because B believes A has a legitimate right to influence, perhaps because of A's position within the organization" (Erchul & Raven, 1997, p. 138).

While position power can often be difficult or even impossible to overcome in the teacher-student relationship, this is not necessarily the case with some forms of facilitation. For example Heron (1998) describes the 'co-operative mode' of facilitation, explaining:

Here you share your power over the learning process and manage the different dimensions *with* the group. You enable and guide the group to become more self-directing in the various forms of learning by conferring with them and prompting them. You work with group members to decide on the programme, to give meaning to experiences, to confront resistances, and so on. In this process, you share your own view which though influential, is not final but one among many. Outcomes are always negotiated. You collaborate with the members of the group

in devising the learning process: your facilitation is co-operative. (p. 8, emphasis in original)

Speaking on the facilitation of reflective learning in higher education, Brockbank and McGill (1998) allude to the co-operative distribution of power between facilitators and students in the learning context:

The relationship required to nurture critically reflective learning, is mutual rather than one-way, open to difference and uncertainty, rather than being tied to inflexible outcomes, able to accommodate the questioning of established ideas, connected to the other by virtue of dialogue, rather than estranged, and, recognizing the existential reality of social and political contexts, rather than losing the value of tacit and personal knowledge in student learners. (p. 147)

While co-operative and other similar modes of facilitation do not guarantee overcoming issues of legitimate power, they can have a significant role in minimizing them. In some instances, certain types of power are not necessarily negative despite there being an imbalance, such as the case with expert power (French & Raven, 1959). As Erchul and Raven (1997) explain “expert power stems from B’s perception that A possess knowledge or expertise in a designated area” (p. 138). For facilitators this can be seen as a positive attribute, where students recognize their expertise in the process of facilitation, and possibly on some of the topics discussed. This is the case in the current research, since the researcher is also a former student in the program in which the participants are currently enrolled. Expert power in facilitation can be particularly helpful when adopting a co-operative mode of facilitation where the voice of the facilitator is, as Heron (1998)

puts it, “not final, but one among many” (p. 8), since it can be seen as the “voice” of experience.

To summarize the important points raised in the review of literature and provide a rationale for this research; there is a growing consensus that training alone is no longer enough to meet the demands of continuous learning. Thus there is a need for a more generative view of learning to be incorporated into training and education. One way of doing this is to encourage and integrate other forms of learning (e.g., informal and non-formal) to complement students’ formal learning, training, and education. Social constructionism provides a theoretical viewpoint that supports the development of generative learning and the integration of other forms of learning through its emphasis on the social nature of knowledge and knowing. In addition, the communities of practice framework provides a structure for understanding how knowledge is created and shared informally within groups through the negotiation of meaning between community members. Recent research has pointed to the growing role of facilitation in various learning contexts, including communities of practice. Some forms of facilitation are said to play a significant role in minimizing some of the power issues that are present in the graduate learning context. All of these findings point to the possibility of finding better ways to provide training, education, and learning opportunities to graduate students.

Purpose

Given the issues mentioned above, the purpose of this study is to investigate the following general research questions:

1. Can a community of practice be created in a graduate student context? In what ways do group processes initiated by the introduction of a non-formal learning

environment compare and contrast with the tenets of the communities of practice framework?

2. What roles does a person acting as a collaborative researcher, co-participant, group facilitator, resource person, and former student in the program play in the learning processes among a group of students in a non-formal setting?
3. How does engaging students in non-formal learning situations (i.e. discussions on undefined topics facilitated by non-teaching staff outside of the classroom) impact their learning? How does the creation of this type of facilitated learning environment impact on the other contexts and relationships that are part of the students' academic program?

The main focus of this research is on discovering how the creation and facilitation of a community of practice with a group of new students in an applied graduate training program impacts on their learning. My goal is to promote learning within the group of master's students, despite the focus on individual learning that is prevalent in the university setting (Gergen, 1999; Resnick, 1987). In addition, I am seeking to better understand the role that I played as a facilitator in the group, but also taking into account my many other roles, positions, and personal attributes that might relate to the students' learning and how these may have influenced the group's relationship and interactions with me. Finally, regardless of whether a community of practice was formed or not, I wanted to investigate the impact of having regular meetings with students on topics of their choosing, to see if this was a worthwhile endeavour for both the students and the facilitator. In particular, I wanted to know if the non-formal learning environment that I

created and facilitated was helpful to the students in their quest to become competent practitioners in their field and graduates of the program.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This section begins by introducing the methods used in the research - a modified collaborative inquiry process - and describes and explains the four phases of implementing a collaborative inquiry group in relation to the current research. Next I describe the participants/co-researchers, elaborate on my multiple roles in the research process, and describe the context in which the research took place. I then move on to describe the data collection techniques, which include transcripts from regular group meetings, individual interviews, meeting notes, and personal reflections. Next, I explain the procedures and tools that were used to analyze the data. Finally, the trustworthiness of the research is examined in relationship to its internal validity, reliability, generalizability, and authenticity.

Collaborative Inquiry

Based on its alignment with the tenets of communities of practice and social constructionism and the nature of the topic, participants, researcher, and context, this study adopted a methodology that combines two variations of the collaborative inquiry process. In the first variation, the attempt to create and facilitate a community of practice was a collaborative endeavour that positioned the researcher as a participant in the process and included the students as co-designers of the collaborative inquiry process in which we engaged over the course of the project. This description fits well with what Bray et al. (2000) define as a collaborative inquiry for *learning* purposes. Conversely, in the second variation the understanding that the knowledge co-created during the collaborative inquiry would be used to help others learn from the participants'

experiences created a way of interacting and collecting information that is more in-line with the definition of a collaborative inquiry as a *research method*. However, a collaborative inquiry as a research method also involves the participants as collaborators on the research design, the inquiry questions, and the dissemination of results. This was not possible in the current research, in part because of the need to have one's research design and inquiry questions completed at the proposal stage of the doctoral research process, long before engaging with the participants. Therefore, the current research could not implement a collaborative inquiry purely as a research method and instead employed a blend of both of these types of collaborative inquiry in a way that does not appear to have been considered in the research literature up to this point.

Despite the lack of studies combining the two types of collaborative inquiry, Bray and colleagues (2000) assert that elements of both types exist in most collaborative inquiry-based research projects. In fact, the authors argue that nearly all collaborative inquiry research continually oscillates on a continuum between collaborative inquiry for research purposes and collaborative inquiry as an adult learning strategy. In other words, Bray et al. do not appear to see these two variations as being distinct from one another, rather they are considered opposing "sides" of the same process (i.e. engaging collaboratively with others in the quest to create new knowledge).

Given that a collaborative inquiry can be seen as a blending of research and learning purposes, likewise, participation in a collaborative inquiry may also involve a blend of people who joined the group for research and/or learning purposes. Thus, despite not all participants being directly involved in both the research and learning portions of the collaborative inquiry, it can still be considered a collaborative inquiry. This is inline

with the tenets of the community of practice framework, whereby a joint enterprise is necessary for group membership, but members contribute to the community in different ways and use the knowledge that is created within the community of practice in a variety of ways that suit their interests and needs. In the same fashion, within this research project there is a joint enterprise (i.e. creating a non-formal environment to enhance student learning outside of the classroom), but the reasons of members for joining the group were not all the same and not everyone was interested in contributing in the same way.

Given the inherent differences between the participants' reasons for joining the inquiry and my own, it would make sense that we would have different inquiry questions – mine relating to research (which would be of less concern to my “co-researchers”) and the inquiry questions that were created collaboratively with the entire group throughout the research process (which were of importance to both myself and the rest of the students). While these inquiry questions were somewhat different, they were overlapping at key points (which is where the joint enterprise of the inquiry is shared) and also influenced each other.

According to Bray and colleagues (2000), there are three major characteristics that distinguish both types of collaborative inquiry from other types of methodologies. First, participants in the research are seen as “co-researchers” (although in this case, their “research” was focused on themselves, not on my academic research questions), eliminating the barrier between researcher and participant that is present in many other forms of research. Next, the research includes cycles of reflection and action on lived experiences. Finally, the research involves a question that is of importance to all the

inquirers. These three characteristics combine to create an openness in the inquiry design to alternative ways of collecting, analyzing, and reporting data. This allows for an emergent design in the co-construction of meaning between participants rather than rigid rules to guide the transmission of information among them.

The notion of research participants as “co-researchers” is fundamental to the collaborative inquiry process as it establishes the relationship between the participants and the researcher as one built on co-operation and a joint effort at answering a question of significance to both groups. Inherent in this assertion is the notion that the researcher, then, is also a co-participant (Bray et al., 2000; Torbert, 1981). This creates a dynamic relationship between the two groups in which the topic of the research is jointly negotiated at the outset and adjusted as necessary while the research is underway (Bray et al., 2000; Torbert, 1981).

The design of this research falls directly in line with the collaborative inquiry process in that it focused heavily on collaboration between the researcher and the participants, particularly for the generation of topics for discussion and activities during meetings, as well as the way in which meetings were conducted, both in terms of content and process. However, while the thoughts, comments, questions, opinions, etc. of participants had a significant influence over the way the study was designed at the outset and the way the data was analyzed, participants were not directly involved in these processes. As mentioned above, there is a distinction to be made between the research questions that I designed and studied, and the topics or questions that were the subject of the group meetings, which the participants and I co-created. While the participants and I worked collaboratively in developing the ongoing content, focus, and processes involved

in the meetings, they were not actively involved in the development of the three research questions that formed the heart of this dissertation.

The reflection and action cycles in collaborative inquiry form the core activity of the data collection process. It is during these cycles that the group acts on its inquiry questions and engages in a reflective dialogue, which enables it to negotiate the purpose of the group's existence and the success of its achievements in relationship to the goals it has set for itself. While there are general protocols or guidelines for the manner in which these cycles unfold, Bray and colleagues (2000) stipulate that: "how these episodes or cycles of reflection and action are organized depends on the question the group is exploring and the constraints under which the group is functioning... [and] the form and timing of the reflection and action also vary according to the purpose of the inquiry" (p. 10). The specific details on how the cycles of reflection and action unfolded in this research are presented at the beginning of the discussion section.

The third and final characteristic of the collaborative inquiry process is that the research is focused on a question of importance to all of the inquirers. This element could be said to be "built in" to this particular research for three reasons. First, the adoption of a community of practice framework ensured a focus on the joint enterprise of the group, which, by definition, entails a question of importance to all of the group members. Next, the nature of the research itself – the creation of a non-formal learning environment where students chose the topics for discussion – implies that the topics were of interest to the students since they were the ones generating them. Finally, despite most students not being involved in the development of my research questions, the focus of my research on

facilitating the learning opportunities for them outside of the classroom did generate ongoing interest which is evidenced by students' continued participation in the meetings.

These three characteristics offer a different view and method rather than the traditional positivist research protocol because they demonstrate how collaborative inquiry is focused on working *with* participants in creating research that is useful, appropriate, and trustworthy. This type of methodology is not as straightforward and controlling as the traditional positivist research protocol and requires constant monitoring and active reshaping: "Research, as understood in the model of collaborative inquiry, is an actual experiential process occurring in a more or less distorted and incomplete fashion at any given moment" (Torbert, 1981, p. 150).

Participants/Co-Researchers

The research participants/co-researchers consist of a community of learners composed of first and second year master of arts students in a graduate applied sport psychology internship program at a Canadian university. Seven students made up the primary group of participants in this research. They were followed through their entire master's degree, which lasted four semesters for all but one student (#5) who took five semesters to complete the degree. An eighth person (#8) was originally part of the group and was interviewed after semester #1, but switched to the thesis program after the first semester and therefore was not interviewed again after semester 1. Quotes from these eight participants are followed (in parentheses) by the participant's randomly assigned identification number (from Participant 1 to Participant 8) and the number of the semester (from Semester 1 to Semester 4) in which the interview from which the quote came was conducted.

A secondary group of participants, who were recruited in the same way as mentioned above, consisted of eight “new” students who began their master of arts degree in the same program one year after the primary group (in Semester 1), which created a one semester overlap between the two groups. Quotes from these participants are labeled in parentheses (Participant 9 through Participant 16) based on the identification they were randomly assigned. There is no semester number, since this group was only interviewed once (after Semester 4). A third group of participants consisted of four professors who taught the students in the program. Quotes from them are labeled (in parentheses) from professor 1 to professor 4 based on their randomly assigned identification number. Student ages ranged from 22 to 35 years. For ease of reference and to avoid any details that could reveal the identities of students or faculty members, all students are referred to in the female gender while all professors are referred to in the male gender.

From the primary group of participants, I attempted to facilitate the formation of a community of practice focused on ways to understand and enhance the social learning process in a non-formal context within the applied sport psychology program. In the second year of this research I invited the secondary group of participants to join the developing community of practice. Professors were not invited to join the community of practice because it was felt that this would severely impact student openness due to the professors’ positional or legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959). While there was no guarantee going in that a community of practice would be formed, the context in which this research took place pointed to the strong potential for one to develop because of the

common interests of students and their continual access to each other throughout their master's degree.

Student Group Profiles

Throughout the results and discussion sections, I describe my perceptions of the two student groups. However, at this point it is useful to provide a basic profile of each of the two groups in order to get a sense of how the dynamics and personalities might have impacted the learning of each group. My interviews with the four professors who were the most involved in the students' learning provided a valuable perspective on each group that helps to better understand each one of them. The following account incorporates direct quotes from all four of the professors that are "stitched together" in the form of a first-person narrative to provide a rich description of the most prominent attributes of the primary group of students in the research and briefly contrast them with those of the secondary students. As the students' instructors, all four professors were involved on a day-to-day basis with students and therefore were in a good position to describe each group in detail. The following is their description of the groups:

I thought the [primary group of students] were an interesting group compared to other groups that we've had... I would say that it was a group that was not very confident to start off with, not necessarily as... outgoing as other groups and so we had to spoon feed them quite a bit just to get them to feel ready and confident and do a little bit of extra stuff for them... It was a bit more of an anxious group... based on the questions they would have during the course, the anxiety that they would show in terms of being able to do the assignments and they seemed to be very worried about what was coming next a lot and not feeling ready to do the internship. I think that was the biggest thing. It seemed

like we, as a group of professors, had to reassure them a lot. And they were quite afraid of the unknown I think. I felt kind of a contradiction [from them]. They would say “we learn more from practice than through theory” but at the same time they were looking for THE method of consultation. So at the beginning it was like “tell me what to do and we’re going to do it and I’m going to be good and I’m going to be able to consult. I am going to be confident because I know this one”. ... But it’s a lot of, “What about this? What about that?” and how the students can survive in the program... I think that aspect of surviving outside of the class was higher than the group before. They didn’t have a lot of experience, or experiences in working with people in numerous capacities, with a couple of exceptions, and they were a little anxious about how the program was going to go. But I think of when I was doing my master’s out of undergrad I was pretty anxious too. So I’m not sure that’s so unusual. I don’t know if you can ever say it, but if I was to choose I might say this group was probably more typical [than the second group].

I can’t say that it was a really good group in terms of cohesion. There didn’t seem to be any overt conflicts but there were maybe 2 or 3 students that had a little bit of a different kind of personality... I felt that in general they were quite insecure and it might have been fuelled by a couple of the leaders, what I perceived as the leaders. So I found they were very insecure and they needed a lot of reassurance... But I think towards the end they were able to work things out because often they had to do group work, group projects... I would say that in the second year, even in that last semester there appeared to be more formation, more unity within the group. And I know for a fact that a lot of the students worked together outside of the classroom based on what they said.

[The students in the secondary group] are the ones that I would consider keen,

outgoing, quite confident as first year students coming in, just being little sponges and absorbing everything and kind of going beyond what is expected of them. There's more energy and more synergy as well in the group, so they just kind of came in and just kind of picked up and ran with the information, probably even more than the second years were doing, so... I know that they probably started working together as a group themselves, perhaps not feeling like they needed the second year students... There is a difference for sure if I think of this group when they started in September and last year's group. But on another level I don't think it's unexpected and I actually think I might say in this group there are a few people who are a bit overconfident.

My Roles in the Research

My participation in this research was multifaceted, with several overlapping, interrelated functions and relationships with the participants. Among others, I occupied the roles of principal researcher, co-participant, group facilitator, resource person, graduate student, and former student in my participants' program. Although there are a number of other roles or positions that I also occupy (e.g., male, athlete, son, etc.), each of those mentioned above were thought to play a significant part in the research since they are directly related to the context in which the collaborative inquiry took place. However it was expected that my main roles in the research would be that of researcher and meeting facilitator.

I entered this study as an experienced researcher, having completed an honours undergraduate thesis on an unrelated sport psychology topic and a master's thesis on understanding sport teams as communities of practice. This prepared me for the current research by enhancing my knowledge on planning, conducting, writing up, and

disseminating research at conferences and in journal articles, as well as providing me with in-depth knowledge about communities of practice. As a doctoral student I learned about social constructionism through courses and through my involvement in many of my supervisor's research projects. Being a former student in the consultant training program I was studying gave me an intimate knowledge of many of the challenges that master's students face in trying to become competent practitioners and graduate from the program. My learning experiences with my colleagues during my master's degree opened my eyes to new ways of learning in that context that I had never seen before nor thought were possible. This is what gave me the interest and motivation to pursue this line of research in my Ph.D.

As the resource person for the consultant training centre I was responsible for maintaining the physical space and managing the borrowing of electronic equipment that students used frequently in their courses. I also made myself available as often as possible to answer any questions students may have had and to consult with them on issues related to the courses and the program more generally. During the study, I worked in the centre as often as possible to give students easy access to me and to maximize my interactions with them, with the goal of enhancing our rapport with one another. This positioned me as a central figure both within the learning process of students (through the knowledge I acquired in the master's program and my experiences as a consultant and doctoral student) and their learning context (since many of the courses, informal meetings, and practice consulting sessions took place in the training centre).

During the study, I adopted a mainly collaborative approach to my interactions with the group and individual members. This positioned me as much as a co-participant

in the research as a group facilitator. During meetings (and outside of meetings), I frequently engaged with the group in the role of former student, relating to their experiences and sharing my own stories from when I was studying in the program. However at other times in the meetings, I acted more as a facilitator, organizing the structure of the discussions (but not the content) and trying to encourage students to share with, and learn from, each other.

Adopting a collaborative inquiry methodology in the research allowed me to acknowledge and closely examine the influence that I had in the research, instead of trying to eliminate potential influences or biases that may have occurred due to my in-depth involvement in the study. For this reason, questions related to my roles and my relationship with the participants were included in the interview guide and are explored in detail in the results and discussion sections of this research.

Context

The applied professional program involved in this research is part of a larger department, which houses a number of different interrelated disciplines. The program is dedicated to the development of sport psychology consultants through a series of graduate-level courses and a supervised internship. Despite having a variety of interests and paradigmatic approaches to learning (positivist, constructivist, social constructivist) professors have always worked closely and collaboratively with each other in the design and implementation of the curriculum. I have witnessed first-hand the interest of professors in improving the program and promoting collaborative learning through informal discussions with them, in their research projects, and in their involvement in curriculum changes and the development of *The Training Centre* (or “*The Consultant*

Training Centre”) over the course of this research. Some professors played key roles in the learning process of students while others had a more peripheral role, depending on the professor’s assigned course load and individual student interests.

The Consultant Training Centre provided a physical location where students could connect to discuss or practice their consulting skills as well as being the place where many of the students’ courses took place. Wenger explains that: “learning entails both a process and a place... [T]o support learning is not only to support the process of acquiring knowledge, but also to offer a place where new ways of knowing can be realized” (1998a, p. 215). Bray and colleagues (2000) support this notion, saying:

Because of the open-ended quality of collaborative inquiry and its emphasis on partnership versus the researcher-subject relationship, the setting of the inquiry assumes critical importance... Settings have ranged from training centres to conference rooms, university classrooms, church fellowship halls, and homes...

An appropriate context establishes a relatively secure, relaxed environment. The setting should provide a “psychological space” that enables the group to separate itself from the outside cares and concerns. (p. 58)

The Consultant Training Centre consists of a physical space housing a large meeting room capable of holding approximately 12 -15 people comfortably, and three smaller consulting rooms for studying, meetings of two or three people, individual practice consulting, actual client consultations, and observations. Students also have access to two computer workstations and a variety of audiovisual equipment and material resources (such as papers and projects written by former students and writings and books relevant to their domain). The centre is the only location on campus that is dedicated specifically

for the use of this group of students, thus the feeling of it being their “own” space was quite prevalent. The space was also very new during the time of this research, with the construction having been completed during the summer semester prior to the start of the research. Thus the excitement of having such a new facility was still present and students often wondered aloud how groups in previous years functioned without the centre.

Bray and colleagues (2000) allude to an important aspect of the physical space that is particularly relevant to this research. Speaking about the importance of the physical location for conducting the collaborative inquiry, they explain that “the considerations include not just assessing the physical setting or the environment where the prospective inquiry will take place, but also discovering and responding to the “genius loci”, the spirit of the place – its history, values, and leadership” (p. 58). The Consultant Training Centre was created as a result of the conversations and efforts of my six colleagues and I while we were graduate students in the program and the support and lobbying of some of the professors that were part of this research. Our desire to improve our learning situation resulted in a conversation in which we discussed how we thought the learning process could be improved. At the time we did not have any space of our “own” where we could practice our consulting skills and do our school work. The idea for a single small room in which we could practice our consulting skills was born and evolved into the current training centre after a number of years, the strong and dedicated support of professors, and a bit of luck in timing. When students were made aware of the history and values that are present in the centre, it was impressed upon them that the physical space in which they spend much of their time was born out of the desire of a group of students to improve their own practice. Many students did not take this fact

lightly and immediately expressed a desire to take responsibility for improving the training centre and ensuring that the next generation of students would enjoy the same opportunities.

Data Collection

Data collection took place in a variety of forms (See Appendix A for timeline of data collection). First, students participated in regular weekly or bi-weekly meetings during the first, second and fourth semesters. During the third (summer) semester, students were given access to a web-based online Learning Management System (LMS) called Web Course Tools (WebCT) (c.f., Goldberg, Salari, & Swoboda, 1996) to provide them with a communication tool and an online resource centre. Second, individual interviews were conducted with all of the participants at the end of each semester and the four professors once at the end of the research. Third, notes were taken from meetings as a way to track important details and to note my own perceptions of the meetings as they occurred. Finally, I wrote reflections in the hours and days that followed many of the meetings as I thought more about the process and content of the meetings and their implications for my research and student learning.

Meetings

In the first semester of the research, during the first week of school, I attended one of the classes of the primary group of participants ($n=7$) and explained my research to them. I then invited them to attend a meeting (on a voluntary basis) that would occur in the coming week. Meetings continued on a weekly basis during the first semester (see Appendix B for meeting schedule and attendance). During the second semester meetings took place on a bi-weekly basis to accommodate a conflict in the students' schedule

which required them to meet with a supervisor on alternate weeks as they prepared for their internship. During the third semester, students conducted their internships, thus there were no classes being given in the program and students were rarely on campus, except for a bi-weekly supervision meeting. Therefore I did not hold any meetings during this semester. As an alternative to meetings with me, students were given access to a WebCT site, which contained an e-mail feature, chat rooms, a threaded message section, a “whiteboard” feature, and a section containing a number of resources related to their discipline, which I had uploaded (see Appendix C for a summary of student WebCT usage). In the fourth semester, I visited one of the classes of the secondary group of participants, explained my research to them, and invited them to join the bi-weekly meetings with the primary group of students.

Individual Interviews

Students in the primary group of participants were interviewed (with a few exceptions) at the end of each of the semesters during their entire master’s degree (see Appendix D for interview schedule). In most cases this equaled four interviews per participant. The interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and were semi-structured in nature. Questions (see Appendix E, F, G, & H) were centred around the three research questions and also examined students’ perceptions of the semester and the learning that they did within it. The interview questions from the final semester (see Appendix G) were the same as in previous interviews, but also contained a second set of questions related to students’ relationships and interactions with the “new” group of students (the secondary group of participants in this research), as well as their overall experience in, and

perceptions of, the program (see Appendix H). The final interviews were each between 60 and 90 minutes in length.

Students in the secondary group of participants were interviewed once at the end of their first semester, which was the only semester in which the students in the primary group were still in the program (except for one student as mentioned above). This interview (see Appendix G) consisted of questions similar to the set of questions asked to the primary group in the first three semesters, but also included a set of questions related to their relationships and interactions with the primary participants, and their overall experience in, and perceptions of, the program up to that point.

The four professors were interviewed one time at the end of the research, once all the students in the primary group of participants had graduated from the program. This interview (see Appendix I) consisted of questions related to their perceptions of the students' (primary group of participants) learning and other activities as a group, their involvement with the secondary participant group, and professors' perceptions of the student-professor relationships with the primary group of participants. These interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes each.

Meeting Notes

During most of the meetings I took detailed notes on the topics being discussed, any particularities regarding the process or the content of the meetings, and my own feelings and perceptions regarding the entire meeting process. These notes served as indicators of pertinent information when coupled with the meeting tape recordings, as well as serving as a backup in case of any recording malfunctions (none occurred). More detailed notes (instead of verbatim transcriptions) were also taken while listening to the

audio recordings of the meetings during the data analysis phase. This process created a methodical way of tracking each topic discussed during the meetings and various points raised by participants regarding the topic so that they could be easily retrieved to extract ideas or quotes.

Reflections

In the hours and days following most of the meetings, I wrote personal reflections, describing my thoughts and perceptions of how the meetings unfolded and how I performed in my role as facilitator of the group. There was no prescribed structure to these reflections and I wrote them whenever I had any pertinent thoughts and/or reflections on the meetings (see Appendix J for a dated list of reflections). These reflections were used in conjunction with the meeting tapes to assess my thoughts and interpretations of the meetings after having some time to think about them. They also served as a way for me to track my own perceptions of how I was impacting the participants and how they were, in turn, impacting me.

Data Analysis

The individual interviews were audio taped, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed. The weekly meetings with students were audio taped, detailed notes were taken during a review of the audio recordings, and the content was analyzed. In-situ meeting notes and post-hoc reflections were also included in the analysis. The data collection process yielded over 600 pages of text. The data was first classified into ten units of information based on themes and concepts associated with social constructionism and communities of practice literature, as well as emerging themes from the data (see Appendix K). These units of information served as initial thematic categories or “parent nodes” for analysis

using QSR Nudist Vivo (or NVivo for short), a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program (Richards, 1999). As more interviews were conducted and as I analyzed the material using a constant comparative approach (Tuckett, 2005), I developed more specific sub-categories or “child nodes” under many of the thematic categories. As the data analysis progressed, some new child nodes were created, others deleted, or some others grouped to accommodate new understandings and interpretations.

As mentioned above, the participants were not involved in the analysis phase of the research portion of the collaborative inquiry. Instead, a hybrid of inductive and deductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) was conducted, using a constant comparative method (Tuckett, 2005). The inductive themes emerged from the meetings and interviews with participants, while the deductive themes were derived from the literature on communities of practice, social constructionism, and adult learning. While thematic analyses generally employ a grounded theory approach, an approach that is somewhat out of step with the tenets of social constructionism, research by Tuckett (2005) suggests that this form of analysis can be complemented by a social constructionist epistemology.

Due to the large amount of information collected in the research, it was necessary to reduce the overall volume of data in order to make it more manageable. This was accomplished in a number of ways. First, the data analysis yielded 90 nodes in ten different thematic categories, thus the creation of these categories helped to reduce the data from the large number of individual bits of information into 10 major themes (i.e. communities of practice, facilitation, learning, professors, the training centre, students, great quotes, social constructionism, progression through the semester, and notes and

reflections) that were related to the research questions or were emergent topics from interview transcripts and other written documents. Grouping the nodes into themes served to make the search for information and citations easier in the data analysis and subsequent writing process. From here, the data was further reduced by creating child nodes (sub-categories), and then selecting some of the most common and/or most notable (i.e. that had the greatest impact on student learning) aspects of each theme, which were usually contained within only a few of the child nodes regrouped within each theme, making the retrieval of data much easier. The data contained within these few nodes then provided the basis for developing the narrative to describe the students' experiences while also providing a subset of data from which students' quotes could be extracted and used to support any claims being made. The final step consisted of searching the entire database (using NVivo) for any other information that may support or contradict the students' experiences being described.

The data offered in the results section consists mainly of a narrative account of the "guideposts" (Schlager & Fusco, 2003) or significant themes and topics that emerged from the research (through data reduction), as informed by and viewed through the lenses of the paradigms being employed in this research. The narrative account that follows in the results and discussion section consists of a chronological telling of the meetings and events over the course of the research, combined with the perceptions of the meetings and events mainly from the students' and my perspective, and occasionally from the professors' perspective as well. Thus the results and discussion section contains two and occasionally three voices, all telling the same story from different points of view.

Trustworthiness

The issue of trustworthiness (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1986) is somewhat of a challenge in qualitative research, particularly in the postmodern movement within which the social constructionist paradigm resides. This is mainly because the concepts of validity, reliability, and generalizability were developed within the realm of quantitative research methodologies and represent a positivist view on what constitutes “good” research (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Merriam (2002) suggests ways of understanding and applying the concepts of internal validity, reliability, and generalizability (or external validity) that ensure rigour in the research process, but that also respect the tenets of qualitative research within the postmodern realm.

Internal Validity

Contrary to the view of internal validity in quantitative methodologies as being an assessment of the congruency of one’s findings with reality (i.e., whether we are “really” measuring what we intended to measure), qualitative methodologies generally adopt the view that there are multiple, constructed, changing “realities” and they can only be interpreted through symbolic representations (e.g., language). Therefore the importance in terms of internal validity from a qualitative research standpoint rests in the researcher’s ability to interpret the participants’ interpretations or understandings of the phenomenon of interest:

In qualitative research we are not interested in how many or the distribution of predefined variables. Rather, it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved, uncover the complexities of human behaviour in context, and present a holistic interpretation of what is happening. (Merriam, 2002, p. 25)

Merriam (2002) suggests a number of ways that internal validity can be increased in qualitative research. First she suggests triangulation (e.g., Denzin, 1970; Mathison, 1988) in the form of multiple theories, multiple sources of data, multiple methods, or multiple investigators. Other strategies for ensuring internal validity include reflexivity and engagement in the data collection phase for a long enough period of time to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Triangulation

In the current research, it could be argued that three of the four types of triangulation mentioned above were in effect to some degree. First the adoption of the communities of practice framework, combined with social constructionism allowed the data to be collected, analyzed, and interpreted from similar yet distinctive theoretical perspectives, enabling a broader interpretation of the findings (i.e., multiple theories). Second, multiple sources of data were included in the research, such as interviews with all of the students (including those who did not participate regularly in the meetings) and interviews with the four professors who taught the students all of their courses. Third, multiple methods were used to collect the data including interviews, meeting transcripts, observations, and my own reflective journals. With regards to triangulation in the form of multiple investigators, in a collaborative inquiry normally participants are co-investigators in the research process. But in this instance, the “research” in which my co-investigators were involved was related to their own development, not the research questions that were the focus of the academic study.

Reflexivity

The term reflexivity in this context refers to the qualitative researcher's ability to reflect critically on his role as the instrument of research. This is essential for qualitative researchers because the nature of their role in reporting the results and conclusions is highly interpretive. The adoption of social constructionism into this research brings the issue of reflexivity to the forefront since this concept is at the heart of social constructionist theory, which invites each person to question his or her role as a co-actor and co-creator of meaning within his or her culture (Gergen, 1999). Being a "participant" in the research with a number of different roles to play (e.g., researcher, facilitator, former student in the program) enhanced my own reflexivity by allowing me to engage with the group from multiple perspectives and forms of participation. This allowed me to examine my role, and interpret the participants' experiences, from various points of view.

Lengthy Engagement in the Data Collection Phase

While Merriam (2002) asserts that there is no particular set amount of time to engage in the data collection phase, she does say that the data and emerging findings should reach a point of saturation. I anticipated that the students' experiences would vary widely over the course of the four semesters of their program (based in part on my own previous experience in the program), so I decided to follow the students through their entire program (1.5 years) in order to get as complete a picture of their experience as possible (as opposed to a cross-section). This enabled me adequate time to capture the richness of their experiences in detail as well as an opportunity to observe and document the changes in their learning from semester to semester. While there was saturation on a variety of themes in the research, there were also a number of unique instances that

revealed what I would consider to be some of the most interesting and telling information from a research perspective. I believe that my ability to be a witness to, or a part of, many of these unique occurrences was a direct result of the relationship I was able to build with students by spending so much time with them over an extended period of time.

Reliability

As is the case with internal validity, reliability in qualitative research also suffers from being a term derived for quantitative, positivist research. Merriam (2002) explains that “reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behaviour is never static, nor is what many experience necessarily more reliable than what one person experiences” (p. 27). The author continues on to say that replication of a qualitative study is not likely to yield the same results, since there can be many different interpretations of the same results. The more important question for qualitative researchers, she explains, is whether the results are consistent with the data collected. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this as “dependability” or “consistency”; that is, that the results make sense given the data that was collected. Similar to the methods used to enhance internal validity, triangulation and reflexivity also served to increase reliability or dependability in this research. One way that reliability was strengthened in this research was through regular peer debriefing with my supervisor, in which we discussed the data and how to create a story (in the form of a dissertation) that is consistent with the experiences of the participants. Another way was through member checking, by having participating students and professors verify the transcript of their interviews for accuracy.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggest keeping an “audit trail” as a means of explaining how the researcher reliably arrived at his or her results. In the current research

an audit trail can be seen in Appendix A, which outlines the timeline of the collection of data, combined with Appendix J, which displays the coding scheme used for deciphering and reducing the volume of data. Further evidence of an audit trail comes in the form of a research journal in which I recorded my thoughts, questions, challenges and decisions as I progressed through the data collection phase as well as the detailed description of the methodology used for designing the research, collecting the data, and analyzing the findings.

Generalizability

The topic of generalizability (or external validity) creates the most difficulty for qualitative researchers when trying to justify the worth of their research using quantitative standards. As Merriam (2002) points out, it's not possible to generalize findings to the larger population when taken from the usual small purposeful samples that are common in most qualitative studies. This is not to say that the findings of this study cannot very usefully be applied ("transferred") to other contexts. The difficulty with the word "generalizeable" is that it suggests the uncovering of a fundamental "truth" purportedly applicable at a universal level. Instead, the purposeful sampling of qualitative research is intended to gain depth of understanding in a *particular* area, not to uncover what might be true for the larger population. In this respect, "transferability" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2002; Sanz, 2005) is a more useful term to capture the utility of qualitative research.

Taking this view into account, the current research did not make any attempts to generalize the data to the lives of other groups outside of the confines of the study. Instead it focused on providing a rich, thick description of the findings so that others can

determine how closely their situations match those in the research and therefore whether the findings can be transferred (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2002; Sanz, 2005). In addition the conclusions drawn can be viewed as working hypotheses (Chronbach, 1975) which “take account of the local conditions [and] can offer practitioners some guidance in making choices – the results of which can be monitored and evaluated in order to make better decisions in the future” (Merriam, 2002, p. 28). The positive practices that emerge from the research process (in particular, the facilitation process and the modified collaborative inquiry) can become prototypes that can be used by others (Eisner, 1991).

The common element in each of these methods of generating qualitative research that satisfies the positivist requirement of generalizability is that the utility of the data, findings, analysis, and conclusions lies in the opinions of those who read about them. The responsibility for ensuring that the results obtained or lessons derived in one particular study can be useful in another situation or be applicable to another group lies with the reader (Merriam, 2002). The responsibility of the researcher is not to determine what might be “true” for all; rather it is to give enough detail in the research process to allow those who see the potential benefits in one’s research to be able to rigorously and conscientiously implement some of the same processes and lessons into another situation.

Authenticity

Another way that is suggested to ensure trustworthiness in collaborative inquiries is through the implementation of four *authenticity criteria* (Lincoln & Guba, 1990), which are elaborated as an alternative to the traditional language used to assess validity in most research circles. The first criterion – fairness – was ensured in the research by

verifying that the viewpoints of all of the participants were represented evenly in the research and that all parties involved in the research did so without being subjected to any significant power issues. Fairness was also obtained by including the reporting of viewpoints that differed from the majority and reflecting on the ground rules of the inquiry. The second criterion – ontological authenticity – was obtained by verifying that there was growth in participants' understanding of the complexities of the issues that are the focus of the inquiry. The third criterion – educative authenticity – was achieved by verifying that participants had gained knowledge and an appreciation of the viewpoints that differ from their own. The final criterion – catalytic authenticity – was ensured by verifying that participants' actions reflected the decisions taken in the collaborative inquiry process and that participants were willing to act in creating change. This was mainly accomplished by students discussing at meetings what they had done since the previous meeting in relationship to some of the discussions that were had. In summary, trustworthiness through authenticity criteria occurred when participants in the collaborative inquiry showed growth in their knowledge and appreciation for the complexities of their inquiry question and the differing viewpoints that accompanied it, and they were willing to act on the question to make change without coercion or intimidation (Lincoln & Guba, 1990).

PART TWO: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results for this research are taken from a number of sources (i.e., individual interviews with students and professors, meeting recordings, my meeting notes, and my personal reflections) and report on a variety of different aspects of the research in an attempt to address the three research questions. In addition, new discoveries and perspectives that emerged through the data collection process and data analysis phase have served to take the research beyond the original research questions into new ways of understanding, interpreting, and applying what was uncovered. Therefore the presentation of the results attempts to document and explain the details of how the learning and research processes unfolded throughout the course of the study. This is done through an initial detailed description of the meetings from my perspective and my view of the facilitation process during each semester. This is followed by results obtained from my interviews with students in relationship to the research questions.

At this point it is important to note that, since this research deals mainly with the students' personal and group experiences throughout their program, the focus of the results and discussion relates to their *perceptions* of the circumstances of their learning (as described by them and interpreted by me) on some of the most pertinent issues for them, and how these perceptions impacted their learning. These perceptions represent a number of the realities that were co-constructed and perpetuated among the students, which may or may not reflect the perceived realities of other stakeholders in their learning, such as professors and administrators. It also does not necessarily fully reflect my own past and present experiences in the program and/or with many of the professors

in question, nor does it tell the full story of the students' experiences. However, I do believe it represents many of the common struggles that graduate students face in general in most academic contexts, and therefore it merits a thorough discussion.

Adopting a social constructionist viewpoint reminds us that the focus should not be on trying to establish whose perceptions or experiences are right or wrong, rather it should be on understanding the changing, negotiated views of reality held by the students in the research and how these views of reality impacted their learning. Therefore a large portion of the results and discussion focuses on the critical issues that the students raised regarding their own learning in and out of the classroom and tries to understand how these perceptions impacted their learning. This critical focus precludes a fully "balanced" telling of the story of the students' journey through their master's degree. This is the reason why the student voice is much more prevalent than the voice of professors in this document and why the majority of the topics revolve around some element of struggle or concern of students. But it should be strongly emphasized that there were many occasions in when students spoke openly about the positive aspects of student life. They also spoke highly of their professors and courses, and they were optimistic about their training and progress through the program. However, because of the nature of the meetings and the concerns of the students, the topics discussed at meetings most often revolved around struggles and concerns as well as areas where students wanted to focus their learning.

Non-Formal Meetings as a Forum for Collaborative Meaning-Making

The following section summarizes each of the four semesters. First there is a brief summary of the content of the meetings, followed by the students' overall perceptions of that semester's meetings, looking specifically at the content and process of the meetings,

as well as the students' perceptions of my role as the facilitator of the meetings. This information was gained through interviews with them immediately following each semester. Next, I include a description of each of the meetings from my perspective and my perception on the facilitation process. Following these summaries, I examine the semester's meetings in relationship to the development of a community of practice, looking specifically at the group's mutual engagement, joint enterprise, shared repertoire, and negotiation of meaning. In semester #3, students conducted their internships and therefore did not have any courses. Since students would rarely be on campus during the semester, I decided to offer them the opportunity to have a virtual meeting space, instead of face to face meetings. The results and discussion for semester #3 therefore summarize the students' usage and perceptions of the resources on WebCT. Similar to the other semesters, students' general perceptions of the semester, and my facilitation (of the WebCT site), are included, along with my analysis of the development of the community of practice.

Semester #1 – September 2004 to December 2004

During the nine weekly meetings in this semester my goal was mainly to develop a good relationship with the students and to establish the get-togethers as a place where they could enhance their learning through the discussion of topics that were most relevant to them. My focus was on having students see the value in the meetings (as opposed to me telling them they are valuable) and want to return week after week if they felt it was worth the time and effort. I also hoped that those who chose not to attend earlier meetings would hear positive accounts from those who did attend and be curious enough to come to a meeting later in the semester (as opposed to me asking them to come).

During the semester's meetings a wide variety of topics were discussed (See Appendix J for a detailed account of individual meetings), such as: attending conferences, gaining credibility as a consultant, what professional title to use, and gender issues in consulting. A former student in the program was also invited to one meeting to share her experiences in setting up her own consulting business after graduation and another former student participated in a few of the meetings as well. In addition, more personal topics were discussed a number of times throughout the semester. These topics included discussions on how students felt they had changed in the program so far, links between the program and the rest of their lives, and influential people in their academic and personal lives. At the last meeting, the discussion was focused on helping each other with their final projects that were due in the coming weeks.

Student Perceptions of Semester #1

When asked in individual interviews about their thoughts on the semester in general, all of the students expressed having enjoyed the term and having learned a lot. For example one student said: "the learning is very different from my undergrad... I get a lot out of the different perspectives that people bring to a conversation or to the table because of their backgrounds" (Participant 1, Semester 1). Another student shared this sentiment, saying: "It's exactly my sort of thing. I feel like I've come to my niche a little bit... like everything is so much clearer" (Participant 8, Semester 1). Some students were surprised with the amount of work required, while others found the workload easy. However all of the interviewed students agreed that they had gained valuable insight and knowledge about their field of study. This is not surprising since it was the first experience at the graduate level for all of the participants and as many students pointed

out, the experience – particularly in this case, where the graduate program is quite small - is quite different from the majority of undergraduate programs.

Learning with Colleagues

Generally, students described their learning relationships as evolving throughout the semester and taking place in a variety of different contexts including the classroom, during the meetings, and outside of both of these contexts. Regarding the learning between students during the semester, one student's comments exemplified the experience that the majority described. She said: There was an evolution over the course of the session. It was our first session and at the start... I didn't feel very involved... But the more we moved forward the more there was chemistry" (Participant 2, Semester 1). Another student supported this notion, saying that things were "better near the end of the semester than during the middle and the beginning..." (Participant 3, Semester 1). This student went on to further elaborate on the group's chemistry, saying: "The big difference between the programs I have been involved in before and this one is that it's cooperative... Everybody wants to share their ideas... I was expecting it to be completely the opposite; expecting one person to want to stand above. It's not that way at all" (Participant 3, Semester 1). This student described how conversations about learning between students often spilled out of the classroom and into the university hallways: "walking in different directions after class, we just keep talking about what we were talking about in class... If we bump into each other the only thing we ever seem to talk about is our schoolwork... That's our lives" (Participant 3, Semester 1). These discussions often also spilled "into" the meetings with me and many of the topics that were not discussed in class due to time or other constraints were discussed in the

meetings. While this positive view of student learning outside of the classroom seemed to be the consensus among most of the first year participants, it was not shared by all of the students, as evidenced by one participant who said: “I find there’s a very good connection in class but out of class it’s really scarce” (Participant 4, Semester 1).

When asked about the meetings in the individual interviews conducted at the end of the first semester, all five of the students questioned said that they were useful for enhancing their learning. One of the students explained her perspective on why she and her colleagues came to the meetings. She said: “We didn’t have to go, and I don’t think anyone went out of a sense of ‘I should go’. I think maybe we attended the first one like that but kept coming back because it just seemed to be something that was beneficial” (Participant 3, Semester 1). Three students mentioned that in particular the sessions in which former students shared their experiences were seen as being very helpful. One student said: “I think it was good to see someone that was really struggling going through the beginning stages of setting up their own business, really trying to do this full time” (Participant 1, Semester 1). Another student remarked: “it forced us to think about what’s waiting for us after graduation (Participant 2, Semester 1). A third student also mentioned that she found it helpful to have other students outside of their group of first year non-thesis students at the meeting: “[the meetings] seemed most beneficial when we had groups from both sides [thesis and professional], just to see it, because I think they help so much and it’s fun to see what they are doing and what we’re doing” (Participant 3, Semester 1).

When asked what, in particular, made the meetings helpful, one participant explained:

I liked to see that common enthusiasm in everybody... [and] being able to get some practical details... I liked being able to go over things from class that we didn't necessarily go into depth with... I felt as though that was my free forum to be able to talk about ideas without taking up other people's time... sort of my "pass go" card to talk about it and not have to feel like I am imposing. (Participant 8, Semester 1)

Meetings and Facilitation

From a facilitation standpoint, students mentioned that having a facilitator for the meetings played a key role in the learning process. For example, one student said:

"Essentially, you let us talk about what we wanted to talk about. That's why it was interesting to come. You never imposed a topic and that was very good" (Participant 2, Semester 1). A second group member remarked: "I find your meetings are a very good way to bring up those other questions that I don't even know exist about the internship and about the other stuff. So they've been really helpful that way" (Participant 4, Semester 1). The former of these two students also added:

You had a big role to play in the sense that you formed a group with the people that were already around, but now we have meetings together. I don't know if we would have formed a group if we hadn't gotten together on Tuesdays. Everything started from there... That's where I met most of the people in the beginning.

(Participant 2, Semester 1)

Another student alluded to my role as a resource person to them, but also recognized the fact that the purpose of the meetings was to engage in a collaborative discussion, not to have a question and answer period with me: "When people had specific questions and

things... 'Ok, on Tuesday we need to ask James this'. Then that [question] would spark the conversation [during the meetings], which was much more effective I think"

(Participant 3, Semester 1). This was a very significant statement to me from a facilitation perspective, as it showed that at least this student recognized my attempts to have students learn mainly from each, not only from me.

One issue that was mentioned by a few of the interviewees was the importance of the timing of the meetings. On Tuesdays, students had two three-hour classes with a one and a half hour break in between. The meeting took place during the last hour of this break, starting at noon. One participant said: "it left us a half hour in case you had things to do, professors to meet, or just to move around. After that we had the hour meeting but you wouldn't stop us from eating, so it wasn't a waste of time... We ate, we talked, it was perfect" (Participant 2, Semester 1). Another student explained: "people are [already] there... I would have a harder time justifying coming back into school or staying later when I could get other things done... I think my participation would have been lower if it wasn't over a lunch time" (Participant 8, Semester 1). While this timing was convenient for the students because it fit in-between two of their courses, this created a long day with little time to rest or re-focus for the afternoon class. This had a particular impact on the second class of the day, which was after the lunch meeting with me. The professor of this class described the problem of students being tired from such a long day, saying: "I would have preferred for them to have time for lunch and to come back fresh. But at the same time, time is a factor... if most of the students don't have a class on Friday afternoon they won't come Friday afternoon for that, it has to be in a spot where everyone is there." (Professor 1)

The Beginning – Meeting #1 – October 5

In the weeks preceding the first meeting I had been preparing myself, letting students know about my research and telling them that the meetings would be starting up soon. I explained to them that we would be having a series of “lunch dates” in which the topic of discussion was undefined and open to anything that is pertinent to them as master’s students in the program. My original plan was to only involve the students that had started their master’s degree in September, but as I thought about it more, I decided that this might not be the most appropriate way to proceed. I wrote in my journal, saying:

To focus only on the new students is not sufficient. Learning does not occur in isolation and the second year students and former students are an important part of the learning process, as are the students in the thesis program. So I have decided to open it up to all of those groups. (My journal, October 5)

I was worried that this might make the group size quite large if many of the people showed up, however I was also worried that there wouldn’t be enough people at the meetings if I were to only invite the seven new students and not open the meetings up to the other pertinent groups. I was hoping for no more than 12 people and no less than 4 or 5 at the meetings, so I was relieved when 7 people showed up for meeting #1 – a mix of old, new, and thesis students. This seemed like a good number of people to start with, and I figured some people would not show up to the first meeting, opting instead to hear from their fellow students whether it was worth attending subsequent meetings or not.

Meeting #1 began with me introducing myself to the group and explaining once again their reason for being there and having them sign the consent forms. Once this was finished, it was time to “start” the meeting. I remarked in my journal:

Then of course they all looked at me to start the “meeting”. I guess that’s to be expected since I was the reason they are all sitting in this room at this particular time... I figured they wouldn’t just start up a conversation on their own without any real direction, so I started them off with a simple question: How do you feel about your experience in the program so far? Silence... It was not a long silence, but it was still a bit uncomfortable. I got a little worried. Then one student... said “I’ll go first”. I’m really glad she started things off, but I was immediately worried that this was going to be a turn-taking type hour, instead of a true dialogue or discussion. But she came up with some very good thoughts and that seemed to stimulate a discussion. I was very happy that other people took the initiative to ask some questions because I was worried that if I were the one asking questions at the beginning the group would assume that that’s how things are “supposed” to work. But the fact that someone asked the first (second, actually) question and it wasn’t me, really helped things along in my mind.

The meeting itself went well, with the veteran students in the program doing the majority of the talking and the novice students listening and asking some questions. I explained in my journal: “I was a bit worried about taking the floor away from the non-thesis students, but I think... that at this point in their education, students want to hear more from students who have been there before them. I know I did when I was in their position” (My journal, October 5). Students mainly spoke about their backgrounds and what led them to apply to the program, what they were looking to get out of the program, and how things were going up to that point. Shortly before the end of the meeting some of the first year non-thesis students who were invited to the meeting but did not attend began to

arrive for their class which was being held in the same room immediately after our meeting. I invited them to quietly join the group, wanting to give them a chance to observe what the meetings would be like, in the hope of gaining their interest in participating in future encounters. At the end of the hour I explained to the late-comers what the meeting was for and reminded them that the gatherings would take place at the same time every week and that they were invited. This was an unexpected but welcomed opportunity to have these students find out what the meetings were all about, without having to commit to going to one of them. I finished my journal entry by wondering if any of the late-comers would show up to the meeting the following week.

Facilitating Meeting #1

As mentioned above, it was necessary for me to take the lead at the beginning of the meeting in order to get people talking. However from that point on, the conversation flowed fairly well and I didn't feel the need to do much facilitation at all. In fact, to my surprise, I felt compelled to participate in the discussion, rather than facilitate it. My journal entry conveys my surprise and confusion about this conflict in roles so early in the process:

I found myself wanting to engage in the conversation not as a researcher, but as a former student in the program and someone who is still deeply involved in its functioning. I'm not sure how that fits in with my research methodology, but I felt compelled to engage in the discussion. Does that blur the line between being a facilitator and being a participant in the true sense of the word? Is that a problem? The way I understand the role of a facilitator is as a person who guides the discussion in order to keep it on track with whatever objectives are set. So I see

my role as somewhat “guiding” the conversation in the direction of “learning” from each other. I felt like I did that today, but I also wanted to be involved as one of my own participants. (My journal, October 5)

Meeting #2 – October 12

I was somewhat disappointed to only have 4 people attend the second meeting, however the small group allowed for a very engaging and personal discussion of a variety of topics. I once again opened up the conversation, asking the three students in the meeting who had recently attended a major sport psychology conference if they could talk about their experiences there. This was the only time I intervened in guiding the conversation, which flowed easily and comfortably from topic to topic from that point on. “We went from talking about [the conference] to talking about how our beliefs inform how and who we are and whether we can change or not... A little deeper than I was anticipating going, but all four people and I were engaged so I didn’t try and change the flow or topic” (My journal, October 12).

In these early weeks of my research, I had moments of doubt about how and even if the process would provide students with an enhanced learning experience, as well as their reasons for being there in the first place. But this meeting provided me with some reassurance that the process was a useful and impactful one:

I guess I was just having some doubts [...] but now I am seeing just how much learning is really going on (well at least from my perspective) and I am seeing how beneficial this can potentially be. There is still a part of me that believes that the students may be coming just to please me, but there is also another side that believes that they are learning and enjoying the opportunity to learn. I don’t know

if I'll ever know which one is truly going on, but there does seem to be some very good discussion and ample opportunities to share and learn. I know I am definitely learning. (My Journal, October 12)

Facilitating Meeting #2

Once again, I felt that I was able to facilitate the meeting without controlling the topics or the discussion format. One particularly useful strategy I did employ was that of asking students to elaborate whenever they mentioned particular classroom events or discussions. Not being in their classes allows me to ask students to clarify or elaborate when they are talking about something in class... I get them to re-voice their own interpretations of what went on in the classroom... which can lead to very fruitful discussions" (My journal, October 12).

As was the case with meeting #1, I felt strongly compelled to participate in the discussions:

Once again I found myself unable to just sit back and listen. I feel like it would not be fair if I didn't get involved in the conversation. I don't feel the need to dominate or control the conversation, but I feel like there are times when I have something valuable to offer as a former student in the program and someone working in the field. I still am hesitant, wondering if I am doing something wrong by getting so involved, but my mind and my judgment tell me that this is what will be most helpful to the students' learning. I guess it is just revealing the fact that I am first a person who is interested in the students' learning, and second, a researcher. I still feel like I am one of them, only a little further along the learning road than them. (My journal, October 12)

Meeting #3 – October 18

This meeting had eight participants and represented somewhat of a turning point, in that it was the first time the students chose to talk about some of the specific things they felt would help them to learn during their master's degree. Specifically, they mentioned wanting to be better connected to the second year students in the program with whom they had very little or no contact at the present time. In addition to this, students at the meeting felt that it should be mandatory for them (and their colleagues who were not present) to mentor the group of new students starting in September of the following year so that, unlike themselves, those students would have an immediate connection with a more experienced group of students. One great moment in the meeting happened when most of the students gave their opinion about the topic of mentoring and there was one student who hadn't spoken yet. The group basically called her out to get her opinion - a very good sign that they were beginning to become a community of practice through mutual engagement. One person said to the quiet student: "you have a thought, I can tell" to which the student agreed and then responded. It was a great example of the group including all of its members and not letting someone just "sponge" off them and hide in the back.

The training centre was also discussed at length during this meeting. It had only recently opened, thus the walls were still bare, the furnishings were minimal, and the day-to-day functioning not yet established. Students saw this as an opportunity to be "the pioneers of ideas" as one student put it, and to "take ownership" for enhancing the development of the centre. Students discussed (unsolicited) ways to make the training centre more inviting and comfortable for them and their future clients. They wanted a

physical space that they could call their own where they could do their work and find their colleagues. This idea was then extended to a discussion on how they could create a better connection to the third and fourth year undergraduate students in “feeder” programs at the university, and even provide opportunities for them to spend time in the training centre observing and learning.

Near the end of the meeting, students were discussing the mentors they had in previous years and who had influenced them to apply to the master’s program. I joined in the conversation by asking them if they saw any ways to help themselves to be mentored in their current context. I then suggested that maybe inviting other people working in the field (but outside the academic context) to the meetings would be helpful. To my surprise, the group responded quite negatively to this idea, with one student saying “we are just getting comfortable with *us*” and another saying “it’s a time thing, it’s a trust thing”. Students then proceeded to think about which other students might be helpful resources to them. The name of one student (who had graduated from the program and was continuing her studies) who had recently set up her own consulting business in the field was mentioned and it was agreed that she would be invited to the following meeting to discuss her experiences. As the meeting ended, students also arranged to have a meeting on their own (without me) to discuss a major project they had recently been assigned in class.

Facilitating Meeting #3

In this meeting I was able to defer a number of topics back to the participants and to give them the responsibility of taking charge of the group. For example, at the meeting there was a first-time participant so instead of me explaining to the student what the

meetings were about, I decided to invite the group to explain what was going on. On top of informing the newcomer, this provided me a great opportunity to see how they were perceiving and interpreting what's going on in these meetings. For the most part I felt that their description was fairly accurate and I simply added a sentence on to the end of what they said to the new student.

Later in the meeting when the group was discussing their desire to better connect with the second year students, I decided to simply let them discuss the topic, without ever calling them to action on it. "Reflecting on it now, I think I should have gotten them to develop a plan to actually make this happen. All I did was let them talk about not having the information they needed, but I never encouraged them to discuss how they might change this situation" (My journal, October 21). Even more important than the fact that I did not call the group to task on this issue, is the fact that the group did not call *itself* to task. While this was somewhat frustrating for me, it did help me to better understand the level and speed at which the group was progressing toward becoming a community of practice.

Meeting #4 – October 28

This meeting had nine participants and was entirely devoted to an invited guest, who was a former student in the program and had recently begun her own consulting business. Students eagerly listened to the visitor's successes and struggles and asked a multitude of questions relating to all aspects of her experience as a student in the program and as a graduate in the "real world" of consulting. Before the meeting had even "officially" started, a student began asking the guest about what specific courses she needed for certification in the field. This led to a longer informal discussion on the topic

involving a few other students along the way. The conversation spawned two different, simultaneous discussions between small groups of students about the program and how people are using their degrees, as well as what courses could be taken to get certification. Then finally the session “officially” began with my introduction of the guest and invitation to her to give her background and story.

Facilitating Meeting #4

Other than introducing the invited guest, I did not facilitate the meeting in any way. The students asked their questions and the conversation flowed from topic to topic without any intervention on my part. In terms of facilitation, I was glad to see that students did not wait for the meeting to “start” in order to engage in meaningful dialogue with our guest and with each other. It was clear throughout the meeting that students had many questions for the guest, related both to her experiences as a former student in the program, and as someone who was now doing what many of the current students hoped to be doing once they graduated. I was happy that the students were getting the perspective of someone other than myself with regards to the program and the field in general because I wanted them to see that there are a variety of perspectives and approaches.

Meeting #5 – November 2

I began the meeting by asking the group of eight students in attendance what they thought about the previous meeting and what our guest had to say. This engaged a lively discussion where students expressed surprise at certain things the guest said and did in setting up her practice, and relief about some of the guest’s other comments and choices. The content of the rest of the session was productive in terms of students learning a lot

about the consulting field and how to “manoeuvre” within the field in order to get the desired career. We talked about doctorate degrees, certification issues, and positive and negative aspects of working in this field. The whole discussion was very interesting and there were a number of cues that helped me to see that people were involved (e.g. body language, students adding their thoughts at certain points, nodding, “um-humming”, etc.). There was a Ph.D. student in the meeting, who was also a former student in the program. She and I actually did a large part of the talking during the discussion about current issues in the field, since both of us were actively working in the field and the new students had little or no experience in these areas up to this point.

One interesting moment in the conversation (from a developing community of practice standpoint) came when a student was discussing her experiences in the field and program so far and sharing the questions that were most important to her. It appeared to me that she felt she was monopolizing the conversation or that what she had to say was of no interest or was not making sense to the group. She abruptly stopped and said “never mind, just ignore what I’m saying...” A few members quickly interjected and encouraged her to keep talking, saying “no, no, this is good. Keep going...”

Facilitating Meeting #5

A few paragraphs in my journal entry for this meeting sum up how I felt about my facilitation.

I can’t help but to be bothered by the fact that I didn’t feel I was a very good “facilitator” in this meeting. I dominated the conversation and talked probably 65% of the time or more. But, as I have mentioned before, this is where I am struggling.... I don’t think this conversation could have taken place if I hadn’t

been there to have it with the students. [The other Ph.D. student] was there and she was involved in the conversation (probably 85% of the talking between the two of us), but I felt like it was necessary for us to talk that much. The group (well it was started with 1 or 2 individuals, but was obvious that others were interested) was asking questions and as a former student, a graduate of the program, a consultant for the last 4 years, and someone who has asked himself these same questions for years, I felt compelled to share my knowledge and opinions with them. In that moment I was wearing the “participant” hat, not the “facilitator” hat. Is that a problem? I don’t know... I guess what it boils down to is the fact that on that particular topic, I felt like I was the person who had the most knowledge in the room (well, equally with [the other Ph.D. student]), and if there had been someone else who knew better or who knew more I would have asked them to talk. So I guess in a way I was “facilitating” myself into the group discussion.

Despite these confusions and questions, there is no doubt that learning is taking place mainly because people are saying so without being solicited. People are asking questions and giving their two cents when it is relevant and pertinent to them. So I feel good about that part, I just still worry about not being a “good” facilitator. One of the biggest dangers for me in this research is to have the group come to rely on me for all of their information. It needs to be collaborative. Maybe part of the problem is not having enough older (2nd year and beyond) students in the group. Because of this, the group is turning to me for answers

because there is nobody else “knowledgeable” in the room on certain topics. (My journal, November 2)

Meeting #6 – November 9

This meeting involved 6 participants and began with me walking into the room while a few students were already talking about food and eating their lunches. The conversation somehow flowed (without my intervention) from discussing food to the topic of male consultants working with female groups and vice-versa. Someone had mentioned this topic in a class right before the meeting but it was not discussed due to lack of time. After about five minutes of conversation on the topic one student turned to me and apologized for not letting me “get started” with the meeting. I explained that what they were discussing was very relevant to their learning and I had no problem continuing the discussion. The discussion then resumed and later evolved into a discussion on gaining credibility in the field and exactly what to call ourselves when working in the field. I wrote in my journal:

This to me shows some evolution in the group. They are finally coming in and talking about issues that are relevant to them, without me having to name something. They are beginning to understand that this is a time and place to engage with others on whatever is important... I really see the group moving forward in terms of community and I think they are really starting to be there more for each other than for me (although I say this with some hesitancy). (My journal, November 9)

Facilitating Meeting #6

I was pleased with the facilitation aspect of this meeting. I especially was happy to see that students didn't wait for me to start talking about something important to them – although they did check with me to see if it was alright to continue talking about it during “meeting time”. I still participated in the meetings as a knowledgeable person on some of the topics, however I made an effort to ask the students what they thought or what they would do in certain situations before telling them my opinion. This allowed them to engage in more dialogue with each other and to make some hypothetical choices and decisions based on the knowledge they had acquired up to that point. Many times their answers were similar to mine, thus I didn't need to talk as much and could simply agree with some of the positions taken by students. I reflected in my journal that

I am not sure how exactly to get this across to the group, but I am very hopeful that they will continue to just have conversations like today instead of me prescribing a topic to them or even having to ask them what they'd like to talk about. Overall I think this research is going very well and I think the group is really starting to come together - at least during the meetings. (My journal, November 9)

Meeting #7 – November 16

In this meeting, what was most significant was what *didn't* happen, more than what did happen. I was attending a presentation at another campus which ran late and I was unable to make it back for the start of the meeting and could not get in touch with anyone to notify the group that I would be late. When I finally arrived about ten minutes late, there were only two people in the room where we normally meet. A third person

joined us shortly after, explaining that she had gone looking for me. The two people did not appear to be in any sort of discussion when I arrived; they were simply reading quietly... “waiting” for me to arrive or for their next class (which is in the same room) to begin. Of course when I arrived, the three were ready to start talking. Four more students arrived later, having attended another school-related meeting. One of them immediately joined in the conversation by sharing her thoughts and asking questions. The actual topic of conversation for most of the meeting revolved around ideas about the major project the students were working on, with one of the students soliciting feedback from the other student and me for most of the session.

Although I didn’t intend on being late for this meeting, I think this was a good “test” of sorts for the group. While I was on my way to the meeting, I was thinking to myself “I wonder how many people will be there?” I remarked after the meeting in my journal: “It seems to me that if the group had become a community of practice they would not wait for me to ‘start’ the meeting or lead the discussion. But judging by today, I don’t think the group is there yet - and I am not at all surprised.

Facilitating Meeting #7

The fact that students waited for me to arrive to begin the meeting led me to believe that they saw me as an important part of the meeting process. While this was not necessarily a bad thing, it did point to the fact that the group was, at least in some ways, relying on me to guide what they did in the meetings. In my journal I wrote:

I know it’s still early in the process, but I am beginning to think about my role in the group and my worry that they are simply “helping me out” as opposed to becoming a real community of practice... But when I think about it, these

students spend all of their classes together, so I guess this meeting time would not be any different in terms of spending time together. I guess I can't expect it to be something all that special at this point, but I do believe that it will become much more important as the students progress in their education especially when they go away to do their internships and don't see each other as often. (My journal, November 16)

Despite this seeming reliance on me, I did feel like the process up to this point was helpful and useful for the students who were coming to the meetings. At the end of most meetings one or more students would normally thank me for the meeting and/or tell me (unsolicited) that they found the discussions very helpful.

Meeting #8 – November 23

This was another challenging meeting, in that what didn't happen overshadowed what did happen. Right before the meeting started a group of three students informed the rest of us that they were finishing up another meeting of their own and would be there shortly to join us. So we decided to wait since there were only two other people and myself. We waited for a while, still having meaningful conversations between the three of us, however the other group never showed up until the very end of the meeting time. Despite this, the conversation with the two participants was interesting and focused, with more personal questions and detailed explanations than normal. They discussed their views on competition, how they have changed since starting the program, and the links between what they are learning and other aspects of their lives. Despite being very late, one of the tardy participants joined the conversation immediately by upon arrival, sharing his opinion and asking questions.

Facilitating Meeting #8

Since the group was so small, facilitation was not really necessary in this meeting. The topic and conversation were both very interesting, however I felt the process of the meeting seemed “forced” or unnatural at times.

The conversation just didn’t feel like it was very smooth and I really felt like the two were only there to satisfy my research agenda. At one point there was silence and one of the two said ‘ok, what do we want to learn about now?’ That kind of made me feel like it was just an “exercise” for her, something to do, in the same way that there are class exercises.

As with previous weeks, I felt that the reason the students were there was for me, but regardless of this fact, they were still benefiting from the process.

Meeting #9 – November 30

This meeting had six participants and felt much more like the type of meeting that I had originally envisioned when starting the research. When I arrived, a couple members of the group were already engaged in a conversation about one of their projects that began at the end of their class and “spilled out” into the hallway and into the meeting. Another small group was discussing a different topic as well while they began eating their lunches. The discussion about the project flowed directly into the beginning of the meeting without any intervention from me. Students then began discussing how to write a major paper that was due at the end of the semester. This brought on a great dialogue on different styles of writing and views on how professors grade papers. After listening to this part of the meeting, one student who was very concerned with how to write her paper said to the group: “Thank you, this has helped me”. However another concerned student

quickly replied “It still seems big” (referring to the complexity of the paper) and claiming she did not know where to start. As the group questioned her about her paper, they gradually convinced her that she had plenty of her own ideas to get started and to write a quality paper. The telling moment came when the student excitedly exclaimed “Ok, I want to go write [the paper] right now!”

Facilitating Meeting #9

The facilitation of meeting #9 was also somewhat closer to what I had originally envisioned when I began the research. I entered the room and didn’t need to ask for or suggest a topic of conversation. In fact the topic was already chosen and the discussion had begun. The discussion flowed from topic to topic without any intervention and every subject was directly relevant to the livelihood of all of the students there, thus engaging their full attention. There were some very practical discussions, as well as some theoretical ones. There was full participation from all of the group and students were focused on helping each other. As with some previous meetings, I wore my “participant” hat for much of the time, however this time I did not feel as concerned about it, opting instead to focus on the fact that we, as a group, were engaged in meaningful learning, even if it might not fit the prototypical model of a “facilitated” discussion.

Development of the Community of Practice

In the first semester patterns of interaction and personalities began to reveal themselves and paint a picture of how the community of practice would likely develop. While the core of the group seemed to find common ground with each other, differences between students in levels of mutual engagement and joint enterprise also had an impact on the dynamics of the group.

Mutual Engagement

The sentiment of most of the group seemed to be one of reciprocity, with most students willing and in most cases, preferring to work and learn with each other as much as possible. For example, one student said “I find everyone to be very open. Where I come from, everybody was individualistic, everyone worked for themselves... But here we get together often... people talk about their projects and it really makes a difference when people help each other out. (Participant 2, Semester 1). While the majority of students shared this sense of mutual engagement within the group, they also conceded that there were smaller, distinct subgroups of students that spent most of their time working and socializing together inside and outside of class. One student explained: “there’s kind of little groups within, just because of demographics and stuff. A couple of students live farther away and [one student] is really busy all the time with her job. But there’s four of us that hang out a lot together” (Participant 3, Semester 1). In some of the students’ first year classes they were assigned to work in groups of three or “triads” together. The groups were usually assigned by the professor and also changed around on occasion. This appeared to be helpful for students getting to know one another better. As one student explained, “the triads were great even though they were prescribed. But that was very helpful I thought and it opened doors to [conversations like:] ‘do you want to get together to work on this?’” (Participant 3, Semester 1).

Not all students shared the same feelings about the meetings and the group’s level of mutual engagement. One student in particular who attended most of the meetings felt that the meetings were not having the intended effect. The student said: “I don’t think there’s a network coming out of this... I feel like it’s a meeting to discuss things that are

on [our] mind or when [we] are having problems within classes, but I don't feel as though a network is being created with that" (Participant 4, Semester 1). When asked why not, her answer was: "For the sheer fact that no one goes. It's inconsistent for people who go... It's not required, so why go?" (Participant 4, Semester 1). This student appeared to be frustrated with the fact that some of her classmates chose not to participate in the meetings. The student saw the meetings as being very helpful and felt that they should be mandatory for all first year students.

Another interesting example of a differing view of the meetings was given by a student who explained why one of the members of her smaller circle of friends didn't attend most of the meetings: "She told me that when she talked, she felt like she was taking up other people's time and she didn't want to bother them with her stuff" (Participant 2, Semester 1). While the student being referred to by the interviewee never became a regular participant in the meetings, as I explain later in the document she did eventually participate in a number of meetings where she felt the topic was directly relevant to her.

Joint Enterprise

The majority of the first year students seemed to share a joint enterprise, which included a focus on surviving as a student, graduating from the program, and becoming a competent consultant. Students spent a large portion of their time with each other working on projects and papers for classes, practicing consulting skills, and working together on managing life as a graduate student. One student sums the group's joint enterprise nicely, saying "When we had work to hand in, the night before or two or three days before, you'd go on MSN [Messenger]... and everyone is there if you had any

questions...It was really everybody asking each other questions all the time and everybody helping each other out. That was good” (Participant 2, Semester 1). Another student recounted a particular occasion where a few students met at one person’s house to discuss an upcoming project: “It just got everybody together and we had a good night and we didn’t just talk about [the project], we talked about other things” (Participant 4, Semester 1). This student’s comments on talking about other things are reflective of many comments made in the first semester of the research regarding the blending of learning with social engagements. At many of the social engagements between students, they reported spending a significant amount of time talking about school. Conversely, many meetings for school purposes contained a social aspect to them, such as going to a bar afterwards, having dinner together, watching television, or simply “hanging out”.

As was the case with mutual engagement, not all of the students were in agreement about the group’s joint enterprise. One student felt that the group as a whole was not committed to the program: “I get a sense that the attitude is that ‘If I didn’t have to go to class I wouldn’t go. If I didn’t have to get up in the morning and go, I wouldn’t go. If I had something better to do I wouldn’t go’ type of attitude. I don’t see them saying ‘Yeah! Let’s go to class! Yeah!’” (Participant 4, Semester 1). A few students also commented on the same non-participative colleague mentioned above, who did not seem to have the same reasons for being in the program as the others. One student said: “I know for a fact that she doesn’t want to do consulting, she’s only in this program to get a master’s degree. So she’s not really involved too much. It kind of puts up a little wall” (Participant 4, Semester 1). Another student also commented: “she didn’t come [to the meetings] very often. I don’t know why because she likes [them]... I had the impression,

not that she didn't want to share her ideas, but that's the impression it gave when she spoke" (Participant 2, Semester 1).

Shared Repertoire

Throughout the semester there were a number of different occasions that revealed some of the group's shared repertoire. The repertoire mainly revolved around two somewhat contradictory themes. First the group defined itself as being composed of mainly novices at consultation and at graduate level studies. Their focus was on working together to survive week by week. This was evident in the way students often looked to me, to professors, or to other graduates from the program for advice on a wide variety of topics and issues throughout the semester. The students also mentioned on a number of occasions that they wished they had access to second year students in the program to answer their questions. For example one student said:

I know personally I have a billion questions that I would love to be able to ask somebody... because a lot of it is just us picking our way through and maybe not understanding what people want or where we are supposed to be going with things. But if we could ask somebody... I know we can ask our profs and everything. But it would be good if we could relate to somebody that's in the program, doing the same things we're doing, same age... going through the same kind of things and stresses and everything. (Participant 1, Meeting 3)

Much of the talk in the group related to working together to "survive" the semester and trying to keep up to the workload. Many students chose to meet in small groups outside of class to work on projects together or get feedback from each other. They also searched for resources from "professionals" in books, articles, and on the Internet, and frequently

consulted the collection of student papers and projects from previous years that were kept in the training centre.

The second theme that dominated the shared repertoire of the group seems somewhat contradictory to the first. While students saw themselves as novices who were ready to privilege the opinions of anybody they viewed as having more experience than them in the field, they also proclaimed themselves to be the champions for the cause of future informal learning in the program. In meeting #3 there was a lengthy discussion about the training centre and the fact that they were the first ones to have access to the centre and its resources. This led one student to proclaim: “We’re the first group. Nothing is there for us. We’re like the pioneers of these ideas” (Participant 6, Meeting 3). This, in turn, spawned a conversation on how to improve the look, feel, and function of the training centre, to make it more inviting to others, but more importantly, to make it feel like it was the group’s own space. The participants also discussed taking the responsibility to find ways to connect with future students in the program who might be in the undergraduate classes for which many of them were teaching assistants. The students pledged to create a mentorship program with new first year students once they, themselves became second year students. The issue of mentoring appeared to be of great importance to the students, evident in the fact that almost all of the group members agreed that they wished they had access to second year students over the current semester, and they did not want the students in the following year to be without that opportunity. These contrasting perspectives reflect the persistent dichotomy that existed within the group of students throughout the research. On one hand the students had a strong desire to have all of the information “spoon fed” (to use the term employed by one

of the professors) to them while on the other hand these same students wanted to show leadership in the program by ensuring future generations of students have better opportunities than they felt they had (e.g. better access to second year students, more resources in the training centre).

Negotiation of Meaning

In the first few meetings there was very little noticeable “active” (i.e. verbal) negotiation of meaning between participants or between myself and participants. Everyone seemed content to politely listen to each others’ thoughts and opinions, making sure not to voice any disagreement. However during the final few meetings, students began to voice their opinions more, even when they were in opposition to those of other colleagues. In fact, one student showed up to meeting #7, explained a project she was working on for a class, and then openly invited the rest of the group to discuss it, or as she put it “to argue against me” (Participant 8, Semester 1). This student invited her colleagues to discuss her interpretations of the multiple topics she had included in her project (which were relevant to all the other students as well) and critique her opinions on them and how she arranged them in her project.

In the final meeting of the semester, students finally began to openly and enthusiastically engage in negotiating meaning with each other. The meeting consisted almost exclusively of discussions in which the participants discussed their thoughts and opinions and openly disagreed with each other. The topics varied from talking about different ways to write a paper and sharing personal philosophies on consulting, to critiquing a new theory currently being used in the consulting literature. Not only were

students willing to engage in the negotiation of meaning with each other by the end of the semester, on many occasions they even invited it from their colleagues.

Semester #2 – January 2005 to April 2005

This semester included six meetings and was the period in which the students began to seek out more practical learning experiences to help prepare them for their summer internships. In particular, students wanted to gain more knowledge and experience in the design and delivery of group workshops. In response to this, a part of most of the semester's meetings was dedicated to discussing topics related to workshops and experiential learning activities. The students reported feeling like their courses were not covering this particular topic as thoroughly as they would like and it was agreed that the meetings were a good venue to share ideas, practice skills, and learn more about conducting workshops with client groups. Other topics that were discussed during the semester were: students' perceptions of how they've changed since entering the program, team building, and dual-role relationships. Near the end of the semester students also began once again to discuss their major projects for their courses and seek each others' advice and support on various aspects of these projects. Another topic that became prominent near the end of the semester was a number of students' challenges with certain professors and how to handle the situation. This topic engaged very open and productive dialogues on how to manage some of the challenges of being a student.

Student Perceptions of Semester #2

While there was a consensus among students that they experienced significant personal and academic learning and growth over the semester, it appears to have been very stressful and challenging for them as well, particularly near the end. One student

said: “the second semester was... extremely busy. A lot of work compared to the first one” (Participant 1, Semester 2). Another remarked: “The stress load was just.... horrible” (Participant 4, Semester 2). A third participant elaborated on her difficulties, saying: “I felt ten times more stressed [than the first semester] because the workload I found was more, which I didn’t think it would be, but it was... It’s kind of like a teeter-totter or a roller coaster” (Participant 7, Semester 2). During this semester these feelings of stress had an impact on this student’s motivation and commitment to the program. For example she said: You go from ‘yeah yeah, this is what I want to do’, to ‘oh is this what I want to do?’” (Participant 7, Semester 2).

Learning with Colleagues

The social learning between students seemed to be a bit of a bigger challenge for them compared to the previous semester, however it also seemed to play a more important role. As one student put it, “most of the learning that I did this semester came outside of the classroom” (Participant 4, Semester 1). Another student explained: “We got together in our study groups a whole lot more than we did [in the first semester], just for the different papers and things and to ask ‘what are you doing with this?’ and ‘how do you apply that?’” (Participant 3, Semester 2). When asked who arranged these study groups, she replied: “some of us said ‘do you feel like meeting together?’ and then people would join in if they wanted to. But it was like ‘ok we are meeting in the training centre at such and such a time’ as opposed to impromptu little conversations” (Participant 3, Semester 2). While the study groups were helpful for many of the students, they also occasionally posed a few challenges. For example, one student explained: “sometimes I find it challenging to work in groups because there are scheduling conflicts and that sort

of thing” (Participant 1, Semester 2). Students said they worked together on group projects and also on individual projects and papers, getting together either at school, at someone’s house, over the phone, or on MSN Messenger.

One student described in detail how she perceived the social learning between herself and her classmates and the progression of their learning from confusion at the beginning of the semester to a more confident ability to negotiate meaning with each other at the end. She said:

We used each other a lot for sounding boards basically... but [around Christmas] it kind of got lost though. There was an echo, like “I don’t know, do you know?” But now we have informed opinions. So even if we are on opposite sides of the board, we can defend our positions much better than we could at Christmas.

(Participant 3, Semester 2)

Meetings and Facilitation

The feedback regarding the meetings for the semester was quite positive. In fact, one student said: “I liked them better than the classes... [They were] more interactive... I felt like I learned more out of those than I did in classes” (Participant 4, Semester 2). When asked to explain why she felt this way, the student explained:

When you are sitting alone and you’re going through all these things you have to do... and you’re going “oh my gosh, oh my gosh”, going to a meeting where you are actually talking about it, you realize you’re not that off as you think you are. You’re not going to do a horrible job. Yeah you are going to make mistakes, but it’s ok... It [also] makes you realize that you are on the same level as everybody else. (Participant 4, Semester 2)

Another student commented on the discussions about workshops that began midway through the semester and occupied most of the meetings near the end of the semester. She said: “when you switched gears and it turned more workshop oriented, that was more useful to me... I think the rest of the group too was even more involved because we felt we weren’t getting that practical applied stuff [in class]” (Participant 1, Semester 2). One student summed up her feelings about the group and the meetings, saying: “I think we all sort of got what we needed to get out of the meetings. I think some needed to vent and some needed to ask a bunch a questions, and some needed to do both and some needed to listen sometimes. So I think it was kind of individual what we took from the meetings” (Participant 3, Semester 2). An interesting point was brought to light when a student commented that often the conversations from the meetings would continue after the meeting was done. She explained: “When class ends, it ends at a specific time and... nobody thinks about staying unless they have something planned afterwards... [But] when the boundaries are less stringent then people have a little bit less hurry to get out the door” (Participant 3, Semester 2).

In terms of facilitation, as mentioned above, students seemed to most appreciate the facilitation of discussions on workshops and experiential learning activities this semester. However, a few students also mentioned that they valued having the space to vent their fears and frustrations on a few occasions and to discuss topics that could not be discussed in class due to their nature or the lack of time. One student explained: “I found [the meetings] useful because... we were all like ‘ahhhh, the internship is coming!’ It was where we vented and got out feelings that we were having about our lack of preparedness

that we have and some of the professors that we were having difficulties with”

(Participant 1, Semester 2).

Meeting #10 – January 31

The first meeting of the new semester provided me with an opportunity to ask the three students in attendance about their impressions of the program after one semester and how they felt they’ve changed since the beginning of their master’s degree. The discussion was rich and varied, with the students’ views oscillating between expressions of having learned so much and feeling like they still have so much to learn. One student explained: “last semester showed me what I didn’t know”. Another participant said: “I still don’t think I’d know what to do if I had to consult tomorrow”. Overall the group felt like their learning was progressing, but they were still apprehensive about their abilities as future consultants. One particular area where students thought their knowledge was lacking was in the organization and delivery of group workshops. They felt that they hadn’t received as much information as they wanted in their courses up to this point, and wanted to see live examples of workshops and practice delivering mock workshops themselves. I suggested to them that workshops could be the focus of the next couple meetings where we might be able to address many of their concerns. The group seemed very excited and relieved by this idea. The discussion about workshops continued for some time and then evolved to a more broad discussion on consulting with groups in general and the students’ fears and apprehensions of doing so. I then asked students what else they felt was missing up to this point in the program. The students expressed a desire to see some live examples of consulting with individual clients as well.

A short, but very interesting discussion was sparked near the end of the meeting when a student expressed her feeling that she didn't have enough time for what she called "ongoing learning" (which she described as engaging in meaningful discussions, reading additional literature around topics of interest from classes, taking time to reflect on readings and discussions, etc.). Another student agreed with her and cited her own personal examples of lacking time for ongoing learning. I suggested that they could bring key articles, books, movies, etc. that are not covered in class to the meetings to share and/or discuss. Both students said that they thought this was a good idea but felt they would have difficulty deciphering the quality of the materials, given that there is a large body of literature on consulting and a wide range of opinions and styles. This suggested to me that the students did not yet feel they had acquired the knowledge and skills to make an educated decision on what constitutes "good" literature.

Facilitating Meeting #10

In this meeting, I felt like I assumed a more traditional facilitation role than previous meetings. I didn't really engage as a "participant" in the conversation as I had done before and I stuck to asking questions and guiding the conversation along. This was mainly due to the fact that the topics that were discussed were related specifically to the students' opinions and experiences, thus my input was not really necessary. While students were not really learning anything new from each other or from me in this meeting, facilitating the sharing of their experiences in the program so far seemed very useful, since it allowed the group to relate to each others' struggles and challenges and to develop strategies for overcoming them in the future.

Meeting #11 – February 7

This meeting was focused on workshops and for the seven students in attendance, it was an opportunity to ask questions and learn from the experiences of one of their own group members. This group member was a former student in the program (and now a doctoral student) who was now consulting in the field, and who had already attended a few of the initial meetings in semester #1. The students listened intently to her stories and lessons from consulting, and then proceeded to ask him a variety of questions about her experiences. I joined the conversation at a few points and added my thoughts and experiences as well.

A notable moment occurred during the discussion when the experienced group member mentioned a few team building activities that she likes to do with groups. Hearing this, one of the students suggested that over the coming weeks the group could find and/or create other team building activities and bring them to the meetings so that the group could build its own repertoire for future use. The group liked this idea and it was decided that they would each find or create one activity for the following meeting. Another important moment came when a student asked the group for some advice on her upcoming internship and ways to solicit clients. The students responded with their opinions, followed by advice from the more experienced group member, and then from me.

Facilitating Meeting #11

Similar to meeting #4 in which there was an invited guest, my involvement in this meeting as a facilitator was quite minimal. However, as with other meetings, whenever I felt that my experience or knowledge was pertinent to the conversation, I shared it with

the group. In particular I spoke up when my experience differed from that of the other experienced group member, so that students could hear multiple points of views and outcomes regarding consulting. I made sure, however, to give the students the opportunity to share their thoughts before adding my own. I did actively facilitate the process during a few occasions when students made suggestions for future meetings, making sure to get concrete decisions on ideas and suggestions put forth by members of the group.

Meeting #12 – February 14

Today's meeting was again focused on learning the intricacies of developing and delivering workshops. There were originally four students in attendance, however one student promptly left only a few minutes into the session, saying she was tired and that she would be working on a computer just outside of the room. I was a bit upset that she was leaving before even getting started, but I didn't say anything. The other three students and I continued the workshop together and it went very well. There was a lot of participation and some obvious signs of enjoyment (i.e., laughter, loud talking, etc.). The very interesting thing that happened is that in the middle of my second activity, the student who left the room earlier suddenly popped her head in the doorway - obviously to see what all the talk and laughter was about. I let her observe for a minute and then invited her to join in. She accepted and immediately joined us and I managed to quickly incorporate her into the activity. She even participated in the discussion to debrief the activity afterwards.

Facilitating Meeting #12

I was quite pleased with how the “workshop” went today. We were only 3 (4) people in the room, but I felt like it was exactly what those students wanted to learn and talk about, and they seemed very satisfied in the end. I would have liked more time to debrief the workshop afterwards, so immediately following the meeting I sent the four students an e-mail asking for their feedback. The most significant aspect of this meeting was the return of the student who had left the room to “relax”. To me, her return indicated that there was something of personal value to her going on in the room, which made her want to rejoin the group. The importance of her rejoining the group without my intervention is reflected in a portion of my journal entry after the meeting:

I have purposely not asked people to come to the meetings, instead opting to leave them to their own devices and decisions as to whether they would like to join in.

In this way I feel I can have a better idea of whether what I am doing is relevant to them or not. I don’t want anybody there simply because I have asked them. I would rather have three students who are there only out of interest than 20 there because I’ve asked them to come. My hope is that students themselves will talk about what is going on in the meetings and encourage others to join them, or simply that others will hear what’s going on and be interested in coming. (My Journal, February 14)

February 21 – Spring Break (no meeting)

February 28

My journal entry for this date was as follows:

There was no meeting today since nobody showed up. Most of the students were busy preparing for an ethics presentation on Wednesday. A few students explained that they were busy and apologized for not being able to attend the meeting. I felt they were being sincere and partly I believed that they didn't want to let me down. Although it would have been good to have a meeting and I could have tried to encourage people to attend and invited more people, I don't feel like that is the solution. I would really like the topics to be the motivator not me. (My Journal, February 28)

Meeting #13 – March 7

This meeting had six participants and was focused on discussing various aspects of team building. One of the main issues for the students was to develop a repertoire of activities that could be used for team building workshops. The majority of the meeting consisted of brainstorming for activities. There was participation from all of the students present at the meeting and a detailed repertoire of team building activities was created while students frantically took down notes on how to conduct each activity. At the end of the meeting it was decided that we would continue talking about activities the following week, this time discussing ways to enhance focus or concentration. As the meeting ended, students engaged in making plans to meet with each other for various projects they were working on.

Facilitating Meeting #13

I was very pleased with the process of the meeting and the participation in the discussion. Everyone in the room contributed ideas for team building activities and there was a continuous dialogue that included everybody in the room. The flow of this meeting was very in-line with how I originally envisioned these gatherings would be: an engaging discussion on a topic that has significance in the academic lives of the students. As with some previous meetings, my role in facilitating the discussion was relatively minimal, since the discussion was continuous and relevant. I participated in the dialogue by suggesting a few activities that I had used in my own consulting over the years. My feeling leaving this meeting was that students were very happy (and relieved) to have a bank of activities that they could use for their upcoming internships in the summer.

Meeting #14 – March 14

The first half of this meeting was completely student led, with participants discussing particular aspects of one of their projects. The project involved students conducting their first consultations with a real client. This had all of the students very nervous, and dominated the conversation even before students settled in to “start” the meeting. Group members raised question after question to each other, asking if people had heard from or met with their clients, what the group thought would be the best course of action in certain situations, or what other members actually did in various cases. In one instance, a second year student (who was not involved in the meeting but was nearby in the training centre using a computer) was asked for her input on the students’ questions based on her consulting experiences.

One particular exchange of note took place when a student expressed her concerns about dual-role relationships and overstepping boundaries, since she has qualifications in other areas related to the field. A lively discussion ensued in which a wide range of thoughts, opinions, and suggestions were made on what she should do. Eventually the group came to an agreement on what they thought she should do, and she appeared open to following their advice. I reflected:

I felt it was a great example of the negotiation of meaning between community of practice members. There was a discussion, there were ideas, there was a sort of give and take of ideas and I felt like there was learning as well. Although this is the first time such an occasion has happened so plainly, I feel it's a good sign that the community of learners is beginning to form a community of practice. (My journal, March 14)

The latter half of the meeting was spent discussing activities for focusing. Only a few students had brought any ideas about activities for focusing, which they shared. However the majority of the second half of the meeting involved me explaining various activities and students commenting on them, asking questions about them, or explaining a similar activity that they knew. Near the end of the meeting I asked if the students had any questions or comments. One student simply exclaimed "c'est vraiment bon" ("this is really good"), relating to me that she felt what we were doing was very useful.

Facilitating Meeting #14

In the first half of the meeting, I purposely deferred as many questions as possible to the other students, trying to get them to make suggestions or share their experiences instead of always hearing mine. In many cases I didn't even give my opinion or share my

experiences, since there were so many suggestions made and ideas shared by others, and often times they were the same as mine. In contrast, the second half of the meeting required my participation to a larger degree than I would have liked. Students did not bring many ideas for focusing activities, either because they didn't know any or they didn't take the time to prepare and bring their ideas. Either way, I felt like I was "teaching" them, more than facilitating a discussion. However the students still did try and participate, and were quick to give their thoughts and opinions wherever they could. Reflecting on this meeting, I wrote in my journal:

One thing I decided I would like to ask students when I do individual interviews at the end of the semester is why they come or don't come to these sessions... is it a matter of time, of interest in the topics, or something else? Overall I feel the meetings are going fairly well and I hope that the larger number of participants continues. It seems so variable week to week and it's hard to tell why they are coming or not coming week to week. Maybe talking about specific activities has generated some interest in people who haven't been coming. We'll have to see if they come next week.

Meeting #15 – March 21

My journal entry for this meeting sums up very nicely exactly what happened with the five participants who attended:

Today's session started out with a simple question about how things were going and me asking if there was anything that anybody wanted to talk about. The students almost immediately started talking about their frustrations regarding [a professor's] class. In particular they are feeling like the class is not applied

enough and they are not getting the practice that they need. But the irony of it is that in their group presentations they mostly chose to add more practical content instead of theory and their professor docked them marks for not putting the theory in. The students very clearly found this frustrating and unfair since the class is supposed to be a very applied class.

While they were talking about their frustrations, a very interesting comment came up that relates to the community of practice.... The students told me that in order to compensate for the low grades they are receiving for their group presentations (which they see as unfair), they all agreed that they would give very high (not quite perfect though, to avoid being caught) marks on the peer grading sheets in order to bring their grades up. This is fascinating from a community of practice perspective, since it shows that the students negotiated the meaning of the project and decided to keep their projects on the practical side, despite the constraints placed on them by their professor. In doing this they found a novel way to engage together in their practice in order to achieve their joint enterprise - good grades and graduation. Thus they were able to figure out amongst themselves how to be successful, despite the framework set out by the professor. Thus, to me is a great example of learning together outside of the classroom. (My journal, March 21)

A great moment occurred near the end of the discussion when one student asked the group "do you think they'll fail us?" and the rest of the group reassuring the student that it wouldn't happen. One student then said "Don't worry, we'll fall together... we'll fight together". The second half of the meeting was a continuation of what we had been doing

for a few weeks - exploring activities that could be done with groups during workshops or presentations. This week's topic was communication/teamwork. There were a number of great ideas and students seemed to feed off one another in generating new ideas for activities. All in all the meeting seemed "productive" in the sense that students were able to voice their concerns and we also talked about the activities as planned.

Facilitating Meeting #15

Again, my journal entry accurately sums up my thoughts on the meeting:

One thing that I was not too sure about was my handling of the concerns from students. I was fairly quiet and tried to reserve comment as much as possible. I wanted students to voice their opinions, so I focused on getting them to share what they were thinking. While this part was good, I am not sure if I should have been a little more active in getting students to come up with some possible solutions. Part of me thinks they just needed to vent and part of me thinks that they were looking to me for answers as to what they should do. I merely suggested for them to ask their professor for clarification on her marking scheme and I also suggested that they should explain to her that they left out the theory on purpose so they could add more applied stuff. But other than that I reserved comment. That part of the meeting finished somewhat without resolve and it left me wondering if I should have encouraged the group to think of some solutions. In addition, I was not feeling like there were many solutions at the time (maybe that biased me a little bit), so I didn't have a lot to offer them anyway. But I am still pleased with the discussion and students did thank me for letting them vent.

Development of the Community of Practice

Despite all of the positive advancements in the group's learning over the semester, individual interviews revealed that the continued development of the community of practice was in serious jeopardy. Students spoke of a shift in the dynamic of the group that occurred part way through the semester, which drastically changed the way the group members interacted with one another. One student explained: "The moment that I started to see the difference was when we started to talk about our internships... That's when I felt that there were some that didn't want to talk. Why? I don't know. Maybe they didn't want others to interfere with their internship or to steal their ideas" (Participant 2, Semester 2). Another student shared her view on what happened to the group:

I found towards the end of this semester that the overall tone sort of changed... In the fall we were all at the same level and we were all completely lost and nobody had any idea. And now I almost feel a little bit of competition coming out, which is unfortunate because it's such a small group. (Participant 3, Semester 2)

Looking more closely at the mutual engagement, joint enterprise, shared repertoire, and negotiation of meaning in the group over the semester helps to shed some light on the ways in which the group dynamics were affected.

Mutual Engagement

The reports of mutual engagement by students during the semester are somewhat conflicting. On one hand students reported a number of occasions in which they would purposely gather for learning purposes outside of classes and meetings, and on the other hand, many of them said the group never got together outside of class time. These

contradictory statements occurred not only between students, but also within the responses of the same students in some instances.

Those students who reported that the group did engage together outside of class time for learning purposes referred mostly to the learning that occurred around class time. This included the minutes immediately before and after classes in the classroom, in hallways, and when arrived at the students' next destination (e.g., another class, the student lounge, the training centre, etc.). For example, one student said: "It was kind of impromptu discussions coming out of meetings or classes... If we didn't have a chance to speak about a case scenario or something, we would continue the discussion outside" (Participant 3, Semester 2). Another student explained:

Most people came to class early... We'd just chat a little bit, five minutes, about what we are doing... [One class] was a huge problem, so we'd just throw something out there and we'd offer to meet" (Participant 6, Semester 2).

In contrast to the accounts of mutual engagement above, when asked about the group's learning outside of the classroom, one student responded: "all of the group together outside of class time? I would say no. The times that we were together the most was with you [in the meetings], and still there were people missing" (Participant 2, Semester 2). Another student answered: "There are cliques for sure. There are some people that get along better with others" (Participant 4, Semester 2). This student later added a somewhat contradictory statement, saying: "I think the group is great. We all help each other out when we have problems. I don't feel shy to go ask anyone for help and I don't think anyone feels shy either... I know we've had some rough patches here

and there, but I feel we've stuck together and tried to help each other out" (Participant 4, Semester 2).

In examining the interviews more closely it appears that the students engaged with each other frequently in smaller groups however they didn't make any attempts to get together as a larger group during the semester. One student explained her perspective on the smaller groups, saying: "In the second session... we were three of us together [in our group]. We were separated and there were definite groups. We didn't really talk much between groups, which really surprised me because I thought we would all work together. I don't know why, but there seemed to be some competition between certain people" (Participant 2, Semester 2). Another possible explanation for the seemingly contradictory statements could be that while the students planned very few get-togethers for learning purposes, there were still many impromptu discussions that occurred throughout the semester. So while students may have felt there was less engagement in learning activities outside of the classroom, this may have been more a matter of the type of learning opportunity rather than the number of opportunities.

Joint Enterprise

One of the biggest reasons that the students opted to gather only in smaller groups outside of class time appeared to be due to the realization during the semester that not all of their colleagues were in the program for the same reasons. This led to a serious blow to the joint enterprise of the group, which seemed to be shared by almost all of the students during the first semester. One student explained: "I think that there are some people who aren't necessarily sure that they want to be doing this [program]" (Participant 7, Semester 2). Another student echoed the lack of joint enterprise, saying: "I think the dynamic was

different [in the second semester] because we knew each other better... You knew the person but now you also knew the direction they wanted go more with school and in that sense it was different” (Participant 1, Semester 2). When asked to elaborate further on how knowing each other better impacted the group’s joint enterprise, she said: “Because you know that is somebody... that doesn’t necessarily want to be a consultant in the end... It’s not a negative thing it’s just that...it may not be as important for them to put in as much effort to totally learn this stuff” (Participant 1, Semester 2). Interestingly, when asked whether she thought this lack of joint enterprise affected the way she or other group members interacted with one another, she said: “I don’t think so, I just was aware of it... We are a pretty cohesive group, for the most part anyway. So I don’t think it really did. Now we just know that that’s what they want to do” (Participant 1, Semester 2). But while this student felt the lack of joint enterprise did not affect the group negatively, some of her colleagues didn’t feel the same way.

Shared Repertoire

There were a number of different examples from meetings and individual interviews that revealed the repertoire that was developed and shared among students during the semester. However the majority of them carried the same theme – the struggle of students to prepare themselves for their summer internships. All of the students were concerned about being ready enough to work with real clients and this fear infiltrated the language and many of the conversations between them, with me in the meetings as a group, and individually outside of the meetings.

While the fear of the upcoming internship seemed to have created an atmosphere of competition among students as described above, there was also a strong repertoire of

togetherness in the descriptions of their struggling and learning. For example, one student said: “This was kind of the semester of frustration for a lot of us... We were all so worried all the time. So we kind of came up with our own little thing: “What if I encounter this? What if I, what if I...” so we kind of did our own little what ifs” (Participant 3, Semester 2). Another student explained: “It makes you realize that you are on the same level as everybody else. You are just as worried as they are. It just kind of makes you feel ok because you’re like ‘I’m worried, they’re worried, thank god everybody’s worried. I’m not the only one’” (Participant 4, Semester 2).

A few other notable examples of the shared repertoire of students related to their classroom work and how they perceived its relationship to their learning. Students often approached their learning about consultation as if there was a single correct way to do it. This frequently led them to trying to find “the” answer to their consultation questions and situational dilemmas. One student explained this search for the “recipe” among students. She said: “[The professors] are trying to tell us that “you can do it yourself” and we want the recipe, but there is no recipe. By the time you figure that out you’ve pretty much missed all the information because you are still trying to figure out what they were trying to tell you” (Participant 6, Semester 2).

Another example of shared repertoire came from the students’ description of their group “triad” work, in which they conducted mock consultation sessions with each other. One student described the process and gave some insight on how the mock consultations were perceived. She said: “We were doing our ‘playing house’ group, that’s what we called it...” (Participant 3, Semester 2). When asked why it was called the “playing house” group, the participant explained that the situations and circumstances didn’t feel

real and that made it difficult for the group to take them seriously or to truly practice their consultation skills. This feeling would become a larger issue late in the semester when in the meetings students voiced their desire to see more “real” consultations led by experienced consultants. This led to discussions with professors about the students’ requests and eventually to a few professors conducting live consulting sessions while students observed behind a two-way mirror. While there’s little doubt about the utility of this type of exercise, it does raise the question of whether the students were simply looking for another “recipe” to follow for consulting. As one professor explained: “There was some kind of contradiction: They put a lot of value on learning to practice and at the same time they wanted THE formula... Some of them were really looking for A, B, C, D; ‘tell me what it’s going to be so then I can show that’” (Professor 3).

Negotiation of Meaning

In this semester there were numerous great examples of the negotiation of meaning between students. The meetings provided an ideal context to witness, and on occasion participate in, a number of discussions in which the students negotiated the meaning of some aspect of their involvement and learning in the master’s program. One student relayed her opinion that the group actively and effectively engaged in negotiating meaning throughout the semester. She said: “Despite the fact that it started getting a little competitive, everybody still seemed to be really open... There’s no sugar coating the actual practical stuff, but I think that’s because we are not in that place that we were in last year, you know, we’re not new anymore” (Participant 3, Semester 2). From my perspective and based on the way the group interacted with each other during the meetings, her comments seemed to be accurate.

Two particular examples stand out from the meetings, which display the group's willingness and openness to engage with each other in negotiating meaning. First, the discussions during a few meetings about different activities that could be used with groups in consultations provided many quality discussions on how to work with groups. It also produced the opportunity for students to talk openly about what they felt would and would not be effective in working with different types of clientele. This allowed students to negotiate the meaning of quality consultation and what it takes to work effectively with groups.

A second example of negotiating meaning during meeting comes from the group's discussion about a particular class and their decision to take matters into their own hands regarding their grades. Students were upset with their grades in a particular course, feeling the low marks were unfair and inaccurate. They collectively discussed the issue and decided to compensate for the low grades by giving each other high marks for the peer marking grade that the professor had included for the project. One student explained: "There's been an understanding between the people marking that we will just give each other really good marks... because they help counteract, so we don't fail" (Participant 1, Semester 2, Meeting 15). This displayed the group's negotiation of meaning on the topics of survival as a student and fairness in grading.

One very interesting point that arose during a few end-of-semester interviews relates to the reasons why some students chose on some occasions not to actively engage in negotiating meaning with the rest of the group. One student explained that she chose to only listen in many group settings because getting different opinions from group members was unnecessarily confusing for her. She said: "[There are] too many people

with different opinions. I personally would never come here [to the Training Centre]... When there's a big group of more than four people, most of the time I won't ask for help, I'll just listen" (Participant 6, Semester 2). Thus, while this student could be seen by her colleagues as not being engaged, this may not have been accurate. She may simply have been adopting a role of peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Another student who chose not to engage in negotiating meaning with her colleagues on many occasions had different reasons for not wanting to do so. She explained: "As far as who I want to learn from, it's mostly the pros... Not that I can't learn from [my colleagues], it's just that they are learning as well, so what they can offer is limited" (Participant 5, Semester 2). Both of these students' reasons for not engaging with their colleagues in negotiating meaning are very fascinating in that they help to better understand some of the dynamics and learning styles that were present in the group. They also might help to explain the growing sense of diversity in the joint enterprise of the group that occurred as the semester progressed.

Semester #3 – April 2005 to August 2005

The summer semester did not include any group meetings with me. Some students left the city and the province to conduct their internships over the summer, and students did not have any courses during this semester. After consulting with students, I felt it would be too much of a challenge and too small of a group left in the city to try and organize regular meetings during this period. Thus I decided to incorporate a web-based online Learning Management System (LMS) called Web Course Tools, or WebCT for short. My feeling was that the LMS would allow students to have a virtual meeting place

where they could share ideas, update each other on their progress, ask questions, and access resources while they conducted their internships.

WebCT

In March, when I introduced the idea of WebCT to the students, they seemed excited about the prospect of a virtual meeting place for the summer and the sharing of ideas and resources it would allow. I decided to focus on two key learning tools on the WebCT site - a resource section and a threaded discussion group. I wanted the resource section to be a place where I could share electronic resources with them, and in turn, they could share new resources that they found (or created) with their colleagues (and me). I also hoped that the threaded discussion would allow students to talk about important topics in a way that would allow the whole group to have access to the entire dialogue in a chronological fashion so that they could potentially participate in it as well. While in theory both of these ideas seemed to be useful and effective ways to solve the challenge of learning at a distance over the summer, the reality was that both of them had very limited success.

Resource Section

Before giving students access to the WebCT site, I uploaded a large number of the worksheets, activities, and other documents that I had found or created and used as a consultant in the field over the previous 3 years. I also invited students to upload the tools that they found or created during their summer internships, so that their colleagues (and possibly future students) could have access to them. Despite my encouragement, no new material was submitted to be added to the resource section by any students. Students did

nevertheless mention that they found the resources that I had uploaded very useful for their internships.

Threaded Discussion Group

Early in the summer the threaded discussion group was used once by a student who was out of town to ask a question. I responded and one other student also responded to the question. The threaded discussion feature was not used again by the students during the summer months. I posted information various times over the summer using the discussion group feature, but never got any further responses or feedback from students.

Facilitation of the WebCT Site

I put in a significant amount of work initially to build the WebCT site and to gather, organize, and upload all of the resources. The rest of the summer did not require much facilitation on my part, since there was virtually no group interaction on the site. Therefore the majority of my time on the site was spent monitoring it for any new messages. This was very discouraging for me at the time. I spent a long time trying to figure out the cause of the low participation and deciding what I should do about this situation. Following my philosophy of not wanting to coerce students into engaging with each other, I decided that I would sporadically add something to the threaded discussion group and the resources page. In this way it would invite students to check in and possibly participate on the WebCT site more often if they were interested without coercing students who chose not to check in or participate. My plan did not seem to work very well in getting students to participate in the threaded discussion, however it appears that it may have contributed to more regular visits to the resources section among a few of the students.

Student Perceptions for Semester #3

Despite not having any courses over the summer, students felt this semester was the most important and productive up to that point. This was mainly due to beginning their 400-hour internships - their first ongoing practical experiences of the program with real clientele. One student said: “I learned so much more during my summer than during anything else I did at school, university or anything, for sure” (Participant 2, Semester 3). While the students didn’t have any meetings with me, they did meet with a supervisor every two weeks, alternating between group and individual supervision meetings with him. This was their only “official” contact with each other associated with the program, however many of the students stayed in contact with each other outside of the meetings, but only in smaller groups of two or three. One student explained: “I don’t think that any one person talked to everybody... I don’t think it’s that we try to be exclusive or anything. I think as a whole we blend really well together” (Participant 7, Semester 3).

Learning with Colleagues

Although students all said they only really interacted with one or two of their colleagues for learning purposes over the summer, these interactions were seen as crucial to their growth and development. For example one student explained how she would interact with her colleagues to help her prepare for her internship consultations. She said: “I did all my research and my preparation by myself, but then once my own ideas were done then I worked a lot with [two of my colleagues] for approval of my ideas... So I ran it by them and then once it made sense and I had an idea of how long it would last then I would just go do it” (Participant 6, Semester 3). Two students who conducted part of their internship together also both described this shared experience as being helpful and

insightful. One student said: “Whenever we would run a session, we would always debrief it in the car on the way back to work. I found that really productive because we were able to talk about... how we felt things went, what we think we could change and basically how much do we think we helped them as well” (Participant 7, Semester 3). Another student described her interactions with her colleagues over the summer as being not only helpful, but literally indispensable. She said: “If I hadn’t been able to vent different things and tell... people exactly how I felt as the summer progressed... I probably would have been completely ready to throw in the towel” (Participant 3, Semester 3).

Use of the WebCT Site

The use of the WebCT site over the summer instead of meetings was met with a range of opinions from students. Some said they liked having the website for reasons of time and convenience. For example one student said: “I wouldn’t have wanted to come in [to school] too much more because... my time was already devoted to my teams and I spent a lot of time with them... And if it would have been too much more [time at school] I think I would have felt more restricted” (Participant 1, Semester 3). Others would have rather had meetings just like the previous two semesters. One student explained: “In the best case scenario it would have been nice to have our meetings over the summer because I think they were probably more effective than any one class that we had at any point so far” (Participant 3, Semester 3).

When asked specifically about the utility of the WebCT site, all of the students thought it was a useful resource. An interesting and somewhat revelatory statement about students’ apprehensions in consulting came from one of the students who said: “I was

very happy when I got that e-mail [saying the WebCT site was working]. I was like ‘oh that’s awesome, another security blanket’” (Participant 6, Semester 3). Despite all of the students saying they thought the WebCT site was a useful tool, when I asked the students about their specific rate of usage of the WebCT site, three students admitted that they had not been on it once during the summer months. All three cited lack of time as the main reason for not using the site, however all three said they still planned on accessing it in the near future (but none of them did). Of the students that did use the site over the summer, all of them named the resources section as the part of the site that they found to be most useful. One student said: “I think that’s great because if you don’t have anyone to talk to at least you have a place to go to get creative” (Participant 4, Semester 3). Another participant remarked: “I spent a lot of time just kind of going through the resources that were on there. There’s a lot of stuff to flip through and look at, and good ideas too” (Participant 1, Semester 3). A third participant commented on how she used the resources, making sure that she understood them before using them. She said: “I know when I go onto that website that I am going to find an idea for more workshops in a very short amount of time... so it’s applied and I appreciate that... But you still have to know why you are doing certain stuff and...understand where it comes from” (Participant 6, Semester 3).

Shortfalls of Using the WebCT Site

When asked if there were any shortcomings of using the WebCT site over the summer, the unanimous response from students was that it was not used frequently enough, and in some cases, not at all by some of them. When I probed the participants to find out what were some of the problems related to the usage of the site, particularly the

threaded discussion section, their answers all related to it being easier to simply talk with their colleagues in person or over e-mail. One student said: “I think a lot of people will use it more when they are out of school than when they are in school... I’d rather talk to somebody face to face than I would on the computer... But when you are away... it gives you this one area where you can talk to everybody” (Participant 4, Semester 3). Another student echoed this comment, saying: “We are only eight [students] so right now it’s easier for me to get in contact with them through e-mail... It was more complicated for me to figure out how to send the bulletin... and I was like “why don’t I just send her an e-mail?” (Participant 6, Semester 3). A third student commented: “I think it’s a good idea if people go on it, but right now no, if I had problems it wouldn’t come to my mind to put it on the [message] board right now because I don’t feel like I am going to get an answer in the near future. It might take a while” (Participant 2, Semester 3).

I then asked students what they thought could be done to increase the level of usage of the WebCT site. Their collective response was to increase the size of the network of people who have access to the site to include current, former, and future students in the field. One student commented: “If the network had been bigger on that website and I knew that people were going to be on there and answer questions, then yes I would use it more” (Participant 4, Semester 3). Another student envisioned a large effective network of students in the future with her group being the oldest. She said: “Let’s say we were like the 7th group and you were one of the people in that first year... I can see it as a long term beneficial thing... Or once we all graduate and we’re spread out... we could use the resources without feeling like [we are] taking advantage of them because it’s in that context of sharing” (Participant 6, Semester 3). A third student echoed this vision of the

future stating: “in a few years the newcomers in the program won’t have our contact so if we still go on this site and they have questions, we are going to have three, four, five years of experience. We are going to be able to help them even though we don’t know them. So if we just continue I think it could be helpful” (Participant 2, Semester 3).

Facilitation of the WebCT Site

Since there was very little facilitation on my part over the summer except to maintain the WebCT site, I did not ask specific questions about the facilitation aspect. However a few students still did make comments about my facilitation during this semester. For example, when I asked one student if there was anything else I could have done through the summer to help enhance the group’s learning she responded: “I think you provided us with a lot of opportunities, like that whole website was awesome I think, we just never took advantage of it... I don’t think it had anything to do with you per se and what you did and the opportunities you provided, it was just that people showed no interest and I don’t understand why” (Participant 4, Semester 3). When asked the same question, another student replied: “I think just knowing that you were there... that kept us in touch with you, so we would e-mail you if we had questions... I think it was good for you to kind of step back a little bit and say ‘go and do it’... It made us a little bit more independent but kind of still knowing that you are not very far behind” (Participant 6, Semester 3).

Development of the Community of Practice

Compared to the previous two semesters, the development of the community of practice was minimal. Students had far less contact with each other during the semester for the most part, and students reported not feeling very connected with most of their

classmates, except for the one or two that were part of their small network or clique. Despite some students using the resources section of the WebCT site often during the summer, there was very little use of any of the communication tools between participants. Nevertheless some examples relating to the development of the community of practice did surface.

Mutual Engagement

As mentioned, there was less engagement between students as a larger group during the summer semester. Their main opportunity to connect with each other was during the supervision group meetings that occurred once every four weeks. But even during these meetings students explained that they did not feel very engaged with each other. This was perceived by some as being mainly due to a general lack of engagement in the meetings by students. For example one student who was conducting her internship out of town who participated in the meetings via conference calling said: “I kind of expected other people to talk, and I don’t know if people were just not confident enough to say anything or [the professor] just took over. I wasn’t here so I couldn’t really say, but [the professor] did all the talking” (Participant 4, Semester 3). When asked why she expected other people to talk during the meeting, she said: “I thought that was why they were holding these meetings, was so that everybody in the group learned about what everybody else was doing, so they could give comments...Those conference calls were not group learning” (Participant 4, Semester 3).

Another student experienced the group’s perceived lack of engagement with her as being due to the fact that she opted to delay conducting her internship until the following semester. She said: “I would definitely say that I felt disconnected. Not only because we

didn't see each other very often [over the summer] but because... I was pretty much the only one in the group that wasn't working on my internship" (Participant 5, Semester 3). However later the student admitted that she didn't really put any effort into being connected to her colleagues either, saying: "I just I came to the [supervision] meetings that were scheduled and that was pretty much all the contact that I had with them throughout the summer... It's not that I specifically wanted to disconnect from these people or the program, I just wanted to do my own thing" (Participant 5, Semester 3).

Ironically, despite the lack of engagement between this student and her colleagues over the summer months, she commented that she would have liked to meet more often with them during the semester. She said: "I think maybe if I had more meetings with the group then... I may have been more motivated or more tempted to do some work on my internship just because it would have been constantly on my mind. I had [supervision] meetings every two weeks, so for a span of two weeks I was somewhere else" (Participant 6, Semester 3). One student felt that getting together more often might have actually been a detriment to the practical learning experiences of the group. She said: "I think if [the meetings were] every week... You'd be able to experience [the internship consultations], but you wouldn't be as daring to experience them because you'd be like 'oh maybe I should get confirmation on that, right'. So maybe it allows you to build your confidence because you don't have to check in every week" (Participant 7, Semester 3).

Joint Enterprise

As with the mutual engagement of group members over the summer, it appeared that the joint enterprise was also not as strong within the group as a whole during this period. One student reported: "I think we are a group in this program, but we're all

individuals. Everyone has their own goals” (Participant 6, Semester 3). Another student chose to conduct her internship in an area more related to health as opposed to the sport focus taken by the rest of her colleagues. She commented on her difficulties in working with a different population from that of her colleagues for her internship. This student said: “During the internship it felt like there was a complete difference between what I was doing and what they were doing, so why ask [them questions]?... Yeah it would have been beneficial [to talk with them], but... I didn’t get the feeling as though it was the same [thing as I was doing]” (Participant 4, Semester 3). Another student also explained that she felt the discord within the group over the summer. She commented: “I don’t feel maybe as much a part of the group as I used to be but I’ve talked to people about that and I think it’s sort of a general consensus... There’s a light at the end of the tunnel so people are finding their own paths back out” (Participant 3, Semester 3). A fourth student agreed that the joint enterprise was not strong between students in this semester, however she saw it as a somewhat positive occurrence. She elaborated: “I guess if people were going in the same direction, all competing for one thing, there would be that added competition. People might be competing to get more contacts or score the better internship that’s going to pay off in the end, but we all have different goals” (Participant 6, Semester 3).

Shared Repertoire

While the students reported feeling much less nervous once their internships began, their repertoire still included many references to a shared uneasiness in working with new clients. One student described how this shared experience of apprehension served to help community members to relate to one another. She said: “Just knowing that everybody

else felt the same way and ‘ok I’m not getting any less nervous as we go through this program’, ‘well neither are they’ ‘Ok I feel better...’” (Participant 3, Semester 3).

Another example that demonstrated the group’s shared repertoire comes from a student’s description of how she and her colleagues approached their supervision meetings, wanting to appear competent to their supervisor by not divulging certain aspects of their internships that could be viewed negatively. She explained: “What eventually happened is that we were told that we needed to say our best experience and our worst experience... People sort of got their meeting face on and I do think that we tried to put our best foot forward” (Participant 3, Semester 3).

Negotiation of Meaning

Since there were no meetings and the students, for the most part, did not use the communication tools on the WebCT site, I did not observe nor participate in any situations where the students were together as a group. Based on the students’ comments, the only times they did assemble as a group during the summer was for their group supervision meetings (once every four weeks), which I did not attend. Therefore, by default, there are no situations of students negotiating meaning as a group that I can report. However, a few examples of a more implicit form of negotiating meaning did emerge during the summer. One example of this is the group’s selective use of the WebCT site. Soon after the site was launched there seemed to be an understanding between students that it would be used as a resource tool, but not a communication one. The communication tools were only used a few times and the response from other students was virtually non-existent. Students made it clear in interviews that it was easier to contact each other by phone or e-mail, but the resources section of the site contained

documents that were not available to them anywhere else. One student who did use the communication tool explained that after some difficulty figuring out how to ask a question on the forum, she finally managed to do so. However, she grew tired of waiting for a response and after a few days decided to just e-mail her question to her colleagues. She subsequently obtained a response by e-mail soon afterwards, making it clear that e-mail was the more efficient tool for communication with her colleagues.

A second example of the group's "implicit" negotiation of meaning during the summer comes from their shared expectations regarding the supervision meetings over the summer months. It appeared that students expected the meetings to be more conversational in nature, similar to the meetings I had been holding as part of this research. One student explained: "For sure our group meetings with you would have been more helpful than the group meetings that we had with the one supervisor, but not because it was [that particular professor] supervising" (Participant 2, Semester 3). Because of the perceived discrepancy between what they were expecting in the group supervision meetings and what actually occurred, students reported not feeling that they benefited as much from the meetings as they would have liked. From the accounts of some students, this created a culture of non-engagement in the meetings and a lack of respect for their potential value in helping students to improve their consultation skills.

Semester #4 - September 2005 to December 2005

This semester had five meetings and was the final term for the main group of participants and the first one for the new group of master's students in the program. In many ways this was a time of transitions for both groups as they each prepared for significant changes to their educational lives. This semester also represented an

opportunity for the second year students to follow through on their intentions to be a resource to the new students. Many of the semester's meetings reflected this intention and were focused mainly on helping the new students learn to survive academically and to become competent practitioners. Some examples of topics that were discussed during the meetings were: what the second year students have learned in the program so far; what the first year students hoped to learn in the program; attending and making presentations at major conferences; how to deal with particular professors, projects, grading, etc.; major challenges that second year students have faced and how they overcame them, and; internships.

Student Perceptions of Semester #4

There was a wide variation between the reports of student's perceptions of this semester regarding their social learning. Many second year students reported that very little learning outside of the classroom occurred in a larger group. However some of them also reported significant learning in smaller groups while others reported very little. Most students agreed that the relationship between the first and second year students was inclusive and beneficial, however not everyone felt this was the case. Overall the theme for the semester was that the second year students seemed to be very busy winding down their degree while for the first year students, things were just getting started.

Learning with Colleagues

Despite only having one day of classes per week, most of the second year students described their final semester together as being very busy and more individualistic than previous semesters. One student said: "I think we were all kind of 'every man for himself' this semester" (Participant 3, Semester 4). Another student said: "It was just go,

go, go the whole time” (Participant 5, Semester 4). However a third student had a different perspective on the final four months of the group’s master’s degree program. She admitted: “We were lazy this semester... Once the internship was done everything is done. There were two courses... and it seemed like they were just thrown in there to fill in [the time]” (Participant 2, Semester 4).

Regardless of the reasons, the time that students spent with each other in and out of the classroom was much more limited than in previous semesters. It also appeared that the level of engagement between students was not as high as in previous semesters. This left many students feeling like they were alone in their learning during the semester. For example, one student said: “I really noticed a difference having that resource cut off. There was a huge difference... not being able to actually see colleagues face to face and discuss things... So it was kind of like the anti-group semester” (Participant 3, Semester 4). Another commented: “I felt a bit disconnected from people because I was so busy, but I think that was the general [feeling] too because a lot of people were disconnected compared to first year” (Participant 7, Semester 4). There were a number of reasons given by students for the lack of connection during the semester. For example, one student attributed it to the size of the group. She said: “I think it’s part of being a part of such a small group for so long that we get to the point where we wear out each other’s welcome” (Participant 3, Semester 4). Another student felt that it was due to competition among colleagues. She said: “It was clear that some people definitely wanted to come out on top in this program in comparison to the rest of us” (Participant 5, Semester 4).

The impact of students not working together seemed to be greater outside of the classroom than inside. This was evident in the comments of one student who said: “I

don't think outside of the classroom it was as well oiled as in the classroom" (Participant 3, Semester 4). For example, when asked if she or her colleagues met outside of class time for learning purposes, a student answered: "I would say that no one met, because it was the same thing for everyone; one day of school and we were so busy outside" (Participant 2, Semester 4). Another student described a group project and how her colleagues managed to get it done without ever meeting face to face outside of class time. She said: "We had that project at the end [of the semester] and I don't think that our group managed to actually do anything in the same room at any point. We split it up and did things individually, even... acquiring the data" (Participant 3, Semester 4).

Learning with First Year Students. This was the first and only semester in which there was an overlap between first and second year students in the program. It was an important semester for both groups separately, as the second year students prepared for their transition out of the program and the new students transitioned into the program. However, this semester also represented the only chance for both groups to learn together with, and from, each other. For the second year students, this was their chance to implement the mentoring idea with the first years that they had discussed in previous semesters, and for the first year students, this was their best opportunity to have regular access to the knowledge and experiences of the second years. This reality was not lost on both groups of students during the semester. For example, one first year student said: "I did work with the second year students as much as I could before they left... Most of them were a perishable item in the sense that when Christmas hit they were mostly gone. So I tried to work with a few of them who I knew or who I was comfortable with" (Participant 9, Semester 4). A second year student commented on her group's opportunity

to connect with the first year students, saying: “I think we sort of felt like the big brothers and big sisters... It was interesting to see the people coming in after us and experiencing the same fears or concerns when they came in, so it was encouraging” (Participant 3, Semester 4). This student later explained:

I definitely think that the best part as far as group learning in general from the entire year and a half was the fact that we had the opportunity to mesh with the first years this year. I think that my biggest regret from the entire year and a half was that we didn't know our predecessors. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

The experiences of what the second year students described as the “mentoring” of first year students by them, were mixed for both groups. Some of the students in both years reported having very positive and productive mentoring experiences. However a number of others felt that the mentorship was less than ideal, mainly due to the second year students' lack of availability. For a couple of the first year students, their mentoring experience with their second year colleagues appeared to be ideal. One student in particular, seemed pleased with the availability and level of engagement of the second year group. She said: “The second year students were very helpful... They were wide open to help and they were interested to help, they wanted to help and we're all thankful for their openness and their willingness to lend a hand... There's not really one that hasn't helped out in some way” (Participant 14, Semester 4).

Another example of a positive mentoring experience came from a first year student who described her relationship with her assigned mentor saying: “She helped me so much... Every time I had a question she was always there to answer...It makes a huge difference just knowing that she'll be there for you” (Participant 10, Semester 4). When

asked what kind of things she learned from her mentor, the student responded: “A lot of the stuff that the profs don’t say or that’s actually not written in the course outline. It’s all the in between the lines stuff that you need to know that you’ll never know unless you ask people that have been through it before” (Participant 10, Semester 4). A third student echoed this student’s description of the type of information that was shared by second year students, saying: “The learning wasn’t so technical; it wasn’t detailed... [It was] more like “how do you do it?”... Its’ more like a lifestyle thing, big details like the internship “so how did you go about...?”... For me [that] had a huge influence on the way I approached my projects” (Participant 11, Semester 4).

There were also a few examples of second year students reporting their positive mentoring experiences with first year students. For instance, one student explained some of the interactions she had with a first year student. She said: “There was one [time] in particular I remember she said she was... finding it really challenging to get through some of the research stuff and so we just had a conversation about that... and I think that really reassured her and made her feel better about that kind of stuff” (Participant 1, Semester 4). This second year student explained that she was motivated to be a mentor because of her own experiences as a first year student. She said: “I would have loved to have somebody that I could have done that with, above me or a year ahead of me, because I am just like [the student I am mentoring]” (Participant 1, Semester 4).

While a number of positive mentoring experiences were mentioned, many students, particularly first years, felt that the mentoring was less than ideal. For example, one first year student said: “We didn’t see them a lot throughout this semester, so most of the time it was just in passing or in [the training centre]” (Participant 12, Semester 4).

Another student shared her thoughts on the mentoring relationship during the semester, saying: “I was actually a little bit disappointed in that relationship. I found that there wasn’t really any structure to it and no one really knew what to do with it... Now that they are gone, I’ve got questions... You only have one semester with the second years so it makes things a bit more difficult” (Participant 13, Semester 4). Many of the second year students’ sentiments regarding the mentorship can be summarized by the comments of one of them who said: “when [the professor] had mentioned [mentoring the first years], I just kind of thought that I am going to try and do it, but time permitting. I knew I was going to have a busy semester and might not be able to do it” (Participant 7, Semester 4). Another student elaborated further on her group’s situation and explained how the lack of commitment to the mentoring program by some of her colleagues affected her motivation to be a mentor. She said: “We got paired up [with first year students] and then [our supervisor] tried to get us going on this calendar right here and then after that it was too much. We didn’t hear much, there wasn’t much checking in, which is maybe why I [said to myself] ‘if they are not going to bother why should I?’” (Participant 5, Semester 4). One second year student felt that the first year students were partially responsible for the missed mentoring opportunities. She said: “I don’t think really any of them approached us too much to ask questions. We were around quite a bit compared to the second years of last year, like I didn’t even see any of the second years last year” (Participant 4, Semester 4).

During the semester, first and second year students had the unusual circumstance of having a class together. This class provided the students with an opportunity to work together and get to know each other on a more personal level. For example when asked if

she felt it was important to have had a class with the second year students, one first year student replied: “Quite important in that we were able to see them as our peers but we were also able to draw on their experiences and get to know some of them more personally and intimately” (Participant 9, Semester 4). A second year student echoed the importance of having the class with the first year students, saying: “It was great. We talked about that a lot because it was our only chance to actually meet with them. The second years were talking about the fact that most of us didn’t know someone in the year before us... so it was great to actually have that connection” (Participant 3, Semester 4). Another second year student said: “I know from class that they appreciated and enjoyed having us around for that class and that we could interact with them and they could get to know us a little bit” (Participant 1, Semester 4).

While the course served to connect the two groups of students, in one way it also acted as a context that revealed the separation between the two groups. One second year student explained: “We got laughed at in our first class because... at the end of class, [a student enrolled in the class from another program] asked if she could see a show of hands where all the [second year] sport psych people were sitting... and we were all sitting in a row and all at the back” (Participant 3, Semester 4). One of the first year students commented on the segregation in the class. She recalled: “By the end of the semester there were a few people from our year that moved around, but really no one else did. It was quite interesting, the second years if they came in and saw us sitting in their row they were like ‘what are they doing?’ They were frozen” (Participant 13, Semester 4). A very revealing comment came from a second year student while she tried to make sense of why her group segregated itself in the classroom. She said: “Our group was

definitely the most 'cliquey'. The second year sport psych students, we were the hardest ones to split up... I don't even know why that is, because for the most part we seem to not even like each other outside of school but we just tended to always migrate to [each other]" (Participant 3, Semester 4).

Meetings and Facilitation

According to the majority of the first and second year students interviewed in the fourth semester, the bi-weekly meetings were where they had the most interaction with, and learned the most from, each other. One student explained: "The most I learned from the second years is when we had the meetings with you... I found those sessions really helped" (Participant 12, Semester 4). A second year student shared her appreciation for having the first year students in the meetings by saying: "They thought that they had to learn from us. I don't think that they realized that we were learning from them almost as much" (Participant 3, Semester 4).

While both groups agreed that the meetings were where they had the most contact with each other, what the meetings provided to the two groups was different for each of them. For the first year students, these meetings provided them with direct access to the multiple viewpoints and experiences of their second year colleagues. For example, a first year student explained the importance of the meetings for connecting with her second year colleagues. She said: "I don't think I ever missed one because I found that I thought I was going to miss something if I didn't come... I felt like if I just talked to people that were further ahead than me... [it] made me feel a little bit better about what I am doing" (Participant 12, Semester 4). Another student described how during the meetings the second year students helped her learn the "ropes" of being a student. She said: "The first

couple weeks of school a lot of learning was just logistics and organization and planning and structure and stuff of how our program is going to be... And that's where I learned a lot from the second years, just guiding us" (Participant 11, Semester 4). A third student described the types of questions she asked during the meetings with the second year students. She said: "It wasn't about present moment questions it was more like thinking ahead, what I would want to know later" (Participant 15, Semester 4). She also described the meeting process, saying: "It was informal so we could just kind of shoot the [breeze], just talk about whatever, and I thought that was good in that it just made it more social with them" (Participant 15, Semester 4). A fourth student described her reasons for coming to the meetings, saying: "[I made] a conscious effort to go to most of them because it was a forum for us to talk about pretty much anything we wanted... I didn't talk much at the meetings, I mostly absorbed like a sponge" (Participant 9, Semester 4).

While the majority of the first year students were focused on learning as much as possible from their more experienced counterparts, the focus for the second year students was on helping the first years' as much as possible. For example, one second year student described the types of discussions in the meeting, saying: "I think it was exactly the same thing as the meetings that we had the first year because they had the same doubts and worries, which is normal... We appreciated the fact that [older students] were there for us so it was kind of doing the same thing for them" (Participant 2, Semester 4).

Interestingly, a number of second year students reported that the process of hearing the first year students' struggles and trying to share the knowledge they acquired through their experiences actually served to give them perspective on their own experiences when they were the new students in the program. One of them explained: "I was thinking 'did

we ask that many questions in the beginning as the first year students?’ But I guess we probably did” (Participant 7, Semester 4). Another student commented:

It was interesting because [the first years] had a lot of the same types of questions that we were asking last year but it seemed funny to hear all the questions when it was such a big deal to us last year... But knowing in the end that the things that we worried about all the way through weren’t necessarily as big a deal as we were making them, put perspective on our position... [So we told them] not to worry as much, that it’s hard not to worry when you are in the throes of the situation but that it all works out... But I think it was good that we actually got to vocalize that because I think a lot of us were thinking it but not really sure if we believed it and the fact that we had to tell other people that it’s not that bad kind of helped us believe that it wasn’t really that bad. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

A few students from both groups made comments on the process of the meetings and how the interactions between them may have been hampered. In particular a number of those who commented mentioned that most of the first year students were quiet during the meetings. This was corroborated and explained by one of the first year students who said: “From what I recall a lot of the first year students were pretty quiet and just simply observed. We didn’t have an agenda of what we wanted; whether the case was ‘you don’t know what you don’t know’ or whether it was [that] we just didn’t see the need to ask or to pursue” (Participant 9, Semester 4). A second year student shared her version of what happened at the meetings. She explained: “I think that sometimes it was the same [first year] people talking in the meetings and some of the other first years, maybe they just wanted to sit and gather information but they didn’t ask as many questions... In my

perception, it was more of an information giving session” (Participant 7, Semester 4). She then suggested what she felt could have helped the situation, saying: “Maybe not just making it the chance for the second years to answer the questions for the first years, but letting the first years answer questions from their peers” (Participant 7, Semester 4).

In terms of facilitation during the meetings, I did not specifically ask the students about my facilitation of the meetings during this semester. I opted instead to phrase my questions in a way that asked them about my overall facilitation of the meeting process from the start of their degree, including the most recent semester. The students’ perspectives on my overall facilitation is included in the next section and discussed further in the general discussion section.

Meeting #16 – September 22

The first meeting of semester #4 had a surprising fifteen participants, including four former first year students (now turned second year students), six new first year students, and five thesis students. The meeting room was quite full but this provided a great opportunity for the students from different groups to interact with each other. I began by introducing myself and explaining my perception of the purpose of the meetings. I then opened the discussion by asking how people felt about the first few weeks of the semester. This initially attracted responses from many of the new first year students who shared their excitement, apprehensions, and surprises about the program. A few second year students responded with their memories of their first semester in the program.

Later, I asked the second year students what they felt they learned in their first year and I asked the first year students what they hoped to learn in the program. This opened a great dialogue in the group in which there was participation from most of the group

members, including myself. After this discussion was done, a first year thesis student asked if she could open a discussion about conferences and their importance in learning and the overall graduate experience. This began a conversation among mostly more senior students in the room about different conferences, people's experiences at conferences, politics associated with some of the conferences, and applying for conferences and funding for them. Since we were nearing the end of the session, I eventually interrupted the discussion on conferences to ask the group what topics they would like to explore in the coming weeks. A few suggestions came from various students, including one from a student who wanted to talk about the expectations of different professors in the program. This drew a round of laughs from the second year students in the room, followed by the remark from one of them "I still don't know!" which drew a bigger laugh from the whole group. Before leaving, I reminded the participants that it was just as important for the group to hear and learn from the experiences of the new students as it was for the first years to learn from the rest of the group.

Facilitating Meeting #16

I originally was planning on doing very little facilitation in this meeting, hoping that the returning students would simply pick up where they left off and begin discussing important topics, and then the new students would join in. However the large number of new students in the meeting and only a few returning students made it nearly impossible in my mind for the group to just take off by itself. So I ended up doing a lot more facilitation than I wanted and the meeting felt very much like a question and answer period with me asking the questions and members of the group responding. I tried my

best to stay out of the conversation in order to let others participate, however as soon as the conversation died down on a particular topic, it seemed like the group looked to me to ask another question. The dialogue in between questions was very good in my opinion, but it seemed clear to me that the expectation was that I was controlling the flow of the meeting.

I was very pleased when one student asked if she could suggest the next topic for discussion – conferences. This would not have been my choice of topics for a first meeting, but it did stimulate a useful and relevant discussion for everybody in the room and it did come from a student, so I was happy to entertain the discussion. Overall I wasn't very pleased with the way the facilitation of the meeting went because I felt it was giving the new participants the wrong impression of the purpose and structure of the meetings – they were not for me, they were for the students – but given the size and makeup of the group, I'm not sure things could have gone any other way. Reflecting on the meeting, I actually hoped for less people at the next meeting so that there would be more dialogue instead of turn-taking, and so that the learning environment would have a more intimate feel to it.

Meeting #17 – October 6

This meeting was the best meeting of the semester and possibly the best one of the entire research in terms of shared learning. There were initially nine students in attendance, and two more arrived later during the meeting. This meeting consisted entirely of a question and answer period between the first and second year students. I spoke in the group early in the meeting, but otherwise only added my thoughts once or twice during the entire hour. The rest of the meeting entailed a back-and-forth, open and

honest discussion between the neophyte and experienced students. Questions were asked on a wide variety of topics, including professor expectations and grading, student motivation and commitment to the program, consulting with clients, class projects, grades, time management, internships, and general advice on surviving as a graduate student.

Two interesting points emerged during the meeting. First, many of the questions and comments from the first year students drew laughter from the second year students because they were the exact same situations that the latter group had faced as first year students. In many ways I believe this was reassuring for the new students since it normalized their experiences and gave them access to advice from people who had lived the same circumstances as them. Hearing the questions from the first year students probably reassured the second years as well by normalizing their experiences as first year students. The dialogue undoubtedly created a stronger bond between the two groups, since this was an area where they could relate to each others' experiences. Second, answering the questions from the first year students and telling stories of struggles and triumphs appeared to solidify the bond between the second year students as they shared their collective wisdom and advice. There were a number of inside jokes made between the second year students during the meeting, which first drew laughter from them, and then an explanation to the rest of the group. For example, one second year student was advising the new students to not be afraid to "step out of the box" and do things a differently when another student replied "That's right. If you want a sandwich, you have a sandwich!" All of the second year students laughed at what was obviously an inside joke, much to the confusion of everyone else in the room. It was then explained to the

others how, in a final paper the previous year, one of the students had used the analogy of a sandwich to explain how the various theoretical components covered in class fit together for her.

Facilitating Meeting #17

Despite having done very little facilitation in this meeting, I was very pleased with how it unfolded. There were almost no lulls in the conversation and students all seemed eager to get their turn to ask a question or share advice. I did feel there was a strong separation between the first and second year students, but I think for this particular meeting it was useful as it allowed the new students to get answers to important questions from their more experienced counterparts, and it allowed the second year students to feel helpful to the neophytes in a way that was not available to them as neophytes the year before. My long term goal for these two groups was for them to mesh into one cohesive group and this felt like a positive step in that direction because it gave both sides some common ground for sharing their desire to learn.

Meeting #18 – October 20

This meeting had six participants, and a seventh joined about ten minutes late. I began by asking the second year students if they would like to share some of their biggest challenges to date and what they did to remedy the situation. There was a lengthy interchange of stories between group members in which I also participated and shared some of my greatest challenges as a consultant. There was a continual flow of storytelling, questioning, and responses to the questions. As I shared some of my stories, a few questions were asked and I answered them in detail. I concluded by giving a few suggestions on what I thought the students could do to improve their experience. At the

end of the session I asked what we should talk about in the next meeting. One student said she would like to hear more personal stories about consulting experiences. After a bit of a long silence, another student suggested that they could just e-mail ideas to me for the next meeting's topic.

Facilitating Meeting #18

This meeting posed a number of challenges for me from a facilitation standpoint. First, when I originally asked participants about their challenges, one student immediately began to talk about her experiences over the summer and some of the difficult issues she encountered with her clientele. Initially the discussion was relevant, but it quickly seemed to veer off-track. Thankfully, just as the conversation began to wander, the seventh participant – a graduate of the program – entered the room. This allowed me to introduce her to the first year students and allow her to share some of her experiences and challenges. However, as she began to participate in the conversation and I joined in as well, I felt we then ended up dominating the rest of the meeting. I actually apologized to the group shortly before the end of the meeting for taking up so much of their time, but a few students rebutted with comments that they were glad to hear my stories and that they were helpful. I personally didn't feel like I managed the facilitation of the meeting very well, however at the end of the meeting, the students seemed pleased with the sharing of information and stories.

Meeting #19 – November 3

Today's meeting was mainly about one of the largest conferences in North America for sport psychology. I had originally expected four people who recently returned from the conference to show up at the meeting, but the two that I was most hoping to show up

(because they attended the most sessions) couldn't make it. We still managed to have a very lengthy and engaging conversation about the conference that had just taken place, as well as important issues to consider about conferences in general, such as keeping costs down, presenting at conferences, meeting prominent people in the field, and choosing which sessions to attend. Once this topic was exhausted a first year student expressed her concerns on how to keep up to date with the field once she will have graduated from the program. This brought on a number of questions from the students on whether I would be continuing to manage the WebCT site and if they would be able to access it after they graduated. Before leaving, the suggestion to talk about internship issues for next meeting was made by one of the first year students in the room.

Facilitating Meeting #19

Overall I was pleased with how the meeting unfolded. However it did bother me though that only a few of us – those that had attended conferences - were doing most of the talking. It didn't feel interactive. It felt like a one-way transfer of information. I tried to get others involved, and it worked to a degree, but not completely. I reflected in my journal that "I am still struggling with how to incorporate everyone when there is such a wide variety of levels of experience in the room. I guess maybe I have to respect that the new students are still on the periphery and will not participate as much" (My Journal, November 3).

Regardless of some of my apprehensions, students still seemed interested in the meetings. In fact some of the participants that I thought weren't interested now seem to be the most interested. Overall I was still happy with how things were going. I found it a very salient issue that both the new students and the second year students seemed very

concerned whether there would still be meetings after my research was completed and whether they would still have access to the resources. For me this was a good sign that they were not just here for me and they were not just there to help out with my research. They seemed to be getting some things that they deemed to be valuable enough to worry that once they left or my research finished, they might be missing out on something. For me this was something very significant.

Meeting #20 – November 17

I was initially disappointed with the fact that only two people showed up for this meeting, however it turned out to be a great meeting with everyone very focused and specific issues being discussed at length and in depth. One of the two participants was the person who had suggested talking about internships at the end of the previous meeting, and her first year counterpart was in agreement on the topic, so we spent the entire hour discussing specific questions and aspects of this area. The majority of the questions about the internship were directed at me however this did not stop the two participants from openly sharing their thoughts, opinions, and concerns. We were able to cover a large number of areas and talk very specifically about topics over the hour session because of our small number.

Facilitating Meeting #20

There was very little actual facilitation to do during the meeting since there were only two people, so I would say I acted more as a resource person during this meeting with them. The two students were able to ask me very specific questions and I was able to give them very detailed answers. I did, however, make it a point to give the two participants the names of current and former students and professors whom they could

contact for more information on many of the questions they asked me. In this way, I was able to connect the students with other appropriate people to help them enhance their learning. At the end of the meeting, the two participants expressed that they felt it was a great session and that the discussions helped to clear up many of their questions and concerns.

Another meeting was originally planned for December 1st however in the days leading up to the session, a large number of students e-mailed me saying they were too busy scrambling to finish their final papers and projects and would not be able to attend the session. After hearing from almost all of the usual participants in the semester's meetings, I decided to cancel the final get-together. This left me somewhat disappointed since the end of my work with the group was quite anticlimactic. However I knew that I would still see the majority of them in the coming weeks and months in my role as resource person in the training centre.

Development of the Community of Practice

This semester could be described more as a deterioration of the mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire of the group, rather than its continued development. In the individual interviews the second year students talked mainly about feeling disconnected from each other for a number of different reasons. And while the first year students were thankful to have access to the second year students, some made it clear that the relationship was lacking, mainly due to the second year students' time constraints. Despite all of this, the meetings appeared to bring the two groups together and provide them with some legitimate sharing and learning opportunities with each other.

Mutual Engagement

As described in the section above, second year students reported that their level of engagement with each other dropped off significantly from the beginning to the end of their final semester together. From the students' perspective, this change was attributed to only having one day of classes per week, being busy outside of school, and differences in personalities, to name a few. For example, when asked about her learning with her colleagues during the semester, one second year student described the feeling of only having one class per week on Thursdays. She said: "I didn't feel as implicated for my learning... We never talked [all week] really and then on the Wednesday night: "Oh, did you do this? Did you do that?"... That's when we did the work" (Participant 2, Semester 4). Another second year student explained: "We were so close at the end of the year last year, then, I don't know. [Now] I only really talk to maybe one person, sometimes two" (Participant 3, Semester 4). When asked specifically about the group's social learning outside of the classroom, a third second year student said: "It was learning outside of the classroom this year too but... everybody was supportive of people more so last year than this year" (Participant 7, Semester 4).

Despite the lower levels of engagement among second year students, a few examples of mutual engagement during the semester were given. For example one student recounted engaging with her colleagues a few times during the semester. She said:

If we had a project that needed to be done whether it was group work or not that would be the one time that we would sit in one of the rooms in the training centre and hash things out... Whether it was by e-mail or by phone or in between

classes, we still communicated a lot, well at least a group of us did. For example we had short little papers that we had to do for a class every week, so before anybody wrote anything we sent an e-mail to each other saying “Is this what you understood from that?” We still kind of knocked each others’ heads around to figure out what was going on. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

Mutual engagement in learning outside of the classroom among the majority of first year students appeared to be strong, similar to the mutual engagement of the second year students when they were in their first semester in the program. However one interesting difference between the two groups was revealed during one of the meetings. In meeting 17 a few of the first year students who were originally planning on attending the meeting decided at the last minute instead to get together at a student’s house nearby to discuss a project. One of their first year colleagues who was in the meeting used her cell phone to call one of them to see if their group was coming to the meeting. This student explained: “I was like ‘hey are you guys coming over? Did you forget the meeting?’... And they were like ‘yeah well....’. ‘Yeah well I am sorry but we’re here and we’re 100 metres away and you don’t want to do your thing even later in the afternoon when we don’t have class?’ I was just like ‘well f**k!’” (Participant 11). This occurrence was the first time during the entire research process that I had witnessed any students from either group challenge each other publicly on their level of engagement in the group.

While this example of calling group members out on their engagement in the community represented a strong connection within the community – or at least the community of first year students – it also displayed the group’s ability to influence its members’ engagement in a negative way. As participant 11 continued to tell the story

above about her frustration with her colleagues for not coming to the meeting, she commented on how this influenced her thinking about the meetings. The student said she began to think: “If no one is committed [to the meetings] then maybe I shouldn’t be either” (Participant 11). The student then explained: “I felt like a lot of people were just not committed to this...For me I wouldn’t have missed those meetings for anything...But then when other people didn’t go, maybe that just reaffirmed that this is much more of a social thing... that I could cut easily out of my schedule” (Participant 11). Another student shared much the same opinion about the group’s engagement and how the members influenced each other on whether to attend the meetings or not. She explained: “After class we would all get up and start getting ready to go and you’d hear “Are you going to James’ thing? Are you going? Are you going?” and if no one was going then some of us would be like “Maybe I could skip today” so I think it was a factor to be quite honest” (Participant 14).

In terms of mutual engagement between the two groups, most of the first and second year students reported that the majority of their interactions with each other occurred through the meetings. One first year student said: “It was good because it was kind of something that linked our classes. If we weren’t sure about something in a certain class we could ask them anything... So it was kind of just good to have that link between the classes if there were still some questions that were unanswered for us” (Participant 14). Another first year student echoed her appreciation for having the second year students around, but expressed her feeling that their level of engagement in the meetings was not as strong as it could have been. The student explained: “There was a connection, so that was a good thing. Perhaps if the second years had more of an incentive to be at

those meetings that might have helped because... sometimes it was light on second year students” (Participant 9). Despite feeling that they did not have a lot of time in their schedules, a number of the second year students expressed their disappointment over not having been as engaged with the first year students as they had hoped. These sentiments can be summarized in the statement made by one of the students who, commenting on her interactions with first year students, said: “I just wish that it would have happened more often... I wish I could have met everybody at that in-depth level more instead of just at the surface level of “Hi, how’s it going? How’s your [project]?” (Participant 3, Semester 4)

Despite the general consensus that the relationship between the first and second year students was helpful, particularly for the first year students, not everyone was in agreement. For example, one second year student felt that the first year students didn’t appreciate the knowledge and experience that she and her colleagues had acquired over the previous year. She said: “I just get this feeling that they don’t really understand what we’ve gone through and the experience that we have gained... I don’t get the feeling that they realize that what we could say is valuable. I get a big impression on that” (Participant 4, Semester 4). For many of the second year students, the initial desire to share their knowledge with their first year counterparts was complemented by the realization that they, in turn, were able to learn from them. One second year student said: “I learned a lot from [two first year students] even though we have been together only for a semester... If there had been more people like them, it’s certain that I would have learned a little bit more from others, and that we would have been more involved together and doing more activities” (Participant 2, Semester 4).

Joint Enterprise

The comments of both first and second year students on the enterprise of the community during this semester mainly fell into two opposing categories. Most of the first and second year students perceived the two groups as having a joint enterprise among them. Likewise, most first year students felt they shared the same enterprise as the rest of their first year colleagues. However, as was the case in the previous semester, the second year students did not all appear to share the same enterprise. On the side of the first year students, there appeared to be a strong joint enterprise among the group members during their introductory semester together. All of the students seemed to be focused on learning as much as possible about their discipline, and becoming good students. One first year student explained how the group made her feel welcome when she first arrived into the program. She said: Once classes started... I got to know them pretty well. I was nervous at first , [but] after a couple of days I kind of just fit in because everyone included me in stuff" (Participant 12). Another first year student said: "We all clicked really fast as a group. We had one social night out and then we were all good... We all feel comfortable talking about anything with each other and sharing" (Participant 15). A third student shared her view of learning with her first year colleagues, saying that it enabled everyone to work together to get what they wanted out of their degree. She explained: "[It's about] creating your core of people and getting what you want from them... we are learning and having fun. We're getting school done and we're all doing it well because we are all doing it together" (Participant 11).

For the second year students, the lack of a joint enterprise between many of them during the third semester was carried over and even amplified in the fourth semester. The

only enterprise that most of them appeared to share was the desire to help their first year colleagues learn and succeed. With regards to their own learning, there seemed to be a lot of discord between second year students. One student described the situation in the following way: “It was like we were a group of independent people. When we would get together we would talk. When we were in class we would talk, but then as soon as class was over, ‘back to my own life again’” (Participant 4, Semester 4). A few extreme examples of the discord between second year students emerged during the semester. For example when one second year student was asked what could have improved the learning between her colleagues, she replied: “I think more learning would have occurred if people weren’t bitching all the time... It was like a spiral down hill. If one person says “this project sucks”... then it turns into “this project is pointless” into “why the hell are we doing this project?” (Participant 4, Semester 4). Another student reported a similar situation while working with two colleagues on a project near the end of the semester. She said:

For the last month and a half we had a project... For the first time [since starting the program] we really had arguments because our mentality was really different. I know I was less implicated at school, but I still care and I want to do the job well even though it was the last semester and the last paper. I don’t want to get crap and [one colleague], she really didn’t care anymore... So it was just a different mentality because she was like “whatever, the paper, I just don’t care” and we had to do everything. She’d say “ok I am going to do this” and the day before it was “I didn’t do it, I don’t care. Hand it in like this...” So [my other colleague] and I would just do it. (Participant 2, Semester 4)

A third second year student talked about her perception of the group, saying: “I don’t think some people were open... [They] were there for themselves and yes they were going to share and try to help [each other] because that’s what we were supposed to do... But they were just doing it to advance themselves” (Participant 5, Semester 4). Another second year student gave an insightful explanation on why the lack of a joint enterprise played such a key role in the group’s relationship. She said: “I think there were some people who were just going through the motions... It reflects in how they do work and how they work with the group and how much they share and it’s very apparent... The people who haven’t really bought into the system, never really shared” (Participant 7, Semester 4).

Shared Repertoire

The shared repertoire of the two groups of students was quite different from one another due to the nature of each group’s current educational and social situation with their respective colleagues. First year students’ repertoire revolved around connecting with each other and learning, both from their colleagues and from their second year counterparts. For example, one first year student explained how talking with her colleagues regarding her frustrations about a course and hearing that she was not the only one who felt that way helped to alleviate some of the feelings she was having. She said: “Just getting together and seeing what other people thought about it and knowing that I wasn’t the only one thinking that way was kind of encouraging... They would give us an idea what to expect and it was more encouraging so it helped for sure” (Participant 14, Semester 4). Another first year student described how she and her colleagues viewed the advice they were getting from the second year students – which they called ‘the real stuff’

- as being more appropriate or applicable to their learning than what they learning in the classroom. When asked to explain, she said:

The real stuff is just the applied stuff. The person that's been through it before, they went through the course and they went through all the hard times. [My second year mentor] told me "you'll see the [project] is a lot of work and I'm not going to lie to you, you are going to put a lot of hours into it" and I'm happy she told me. (Participant 10)

While the first year students talked about the ways in which the second year students could help them learn "the real stuff", the second year students seemed focused on a comment made by one of their professors during the semester that their group was "needy". Much of the group's shared repertoire during the semester was focused on this comment. One student recounted the event: "One of our professors... said that we were the neediest group that had come through [the program]... I think we could handle it ok at the end and I think a lot of people were still upset by that comment, but at the end of the year looking back... we were!" (Participant 3, Semester 4). The student then explained how this designation impacted the group and then she gave her theory on why they were labelled this way. She said:

"Nobody likes to be told they are needy, but whether you like to be told that or not, it was true... But at the same time because we were so isolated from any other group I don't think we were aware we were being that way. We didn't have anyone to compare ourselves to so we didn't see any other group's interactions. So we had no way of gauging. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

Another student added: “I don’t really think that we were that needy... I think a lot of people were very, very high achievers in our year, so I think they were afraid to make mistakes” (Participant 7, Semester 4). A third student talked about how the designation of their group as “needy” influenced them to want to help the first year students to find answers to their questions. She said:

We’ve been labelled as the needy group... So I think having our experiences through our internships, we have this valuable thing to offer, as well as we’ve been in the first years’ place. It might not be the same experience but at least being in [the meetings] and giving them some guidance won’t get them to a feeling of need like we supposedly had. (Participant 4, Semester 4).

Negotiation of Meaning

The first year students gave a number of examples in which they negotiated meaning with each other over the semester. One of them described how the process was beneficial to her learning. She said: “Although I have gained a lot from reading in the books, just being able to discuss it and talk about different points of view and stuff like that... that’s the biggest thing for me. Just being able to exchange ideas with people was fun” (Participant 14). One first year student shared a specific example of how negotiating the meaning of quality academic writing with her colleagues impacted how she thought about her own writing, which her colleagues viewed as being overly complex. She recounted: “Sharing with them maybe did make me aware of toning [my writing] down a little bit. Sometimes simple words are better... So the conversation with those students changed something for me... That awareness has made self-reflection, which has made an evolution towards simplistic writing” (Participant 11).

Another first year student explained how she and her colleagues engaged in negotiating the meaning of quality presentations in class and how this negotiation process was somewhat of a challenge for the group because of how it impacted the way the course was graded. She said: “People were just trying to one-up each other and just be fancier... [which] took away from the material and the learning part of their presentations... [But] if you weren’t doing that then you were losing marks... And it just almost felt like we were being put down at times because we hadn’t done certain things” (Participant 13).

Despite their challenges as a group, there were a few notable examples of negotiating meaning between second year students during the semester. The most pertinent example came from one student who described a typical scenario in which the students would negotiate the meaning of a particular class or project as they left one of their classrooms. She said: “It would start with this little murmur and one person would be like ‘Oh that’s not at all what I was going to do’ and they would get worried... But the more in depth we talked about it the more we realized that there wasn’t one right answer... It made us more open minded” (Participant 3, Semester 4). This student further described how the group negotiated meaning together. She explained:

We could talk ourselves out of our positions just as easily as we could explain it to someone else. But just being close enough to know that if you disagree with something that’s going on in class, to be able to share that with your classmates and colleagues... Or if you have a concern about something in class or the way that something is being taught that there was enough of a bond within our

classmates that even if we weren't close friends that we could talk about it...

There was just a level of trust. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

Another student explained how her relationship with two of her colleagues allowed them to negotiate the meaning of what constituted a quality term paper. The student said: "I have confidence in them...I respect their opinions. Like when you do your project, for sure you are going to like it... [and] it's not that they will say it's not good, but they are always going to bring some points that "did you think of developing this part?", like the devil's advocate" (Participant 2, Semester 4).

There were a number of instances where negotiating meaning between first and second year students proved to be a productive process. For example, a first year student shared how negotiating meaning with her second year colleagues in the class they had together impacted her learning. She said: "I'd have a vision... Then it's by sitting in class and having a very eclectic group and everyone is sharing their own opinions that I'd open up my views... I wish there would have been more... learning from the others and kind of creating a vision of excellent work being produced" (Participant 11, Semester 4). A second year student explained how, despite having less education in the field and less education in the program than their second year counterparts, first year students were still willing and able to engage in negotiating meaning with them. She said:

Specifically in your meetings, it was usually designed, for good reason, to have us talk about our experiences or talk about things and have [the first years] ask us questions. But they were pretty good at giving their impressions of things as well so even though we were the ones being asked the questions most of the time it

was interesting to see what kind of questions they were going to ask and where their interests lay. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

Key Influences on Students' Learning

Much of the direction taken in the data collection phase was in response to the students' expressed desires and needs related to their learning. From this process a number of common elements emerged from the interviews with students and facilitated group discussions during meetings, which they described as having a major impact on their learning. These topics were further discussed during subsequent interviews and, where possible and appropriate, attempts were made to incorporate any suggested changes into meetings, classes, and students' various relationships (e.g., with professors, colleagues, etc.). This section documents what the students considered to be the key influences on their learning and it describes the ways in which they impacted how and what students learned. In particular, it examines the influence of students' independent learning versus their learning with others, as well as the importance of social events for their learning. The focus then shifts to the examination of students' views on the key differences between the learning they did in the meetings they had with me and the learning during their graduate classes and how these complemented each other. I also examine the students' perceptions of the differences between having a professor guiding the discussion in the classroom versus having a facilitator who is not a professor guiding the meetings. Finally, I look at the impact of having a training centre where students could meet and work together using the resources that were available to them.

Independent Learning versus Learning with Others

During the final semester I asked the second year students whether they considered their learning styles to favour a more independent or social aspect, some variation of one of the two, or something different from either of the two. I felt this was an important question to ask because it would help me to better understand where students situated themselves with regards to their learning with colleagues. I did not define the terms “independent learning” or “social learning” and opted instead to let the students explain to me their interpretations of the terms and their preferences for each of them. The students’ answers covered the range of possibilities, with the majority of them situating themselves somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between independent and social learning. However some students did situate themselves on the extremes. For example, one student felt that she was a very independent learner. She said: “I need to be alone ... then I just follow my own speed. I don’t have to adjust to how others are doing, or if they understand something I know they will try to rush me. I just want to go at my speed. I know what I need” (Participant 5, Semester 4). In contrast, one of her colleagues felt she was mainly a social learner. She said: “I learn by experience, so I cannot be an individual learner because there is nothing better than contact. That’s the way that I interact... I like to talk about it because as soon as a teacher gives us a project... I want the others’ impressions, views, and where are they going” (Participant 2, Semester 4).

As mentioned above, the majority of the second year students placed their learning preferences somewhere in between social and independent learning. An example of this comes from a student who explained:

I think I am in the middle because in terms of social, I am not a huge fan of the group work, but I do get ideas from discussing with other people and I did find it helps with certain things. But I also very much enjoy going home and doing something myself and taking that time and having it really be my project.

(Participant 1, Semester 4)

Similarly, another student stated her preferences saying: “It would depend on what the task was because if it was something that I know I can do on my own, I just want to get it done and it would be easier... but if it was something that I wasn’t sure of... then I’d be more social probably” (Participant 7, Semester 4). Another participant also pointed to her desire to work alone most of the time but to connect with her colleagues when she had questions or doubts about her ideas. She explained: “I tended to formulate at least a starting opinion of what I was going to do or what needed to be done, then second guess myself and have a conversation with a bunch of my classmates, then end up doing exactly what I intended to do in the first place” (Participant 3, Semester 4). When asked what benefit the conversation with her classmates provided, she answered: “Probably more confidence in what I was going to do” (Participant 3, Semester 4).

Importance of Learning with Colleagues

When asked if they felt social learning was an important part of the learning process in their master’s studies, almost all of the students stated that they felt it was important. For example, one student said: “I think it was extremely important... I honestly wouldn’t be where I am today as to how ready I feel about doing certain things as I would without it. I think [our professors] would have labeled us as the VERY needy group without the social learning (laughs)” (Participant 4, Semester 4). Another student said:

The social learning part is really important because it's... how I learn - through other people: It's learning through the social context about my self... The social part allows those other thoughts and ideas and perspectives to come in and that makes you more aware of the different things that can be affecting you. (Participant 1, Semester 4)

A third student commented:

It is incredible how many ideas can come from others or how many ideas we can give to each other. I think I would be lacking confidence if I was alone because we are all still new in this domain... Sometimes I feel like I am going in circles, but then others around me will open doors for me and help me see different things. (Participant 2, Semester 4)

A fourth student explained how the social learning environment for her was as much about being lost together with her classmates as it was about finding solutions. She said:

I think we all get thrown into this hodgepodge and then nobody knows... what we're supposed to be doing exactly. And I think everybody just gets so lost that it's nice to just have that bond, to know that you are not the only one that's lost and to sort of realize that it's ok if we try and figure this out together. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

This student continued, saying: "If you don't have the social learning aspect then... the only source you can go to is your prof, and that puts the whole evaluative thing... I don't think people really care if they are being evaluated by their colleagues as much as if they are being evaluated by their [professor]" (Participant 3, Semester 4).

While the majority of students supported the importance of social learning in their master's degree, not everyone shared this opinion. For instance, one student explained: If someone had a really big issue or something like that and they shared it with the class then yeah I could learn from that. But all the other things, I don't really need others to learn" (Participant 5, Semester 4). Despite her feeling that she didn't need others to learn, the student later conceded that social learning can be an important part of the learning process when she said:

Not only do you learn but you also develop relationships with people and I think that's important as well. Because if you have to develop relationships with people then you are more likely to share information, not just about school but about themselves personally... [I like] just being able to talk about it if I'm frustrated or stressed or being able to sense when other people are frustrated or stressed. [But] I think if you just focus on independent learning then you are not aware of that.

(Participant 5, Semester 4)

Social Events

There appeared to be a consensus among students that social events or outings outside of the classroom were very important to the overall cohesion of the group. However there was also a consensus that it did not happen very often, particularly in a larger group. For example one student said:

I think we should have had more nights where we just went out for a drink or went for dinner or something. I did have a few dinners with people here and there but I think we should have done more of that because I think that would have maybe helped us in the learning in the sense that we would really know and understand the

other people and if we do, then I think it would have made us trust more... There is still competition within the group, so maybe that would have helped. (Participant 1, Semester 4)

Another student described how social events helped in the learning relationships between her and her colleagues, saying:

I think it does [help] without people realizing it. I think that's the benefit to it... As much as people say "I'm not going to talk about school", when they are out doing whatever, they do. They talk about school, we talk about profs, we talk about subjects, we talk about things to watch for, we talk about all that stuff. So that takes place when people aren't really thinking about it because they are just making conversation with their friends or whatever... You [also] get to know them as a person, and not just on a little level that you do in class but on a big level. You get to see the people for who they really are and you just build a strong [social] connection rather than an in-class connection [which] are two different things.

(Participant 4, Semester 4)

Thus overall, regardless of whether students considered themselves independent or social learners, it appears that they all felt that social learning was an important aspect of their learning during the master's degree. Furthermore, social events were seen as important opportunities for students to get to know each other and learn from each other in a relaxed and informal environment. However, despite students wanting to engage socially more often, there were very few occasions in which the majority of the students were actually present for a social event.

Meetings

Overall, both the first and second year students appeared to agree that the meetings were worthwhile. For example, one second year student felt the meetings enhanced the work done in the classroom throughout their degree. She said:

The meetings in here were proactive in the fact that the questions that would come out would be to enhance our learning, to get something, to add something to our deeper level of understanding. The meetings were a way of putting it all together. It was like the pros provided the layer of cake and it was the icing that kind of stuck everything together and made it make sense. (Participant 4, Semester 4)

This student continued on to say: “If you wouldn’t have had the meetings I would have nowhere to go to have these sorts of discussions... If I could have had that meeting every single day at lunch, I would have” (Participant 4, Semester 4). Another second year student commented:

[In the meetings] we talk with you about stuff we want to talk about. It’s not imposed on us; it’s stuff that we bring to the table, and that’s all the difference. All of our courses are so structured that I don’t feel like I am part of creating. I don’t feel like I am involved... The meetings we did together, the first thing you asked us was “what do you want to talk about?” So just this open attitude, it changed everything. It’s not the same... You are there for us; you are not there for you.

(Participant 2, Semester 4)

A third second year student talked about how the meetings encouraged students to talk to each other more. She said:

I think we got a taste of so many different things in those meetings... They were perfect for what we had available to us at the time... just the fact that we were able to talk about what was bothering us, whether it was something from one of our classes or our self doubts. And it was the fact that it got us talking to each other. That and whatever we felt we were missing from our courses we were able to sort of put that on the table too and do something about it. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

The positive view of the meetings held by the second year students was also shared by their first year counterparts. In particular, the first year students felt it was a safe and comfortable forum to learn from each other (e.g. through engagement in the discussions, listening to other first year students describe their experiences) as well as their second year colleagues. For example one first year student explained how the meetings helped her to ease into the program. She said:

I was a little intimidated the first semester so [the meetings were] good for me to initiate myself in the program. It was good for me to not feel threatened and feel like I could come in and ask questions and give my opinion... I wasn't always the first one talking or anything like that, so a lot of times I would sit down and take a lot in rather than talk a lot. (Participant 14)

A number of this student's colleagues also referred to participation in the meetings through observation and listening rather than active involvement in the discussions. This speaks to the notion of peripheral participation (e.g., Galipeau & Trudel, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998a), which provides newcomers with a way to ease themselves into the practices of their community without the obligations and responsibilities that come with full participation.

Another student explained how the meetings helped her to get a better understanding of the tacit dimensions (e.g., Eraut, 2000; Polanyi, 1983; Trentin, 2001) of her courses, saying:

[Having the meetings is] important because it gives school a frame of reference, like where you are going with things... It's always good and beneficial to have someone talk about classes you are going to take... It's very valuable information, you don't feel like you are going in blind either, because I've never had these teachers before, I have no idea how they mark, I have no idea what they expect. (Participant 12)

This student also expressed her hope that the meetings would not end when the research was finished. She said:

[I hope you] continue with these meetings that you are having... There is interest and however many people don't come the three or four that show up will get a lot of use out of it. So don't stop them just because some of the people don't come, because I look forward to them, I gain stuff from it. I just feel like I know exactly what I want to do, I just need someone to pat me on the back and say "You are all right, you know what you are doing". (Participant 12)

A third first year student expressed her feelings about the meetings, saying: "At the meetings we were there, we were committed for an hour to think and kind of just get into that school zone. For me that's what it was; my questions, and us... I got everything I needed from that and I think that's why they worked so well" (Participant 11).

A few of the students alluded to the overall importance of having students of differing levels of experience in the meetings. For example, one student described the meetings saying:

I had a lot of questions about the internship and they got answered and I felt a lot better afterwards, after learning about that stuff; not worrying about it, but just having things clarified. Often if you ask profs stuff... they don't get it, they can't give you the exact detail you want. But if you ask other people who have done it they know what you are talking about they say "yes, this is it, this is how you need to feel". (Participant 13)

Another first year student also commented on having the second year students and former students in the meetings. She said: "They did share a lot about their experiences, which was really quite helpful because it helped to prepare us for courses and profs and projects and just things to look out for" (Participant 9). One of the second year students gave her perspective on why attending the meetings and sharing their experiences with their junior counterparts was important for her and her colleagues. She said:

I think it was the one time that maybe allowed us to feel like we maybe sort of knew what we were doing or at least knew as much what we were doing as we were supposed to at that time... Being able to share what actually did happen [in our internships] with others was helpful to us too... It reinforces that you actually have things that people want to hear. We're not expecting ourselves to be experts at any time in the near future but [it shows] that we are not completely out in left field either. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

Another aspect, and what I would consider (from a community of practice perspective) one of the most important functions served by the meetings, was that they provided students with a vehicle for community building. While the specific topics covered in the meetings were vital to the success of the meetings and were the main focus

of the students, the more significant event from a collaborative learning standpoint was that a number of students began to see the meetings as a regular opportunity to connect with others in their community. They began to concern themselves with who was going to attend and what would be discussed. They also saw it as a place to connect with people other than their classmates (e.g., myself, other former students, invited guests, etc.). This created connections between some of the students and the other participants at the meetings which extended outside of the meeting context both socially and from a learning perspective. Students reported that during the summer months, some of them were disappointed that the meetings did not continue because they felt disconnected from each other and they thought the meetings would have helped to keep them connected. Students also said they would have liked to have a larger community on the WebCT site to make it more worthwhile. And when their community did grow in the fourth semester with the addition of the new group of students, the original group made an effort to attend the meetings and to provide these students with the support that they felt was lacking when they began the program.

Meetings versus Classes

Nearly all of the students interviewed said that there was a difference between their learning in classes and the learning that occurred in the meetings. While this is not surprising, some of the explanations about the differences revealed some interesting details about how the students perceived the different facets of their learning experiences. For a number of the students the biggest difference was related to what they described as getting practical knowledge from the meetings. For example, one student said:

It's different in the sense that profs are teaching us skills. But I find that they aren't teaching us the actual skills, they are teaching us about the processes. It's like when you talk to someone who's taken the course before and you are saying "we are doing our triad" and they say "don't forget to do this, this, and this" you know, like tips. They are not teaching us how to do it, they are just saying "ok here's a tip".

(Participant 12)

Another student explained: "I learned the most when I wasn't even in classes, when we were with you... [In the meetings] it's often more concrete. In class we will do things but they are more related to theory, but in the meetings we learn more specifically how to apply them" (Participant 2, Semester 4). When asked to elaborate on her comments the student replied:

In the classes... we talk about the chapters that we read, the books we read. In the meetings we talk about what's worrying us; ultimately we talk about what we want. That's not something we do in class. In class... it's more imposed... The classes are too structured and there's no place for [talking about our worries]. I don't feel like we are important. We are there as students, but that's it. But with you, we are the ones who bring the content.... Your questions are simply to get the person to reflect.

(Participant 2, Semester 4)

A third student talked about the meetings, saying: "I liked them better than the classes... [They were] more interactive. I felt like I learned more out of those than I did in classes... Classes you just sit there. [The meetings were] actually everybody talking, so everybody can join in to the conversation" (Participant 4, Semester 4). When asked what was specifically different between the meetings and the classes, she said:

The classes provide some information but they don't put anything together. Or they provide basic stuff but they don't give you the little extras like how do you do a workshop. Nobody talks about that. Just the little things, and to me the little things are what's going to [make the difference]... Yeah you might have all this information but how do you use it, how do you do it? None of the profs fully address that. (Participant 4, Semester 4)

An interesting comment was made by one of the second year students when she was asked about the difference between her classes and the meetings. She explained how the meetings served to keep some of the cohesion with her colleagues. She said:

[Without the meetings] I think that it would have been every man for himself... Our group feeling started to disappear. It was more like we... were not trying to do this to meet a united goal, we were doing this for ourselves... The class is different, you can go in and you can sit there and you can do whatever the teacher tells you to do and then you get up and leave... But the meetings were more than just material they were sort of like, "How do you feel about this situation?" We were allowed to get stuff on the table that we couldn't possibly get on the table in a class situation.

(Participant 3, Semester 4)

Another interesting comment was shared by a first year student who explained how the meetings served to bring the first and second year students closer together in the class that they shared. She said:

I had [a class] with them, it was first years, second years, and students [from another program] and it was like three little islands. None of us really talked at all. But then after we started having the meetings where we got to know the second years better,

in class we all kind of mixed it up... [They were] kind of like an ice breaker, our meetings with you I think, to start it because in class... everyone introduced themselves but then we didn't really socialize until those meetings. (Participant 15)

Despite most of the students saying that there was a difference between the classes and meetings, a few of them felt they were virtually the same. For example, when asked if she felt the learning was any different between the two contexts, one student said: "I don't think so... It depends on the class I think. Every teacher has their own style of teaching so everything is going to be a little bit different... and I think your style is closer to [professor X's] style so in that sense it was similar" (Participant 1, Semester 4). Another student commented: "It's the same thing. It's exactly the same thing except for the professor" (Participant 2, Semester 4). Interestingly, this statement contradicted the student's comments above that there was a difference between the two contexts. However this could be due to her perceptions of the professor-student relationship (which is discussed later in this paper).

Reasons Given for Not Attending Meetings

When asked about the reasons for not attending the meetings, students offered a variety of answers. For example one student explained: "A lot of students were also working, and they would always say 'I am so busy, I'm overwhelmed, I don't even have a free minute.' And you can sense that they don't have time to see you, they don't have time to do anything outside of school either" (Participant 2, Semester 4). Contrary to this view, another student who attended most of the meetings during the research explained how she didn't think there were any real barriers to attending; she simply felt it was an issue of students improperly managing their time. She said: "Time management. That's

what they've said but that doesn't mean that they necessarily grasped that time management strategy" (Participant 3, Semester 4). When I asked her if she thought there was a lack of interest from her colleagues in coming to the meetings, she responded:

No, just sort of prioritizing... I think it was mainly school work and it just depended on how much spare time people felt they had outside of class, whether or not they could afford to miss a lunch. I found it relatively easy to attend most of the meetings. I had a little bit more of a hard time this semester just because that was really the only hour we had, but even then I managed to attend a lot of them, so I didn't really see there were a lot of barriers. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

Another student echoed this, saying that the reason that some of her colleagues didn't attend the meetings sometimes was because they didn't make the effort to attend them.

She said:

Everyone's busy... but it is only an hour and if you really, really wanted to be there you would be... I think it's still very much at the undergrad mentality. "If it's not said to me I'm not doing any extra stuff and I am not going to go pursue anything extra whatsoever unless it's handed down to me or a requirement of my degree"...

A lot of them don't [want to do] the extra stuff. (Participant 4, Semester 4)

A fourth student who did not attend many of the meetings explained a few of the reasons why she chose to miss them. One of the things she explained was how having a different career path than her colleagues made many of the topics in the meetings irrelevant to her. She said: "One of the reasons I didn't attend is because a lot of the time what was being discussed didn't relate to me, I didn't relate to it. So there was really no point. And also I needed breaks... to decompress" (Participant 5, Semester 4). However,

as the student explained, in the meetings where the topics were more relevant to her, her need to decompress did not stop her from attending. She explained: “Later on I heard [a student] saying that “from now on he’s going to do workshops. He’s going to conduct a real workshop” so that was something “oh well this is what I want” (Participant 5, Semester 4).

Facilitation

The dialogue about facilitation during the one-on-one interviews, particularly in the final round, was some of the most lengthy and thorough of all of the topics discussed. This was partly due to my own curiosities and research questions, as well as the students’ insistence that my role as the facilitator was instrumental in the meetings and the overall learning process out of the classroom, and trying to distil the factors that contributed to this. One of the most interesting and impactful aspects of the discussions about facilitation was students’ perceived differences between my role with them as a facilitator (and in other roles), and the role of their professors in their learning (see Appendix K for excerpts from two interviews on this topic). Students were very clear that there were some important distinctions between the two roles and a considerable amount of time was spent during the final set of interviews trying to better understand these differences. The most significant issues appeared to revolve around students’ admitted misperceptions of their professors as powerful, critical evaluators. This sparked all kinds of thoughts and behaviours from students aimed at mitigating their fears of being judged or evaluated. By examining the students’ relationships with both myself and their professors and the resulting power dynamics, a clearer picture emerged of why students viewed the processes in which I engaged them as being useful.

The Facilitator-Student Relationship

While I assumed a number of roles with the students in this research, it appears from both our perspectives that the most significant one was that of the facilitator of the regular meetings with students. Despite recognizing that the meetings were useful to students and that they appreciated me creating an opportunity for us to engage in a shared learning experience, I was still surprised by how much of an impact students said this process had on their learning. For example, when asked what role I (as the facilitator of the meetings) played in their overall learning, one student replied:

In a word: crucial. I was just thinking back to the year and all the questions that everybody had and there were some times when we were getting at each other's throats with everything. It was such a communication opener and vital for us not feeling alone and not feeling like we were going under... It's like [you were] the stepping stone. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

Another student said: "To have you around is so priceless. It's as if you've processed enough of the information to be able to tell us 'yes this will paint the picture... when you are done'. But when you are going through it, it's impossible to paint that picture because you are just all over the place" (Participant 6, Semester 3). A third student talked about a few specific ways that she felt I was most helpful to the group and her personally. She said:

You really addressed our specific individual and also group needs more so than the profs... I remember we had a venting session, that's what we needed to do, and you let us do it and it was great. And then when we needed to talk or when we were

more under stress about something you helped us. Or when I was trying to find an internship, you helped me with that. (Participant 4, Semester 4)

A first year student commented on how sharing my experiences in the program helped her and her colleagues to learn some of the tacit aspects of being in the program. She said: “I like that you brought up things because a lot of the times I wouldn’t think that I needed to know that, but when you brought it up I was like ‘Oh yeah that’s a good point that I wouldn’t have necessarily thought of’” (Participant 15).

Although I personally never used the term with any of the students, some of them referred to me as being a mentor to them. For example, one student said:

I would perceive you as our mentor. I don’t know if you officially see yourself as that but you definitely were one of the people I could consult...Like any time I had a concern I could ask you and I know you are always here to listen and to soothe our fears or worries... I never felt judged by you or anything like that. Of all the people you are probably the one that I approached more. (Participant 5, Semester 4)

Another student explained: “It was just us and it was an informal setting and you are like our peer or our mentor. You’ve been there and you’ve done the program. Any uncertainty that we feel, we can bounce off you and you can throw ideas at us, so it’s kind of reassuring” (Participant 7, Semester 4). The student also commented on how there was a balance between seeing me as one of their group, but also as someone with more experience. She said:

As much as I see you as a mentor, I also see you as like, we could go and shoot the [breeze], just have conversations... You would come and eat your lunch with us during the meetings too. It was not like ‘Ok I’m going to sit here while you all eat

your lunch'. You were eating too and you just fit in so well.... I think although you are one of us, I think that we still respect the knowledge and experience that you have, but you never make us feel intimidated by that. (Participant 7, Semester 4)

One important aspect of the meetings and the research in general was that students not only engaged in learning with me, but also with each other. One student explained how the two of these aspects were combined within the context of the meetings. She stated:

I think that the meetings were very effective because a lot of times we'd be thinking of a topic but we wouldn't really know how to discuss it or how to think about it differently. Let's say it was something presented in classes, so how do we take that and actually learn from it? So I think that you constantly posing those questions to us definitely helped with us learning outside of the classroom and I think that the meetings were a good way to do that for sure... It was easy for us to open up and if we were upset about something or we weren't sure about something to be able to share that with you but also in the meetings to share it with the other people in the [room]. (Participant 5, Semester 4)

I asked this student if she thought that the sharing in the meetings had any impact on people continuing to share ideas outside of the meeting setting. She responded: "I think so because you started the wheel turning and it got us thinking more and if we still had questions outside of the meeting about something or if we wanted to have more discussion we'd keep talking about it. But I think that you were the catalyst that would start that a lot of the time" (Participant 5, Semester 4). A second student explained that

while they initially wanted to help me with my research, the meetings quickly became focused on learning with and from each other. She said:

In my mind it's like 99.9% we are helping each other. Probably more at the beginning [it was] "Ok James wants us to go there for his Ph.D., we're going to go and we're going to see". But we gained so much out of it, we learned, we talked with older people. Your Ph.D. wasn't even on my mind. [It was more about] "It's a group meeting; we are going to go there for us". (Participant 2, Semester 4)

Another student commented on how the meetings helped her to connect with her colleagues but they were also still focused on her own self-growth. She explained: "When I came to these meetings I felt more like the expert on myself. Like I'm sitting on the board of experts, we just have to brainstorm to find the ideas, they are there. And then you would give us the rest after" (Participant 6, Semester 4).

The Professor-Student Relationship

In the interviews, students reiterated that their relationships with their professors had a major influence on the learning process for them throughout the research. All of the students made it clear in the individual interviews that they really liked their professors and felt they were effective teachers and this had a positive impact on their learning. However, despite this positive rapport, the students also expressed still having tremendous difficulty in getting past the perceived inherent power differential in the professor-student relationship. This severely affected the way students interacted with their professors on certain topics and also limited professors' ability to impact some aspects of student learning.

When asked about their relationships with professors, all of the students expressed appreciation for their teachers and respect for their knowledge and desire to help students learn. For example, one student said: “I had good rapport with the profs both in and out of the class” (Participant 4, Semester 4). Another student commented after the first term: “There was always a way to learn something from each professor... I found the profs to be accessible even outside of class time... and the fact that they were open to talking about their experiences, I found that really great” (Participant 2, Semester 1). Whenever students spoke critically of the professor-student relationship, they were adamant in reminding me that they really liked their professors and felt the professors were knowledgeable, helpful, and effective teachers. They made it clear that it was not the professor they were criticizing rather it was the professor’s position of power. On occasion there were some mentioned instances of personality differences between students and professors, but overall students said they respected and appreciated their professors.

Power Dimensions in the Professor-Student Relationship

Despite liking and respecting the professors and the professors doing their best to help them learn, students still expressed a number of challenges in their relationships with their professors. The challenges mainly revolved around the power differential between themselves and their professors. In particular, students were very concerned about being evaluated by their professors and were afraid to appear incompetent in front of them. For example one student said:

If there was any barrier I think it would be my perception of the professor-student thing... When you are a student and you are learning from somebody you put the

professor in the expert position so you are automatically the one down, you don't really feel on an even level... It may not even come down to personalities in your relationship with the prof. You could be completely on the same level with that but they still determine your grade and I think that the thing that keeps them in that position [of expert] is the grading factor for a lot of people. (Participant 4, Semester 4)

Another student commented: "It's not anything against the profs, but it's just there... There is not an equal relationship" (Participant 2, Semester 4). This student described a situation in which the professor invited students to videotape themselves in a consulting session so that he could give them feedback on their consulting skills. The student explained that despite thinking this was a great opportunity to get feedback from the professor, she did not videotape herself because she was worried about getting negative feedback from her professor. She explained: "[The professor] made it clear 'I'm not here to judge you or evaluate you, I'm here to help you'... I know he's not judging us but... I see him as someone higher. I trust him, but in my mind, in my perception he is higher" (Participant 2, Semester 4). When asked to elaborate on this view of the professor as someone higher, she said: "We see professors as being superior to us and that will never change. We'll never have the same confidence... I've always had a fear of the teacher going back to first grade... I would see them as people that are so important, so I would be scared... But if the teacher isn't there I'm not shy" (Participant 2, Semester 4). This student explained how she saw the same behaviours in many of her colleagues. She described one particular colleague, saying:

“When she is all alone or with a small group you’ll hear her, she always has great ideas... You can see she’s super brilliant, she’s great. But we didn’t hear from her once when the professor was around, not once. And if the professor asked her a question directly, “bang”, exactly like me, her face gets super red and she gets all shy... A lot of people do that. You have the same person but if the professor is around the discussion will be dead. There’s always two or three, they are the opposite; when the professor is there they want so much to be valued, so they say “I did this” and “I think this”, but for most of us it will be negative. (Participant 2, Semester 4)

Another student made a very telling comment which supports her colleague’s point when I asked her about the summer and whether she thought it would have been beneficial to have meetings over the summer in addition to (or in lieu of) the WebCT site. She responded:

It would have been nice to have lunch after our [supervision] meeting and sort of have [another meeting to say] “ok now what is everybody REALLY feeling now that you are not worried about how we are going to look?”... I just wonder how many people... filtered out stories they would have maybe shared if their supervisor wasn’t sitting at the end of the table. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

This student elaborated on her fear of the professor’s evaluation and explained why she and her colleagues did not voice many of their biggest concerns. She said:

It’s intimidating to talk about your experiences because we’re so new at it and everything is just so scary... I’m sure that a bunch of us have a million things we could have said [in the supervision meetings] that were more important than the

things we voiced, ... but people sort of got their meeting face on and we tried to put our best foot forward [by asking] questions [like] “what do I do with this person?” as opposed to “I did this, was that ok?”... I always made sure that it was something that there was no way it could reflect badly on me because it hadn’t happened yet; it was something that I was unsure of, but being unsure about something you are going to do is a lot less scary than being unsure of something you did... When we’d have to journal... I took the emotional content out. I’ll never say something like “I am worried about the way this athlete reacted this way”. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

Later in the interview the student made another telling remark that revealed a whole other side of the fear of being evaluated by the professor. She said:

I always wondered if everybody was not giving me the feedback that they would normally give me because they don’t want to do it in front of the teacher... Like if you make a suggestion to one of your colleagues then it’s a suggestion that you could potentially be putting yourself on the line again. If you say “I would do this” and the teacher tells you or somebody tells you “you shouldn’t do that” then [the professor] wonders “did you do that?” (Participant 3, Semester 4)

Another student alluded to her fears of not only being evaluated by her professor but the fear that the professor would divulge negative information to other professors. When I asked her if it made any difference that I was not a professor, she said:

I think absolutely. There were some... issues that we might not have brought up to a professor. We weren’t intimidated by you, we felt that you were a student and that you were there to help us and we understood that it was confidential and I remember you making the remark that there would be no profs, making sure that we knew that

there were no profs and we felt that we could talk about anything and none of it would get out. For sure that made a difference. Had there been a prof here, although we know it's confidential and they could say that it won't get out, but they are still at that level with the other profs and there are exchanges between them and whether they come out and say what we said or not, we would probably hold back. But it was wide open with you. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

The fear of being evaluated appears to have been extended to interactions with professors outside of the classroom. As one student explained, despite having a relaxed relationship with their professors, she and her colleagues were always on guard. She said: "There's so much stigma attached to the professor... We can kid around with the profs, even outside of school, but even when you bump into a professor outside of school you are always constantly thinking 'Ok is this is going to come back to me somehow?'" (Participant 3, Semester 4)

Use of the Training Centre for Learning

Students reported that the main location where the majority of the group's informal learning with each other occurred was at the training centre. In general, students mentioned that the training centre provided a meeting place for informal learning between them. More specifically it was a place where they could meet and work together on their projects and papers for classes or to practice their intervention skills and techniques in preparation for their internships. For example, one second year student described how the training centre became the group's main point of contact. She said: "It's like our home base. It's a no-brainer; it's where we are going to meet. We don't have to come up with a meeting place. We know we are going to have a place to work."

We're not going to be distracted... I think we would be at a loss if all the rooms were booked" (Participant 3, Semester 2). A first year student explained that she and her colleagues came to view the training centre as their own and for work purposes, preferred the training centre to the graduate student lounge, which was shared by students in other programs. She said:

It's been useful so far for doing our triads and being able to meet here. The grad lounge is good but it's busy and there are people in and out and you can't work as well... [The training centre is] great for working as a group and doing stuff together and I think for our internship it's going to be an unbelievable resource... All the other grad students have their labs they can go to, all the thesis students... we don't have anywhere we can go as [students in the professional stream]. Having this centre is kind of like the equivalent of our lab... It's been useful so far and it will surely become more useful as we go on. (Participant 12)

The student continued on, explaining the value of having both shared and private spaces for learning, saying: "There's nothing more perfect than having a break from your homework when you know that right next door someone else is doing homework, probably about the same thing and you can just knock and then ask them a question and then come back" (Participant 12).

A number of students commented on the centre's physical resources and their utility when working on projects in a group. For example, one student shared the details of her group's work on a particular project for one of their classes. She recalled:

We mostly met in here just because it was the most convenient spot for everyone... [My colleague] and I came here one time and we stayed until midnight coding. So

we had the TV available to us, the cameras, and when we were doing the coding and putting it into our templates afterwards we used the projector just because it was big and we could both see it instead of squishing around one little computer... We used all the white boards... We would first put [ideas] on a white board and then we would put it into our document. And then the Internet; she'd be working on something and then she would just send it to me even though I was right next to her. It was very convenient... It's the little things that you don't really notice but they do slow you down if you don't have all these resources. (Participant 5, Semester 4).

When asked what determined the group's decision to use the training centre for their meetings, she said:

It wasn't even a decision or a discussion; it was just natural that we were going work here. It's funny because in undergrad it was always an issue "where are we going to meet?" trying to decide, if people live in the east or west, trying to find a middle ground. But here regardless of where people live we just always met here at the centre... It's just convenience. You know it's always open and it's quiet... and [there are] a lot of computers, so we can spread out. (Participant 5, Semester 4)

Another student described a similar situation with her colleagues where having the proper location and resources was beneficial to them getting their work done efficiently for their end of the year projects. She recalled:

I was working on a group project with [my colleague], and she has a computer and I have a computer at home, but when you are doing a lot of research it was just easier to just come here. We put a table between the two computers and set up all our papers. She would research and I would research and we would [e-mail] each other

information. You could just get that much more done. And when we had group work to do for class it was just easier to come here and the library is right down the road and you have access to other people if you have questions... It got pretty busy here at that time with people using the centre for stuff like that. (Participant 6, Semester 4)

A number of students described a very interesting scenario that occurred a number of times with their work groups when they used the training centre for their collective project work. One student explained the situation saying:

Everyone has different schedules...And when there's four people it's hard to coordinate schedules so sometimes two people would come [to the training centre] and then one person would come in later and another person would leave, so it gives you that flexibility... People would book two rooms and one group is working in one room and the other group is working in the other room and that person is going back and forth. So that's good that way because everyone is here. We've had days where all eight of us were in this place and it was group work in [a configuration of] two, three, three, let's say. And then all of a sudden it was like musical rooms, people swapping or they are coming into our room and sitting with us for a few minutes; "What are you doing? How are you doing it? Did you get information?" And then they would get up and leave and one person from our group went to the next room. (Participant 6, Semester 4)

Another student elaborated on the same type of scenario. She said:

Whenever there was a major project of some kind due, our class was always here. Everybody was here, we just split up. So class would end and people would be like

“which room are you in?” We’d check to make sure no one had booked anything and we were just split up and people would cross over. So that was very helpful. And people could be working on different projects but we always left the doors open. It was sort of a universal “everybody’s working” kind of thing. So we were in our little groups doing whatever, but if the doors were open it was a sign that it’s ok to come in and ask a different question. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

When I asked the student to elaborate on the term “crossing over”, she replied:

If there’s a group in this room and a group in that room and another group in that room all working on something different, if the doors were open it was a type of agreement that it was ok to come in and discuss something different. So if we needed, if we were at a standpoint, like when we were doing our [project], all three of us at the table came up with a completely different outtake on the same example. So they were like “I think maybe we should get some advice.” So we all split up and went to talk to other people. (Participant 3, Semester 4)

I then asked her what it meant if the doors were closed. She answered: “If the doors were closed then they are doing whatever they need to do and it’s quiet. I think you could knock on the door, but it wasn’t as much of a free-for-all if one of the doors was closed” (Participant 3, Semester 4).

While most of the time students made arrangements with their colleagues to meet at the training centre to work on projects, students also often stopped by the centre as a way to connect with other students and keep up to date on the relevant happenings within the group. For example one student explained: “I would just stop in to see... If I was going to check my mailbox [in the graduate student lounge], I’d walk down here to see what’s

going on. I'd come in here and check the calendar and stuff. That's when I ran into people" (Participant 12). Another student described how she would stop in to the training centre before classes at times when she expected her colleagues to be there. She said:

Usually [I'd show up] a few minutes or a half an hour before classes. I know [one of my colleagues], she would show up here a bit earlier on Thursdays and I would always see her... I also had the same TA hours with [another colleague] so we did meet up also to prep for our labs together. (Participant 5, Semester 4)

One student said she liked to come to the training centre because she preferred the privacy and comfort level of conversing in smaller groups. She said for her the training centre was a place "where a casual conversation can just come up. Because I know when things are a little bit more organized, people - us anyways - we don't like to talk up when there's... people looking at you" (Participant 3, Semester 4).

The importance of the training centre in the learning process for students can be summarized in the words of Etienne Wenger (1998a), who asserts that: "Learning entails both a process and a place... To support learning is not only to support the process of acquiring knowledge, but also to offer a place where new ways of knowing can be realized" (p. 215). Likewise, Malcom and his colleagues (2003) state that: "It is the synergy between practices and setting that ensures successful learning" (p. 316). Said another way, the training centre provided the students with a physical location which allowed them access to informal and non-formal learning opportunities with both physical resources (e.g., books, documents, computers, audiovisual equipment) and human (social) resources (e.g., classmates, former students, students in other related disciplines, professors, myself), in addition to courses being taught there.

As the literature and the comments of students both indicate, having a space designated specifically for these types of learning experiences enabled the students to access resources at their convenience and in the manner in which they desired. This was in contrast to the more formal environments (such as classes) where the learners generally had less control over what they learned and the pace of their learning. However the training centre was designed and was used as a complement to the formal learning environment (and on some occasions even a place where formal learning occurred) not a replacement for it. For example it provided students with a place where they could deepen their learning on the topics that were covered in class through access to books and documents, facilities where they could practice the consulting skills they were learning, or a place where they could engage in dialogue and reflection with other users of the centre. The main point is that the centre provided a designated place (other than the classroom) where learning could occur in a less formalized, less structured environment.

Interviews with Professors

The interviews with professors yielded some very interesting information on a number of topics related to students' learning experiences in and out of the classroom. I asked professors questions (see Appendix H) regarding their perceptions of the main group of students in this research and how their learning progressed throughout the students' master's degree. I also asked them about their perceptions of the research I was conducting with the students and the utility of the particular methods I was employing. Finally, I asked professors about their views on the importance of learning outside of the classroom and the factors that may affect the enhancement of learning in this context.

Professors' Perceptions of the Student Research Participants

When asked to describe the main group of student participants in the research, there appeared to be a consensus among professors that this group seemed anxious and insecure in the early stages of their program. For example one professor explained:

The sense we had early on was that they were kind of like “What can I do? How am I going to do this?” and it was always questions, tons of questions in terms of that, which is really an indication of “I really don’t know what I am going to do here”, kind of thing, lack of self- confidence. (Professor 4)

Another professor shared a similar view of the students’ learning, saying:

They seemed to be very worried about what was coming next a lot and not feeling ready to do the internship. I think that was the biggest thing... It seemed like we as a group of professors had to reassure them a lot. And they were quite afraid of the unknown I think. (Professor 2)

A third professor commented: “They were looking for THE method of consultation. So at the beginning it was like “tell me what to do and we’re going to do it and I’m going to be good and I’m going to be able to consult. I am going to be confident because I know this one” (Professor 3). This professor elaborated on the students’ insecurities, saying:

I think that group at some point was a little bit insecure [especially in] learning to be a student. It was a lot of, “what about this? What about that?... I don’t know who that prof is... Is he expecting a lot, not a lot?” so it’s how the students can survive in the program... In that group I think that aspect of surviving outside of the class was also higher than the group before. (Professor 3)

One professor commented on the group's apprehension compared to that of other groups in the past and how he could relate to their fears. He said:

It was a bit more of an anxious group. Maybe they were a bit less self-confident than I would have expected... If you were to put people into sort of black and white categories they were a group that didn't have a lot of experience, or experiences in working with people in numerous capacities, with a couple of exceptions I think. And they were a little anxious about how the program was going to go, but I think of when I was doing my master's out of undergrad; I was pretty anxious too. So I'm not sure that's so unusual. (Professor 4)

This professor then explained that despite the tentative start, he and his colleagues felt the group evolved throughout their master's degree. He said:

We commented on... how much [the students] changed over the course of that program, I think, every one of them in different ways... One of the fundamental changes is just a greater sense of self-confidence that they actually can do things... and I think that's what I saw in their [internship defense presentations]. It was huge! I mean maybe even more huge because of where they started... I would say almost without exception the change in them was dramatic. (Professor 4)

This sentiment was echoed by another professor who said:

For me it was really great to see the progress that they made throughout the year and a half because I would say that it was a group that was not very confident to start off with, not necessarily as... outgoing as other groups and so we had to spoon feed them quite a bit just to get them to feel ready and confident. (Professor 1)

Professors' Perceptions of my Ph.D. Research

In general, all four professors were very supportive of my doctoral research and expressed their views on the utility of providing a non-formal learning context for students and conducting research on the process. For example, one professor said:

I think [learning with colleagues out of the classroom] is very important and actually in our program we try and facilitate that as much as possible and I think people make links when they chat with each other; different links than I think they make in a formal context... I also think the formal stuff is essential but I think they go hand in hand. It would be really unfortunate to not have that social component, and there would be a lack. (Professor 2)

Another professor commented:

it is so valuable... having someone else to get feedback from because you know that, when you have a question, in particular when it's around things like school where you are going to get a mark - you are going to pass or fail or whatever - when you don't know the answer it's so great to have somebody to come to and ask that of... And so to have you there so that they have that ability to talk to you about stuff... would be valuable. (Professor 4)

Another professor commented on how the benefits of the meetings were apparent to him through the students' comments. He said:

I remember them saying that they really helped, that they really enjoyed having those discussions with you... I think it was something they were looking forward to, to a large extent because as they were doing their internships they often referred to having talked to you about a certain situation or about a certain

strategy and so it was almost like you were another resource for them. (Professor 1)

When asked about the utility of implementing a non-formal learning environment as a more permanent strategy to enhance student learning, one professor had concerns that, while he could see the utility, an administrator might not. He said:

I'm just wondering if the dean or an administrator would say something like "Isn't there a way to do that in the courses? Like you've got this really full program with a lot of courses" – I know they find the program too heavy as it is, too many courses cost too much money. And so if we are proposing that we are going to do this other thing... Like are there not other ways to fill in these blanks in some of the courses? (Professor 2)

Perceived Importance of Learning with Colleagues Outside of the Classroom

Not surprisingly, all four professors felt that learning with colleagues outside of the classroom was an important element in students' overall learning process. All four professors also felt that they were active in promoting and supporting this type of learning. For example, when asked what they do to promote or support this type of learning, one professor responded:

I think when you put people in groups to do work that that often happens automatically because they go to each other's house and they obviously work on the project but I think that it gets them talking about stuff in general related to that or even just their program... The other thing that we do in this program... is just this whole idea of reflecting; reflecting on the process, reflecting on you as a consultant. And so I think that just pushes the reflection and makes them

introspect a little bit more and I think that facilitates them making links as well outside of the class. So I think by trying to foster the self-reflection by getting them to do group work, that really fosters the social learning. (Professor 2)

Another professor explained:

I set up my courses so they do have opportunities to [learn with colleagues outside of the classroom]. And in my course they form triads and they have to do so many sessions outside of the classroom together and then I rotate half way through so that they get to learn and reflect with other people not just always the same people. So I try to create these opportunities. (Professor 1)

While the professors felt that they were doing their part to emphasize and support learning between students outside of the classroom, they did not feel that the university administration accorded this type of learning the same importance. When asked how much importance or support the university accords to teachers to enhance learning outside of the classroom, one professor answered:

None, so far from everything that I've seen... It's more about outcome than the process and that's what's valued in society and I think the university pushes that as well. I think that's the general attitude and I don't agree. But students are pressured into doing it and we're pressured to deliver the program that way as well. So we try to make the best out of this type of situation. (Professor 1)

Likewise, another professor answered the same question, saying: "Zero... The university has called for innovative teaching... but there's no incentive for us to do that and it's not about learning and I don't think they value it at all" (Professor 4). Therefore, despite professors recognizing the importance of learning between students outside of the

classroom, many of them did not feel as though there was any support for them in trying to create or support these types of learning opportunities. In addition, professors explained that the heavy workload from teaching and research did not allow them the time or energy to devote to other forms of learning which would not be recognized in their performance evaluations.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The discussion chapter is divided into four major sections. The first section discusses the use of the collaborative inquiry methodology for constructing knowledge within the research process. Next the development of the community of practice is examined to better understand how the development of the community in this research relates to current literature and practices within the field. The third section explores the continuum of learning environments, from informal and non-formal contexts, to the formal classroom setting. Finally the issue of power, which emerged as one of the more central themes in the research, is discussed in more detail within the context of the current literature.

Collaborative Knowledge Construction

A key aspect of the research process involved using a collaborative framework for constructing knowledge and carrying out many of the activities related to the data collection phase of the research. This included the negotiation of specific topics for discussion during meetings and more generally collaboratively deciding what the group (including myself) would like to get out of the process of engaging with each other on a regular basis. In many ways, the collaborative inquiry methodology played a key role in this process by establishing a working relationship between the students and myself, as well as among the group of students. Positioning students as co-researchers and myself as a co-participant was an important way to engage students as equal (or near-equal) partners in the design and direction of the research. While I took responsibility for structuring the research process (e.g., choosing meeting times and locations, establishing

the basic format for the meetings), the students provided the large majority of the content for the meetings. This collaborative relationship helped to break down many of the barriers that can often occur in the researcher/participant relationship, the most notable of which relates to an imbalance of power.

The modified collaborative inquiry methodology played a key role in the collaborative knowledge construction in this research, despite the fact that students were heavily engaged in negotiating some elements of the research while I did not engage them or invite their input into some of the other crucial components of the research process. The writing of this document serves as a fitting example; students' ideas, actions, and voices are woven throughout the text, however they are presented and interpreted by me. While the students reviewed their transcripts for accuracy, we did not engage in a collaborative process of interpreting the data or co-creating the content for the dissertation document and my participants will only have access to this document once the final copy is printed and it is made public (unless, of course they asked to see a copy before then).

Nevertheless, a number of elements of the collaborative inquiry methodology provided helpful guidelines in creating a collaborative environment in which all parties could engage in knowledge sharing and creation. The following paragraphs describe how the collaborative inquiry methodology was used in this research and how the collaborative relationship unfolded through Bray and colleagues' (2000) four phases of a collaborative inquiry. This model helps to highlight some of the major milestones in the collaborative inquiry process and bring forth the ways in which the group was able to move forward in a collaborative manner. As the results of this study indicate, the research

generally followed the typical four phase process for implementing a collaborative inquiry group.

In phase one – forming a collaborative inquiry group – the group was initiated by me through an invitation to students to join me in regular unstructured meetings early in their first semester. However, as much as possible, from that point on I attempted to leave the framing of the inquiry questions and the designing of the rest of the inquiry project up to the group. In many ways there were two different inquiry processes occurring at the same time. First there was the research component, which, for the most part, I designed the inquiry questions (i.e., research questions) and the inquiry processes. Second there was the community of practice (which I attempted to create and cultivate) whose inquiry questions and inquiry processes were collaboratively developed between the students who attended the meetings and myself. In this discussion section, I try to answer the research questions by describing the collaborative process through which I attempted to create and facilitate the community of practice. While the majority of the forming of the collaborative inquiry group occurred in the first few weeks of meetings, the development of the community of practice's inquiry questions - which mainly revolved around the notion of survival as a graduate student (Fischer & Zigmond, 1998) - and processes was ongoing throughout the research based on the changing needs of the students.

In phase two – creating the conditions for group learning – the rules for collaboration and the cycles of action and reflection were developed collaboratively between myself and the group. While I had some ground rules based on the ethics protocol of my research and my own values (such as respect for each other's opinions), the majority of the rules were negotiated within the group. In some cases they were more

tacit in nature (such as keeping the discussion focused on learning) while at other times they were very explicit (such as not allowing professors to attend the meetings). On a number of occasions students sought to clarify the ground rules during the meetings by asking me questions such as “This is confidential, right?” and “Is it alright if we talk about _____?”.

Cycles of action and reflection in the collaborative inquiry occurred in conjunction with the meeting schedule, with the time in between meetings (normally one or two weeks depending on the semester) serving as the action portion of the cycle in which students applied some of the knowledge they co-created in the meetings. The time during meetings most often acted as the reflection time, where students shared thoughts and ideas about their experiences and pondered ways to improve their situation. On some occasions, in particular when students were engaged in workshop demonstrations, the meetings contained both an action component and a reflection component. Given this logic the group can be said to have passed through twenty cycles of action and reflection, as opposed to the six to ten cycles suggested by Reason (1999). However, the results show that each semester was quite different for the students and this impacted the focus of the meeting topics each semester, therefore each semester could be seen as a life cycle for the collaborative inquiry group. Thus, in Reason’s (1999) terms, each new semester represented the inquiry group’s re-forming to address a new inquiry. This would then mean that each inquiry group’s life cycle comprised between five and nine cycles of action and reflection (with the exception of the summer semester in which there were no meetings).

In phase three – acting on the inquiry question - we collaborated as a group in putting plans into practice, respecting group ownership of ideas, and practicing dialogue and reflection. This phase is the one that consumed the content of the majority of the meetings as students and I – and the occasional invited guest – worked at finding ways to share, improve, and create knowledge within the group that would help to enhance their experiences as students and future practitioners.

Bray and colleagues' (2000) fourth phase - making meaning by constructing group knowledge - involved the steps of capturing the group's experience, constructing knowledge, checking the validity of interpretations, and celebrating meaningful collaboration. Knowledge was constructed during meetings and often checked for validity both within the meetings and outside of the meetings as students tried to apply what they had learned. They then would return over the following weeks to share their experiences with the other group members and discuss ways to further improve the knowledge they had gained. This process was captured for research purposes through audio recordings, and for individual purposes through students' note-taking, collaborative and individually designed drawings or charts, and documents that were either created by students or found by students and brought in to be shared with peers.

Heron's Four Forms of Knowing

Constructing knowledge in the inquiry group was a key outcome of the entire collaborative process. Knowledge was constructed in many forms that reflected the different interactions with, and understandings of, the data that were collected and reflected upon. Heron (1996) divided these forms or ways of knowing into four categories. First *experiential knowing*, which occurs through direct interaction with a

person, place or thing, was achieved in the research through face-to-face interactions and activities during meetings and interviews. This was a preferred mode for many of the students who wanted to learn skills “hands-on”; for example, how to develop and deliver workshops with clientele. Having the opportunity to meet as a group and directly interact on the topic of dealing with challenges they collectively faced was mentioned by most students as another important experiential aspect of this collaborative inquiry. Second, *presentational knowing*, which is built upon experiential knowing and presents itself through a variety of modes of self-expression such as stories, drawings, poetry, dance, etc., was achieved in the research through students’ sharing of stories and documents, as well as students leading some of the activities during the meetings. Stories of challenges, triumphs, and lessons learned made up a significant portion of the discussions in the meetings and helped to bring students closer to each other as they recognized that they shared many of the same concerns and difficulties. In particular, students wanted to hear both success stories and stories of failures from invited guests whom they viewed as having made achievements in some of the same pursuits in which they were currently engaged (e.g., setting up a consulting business, graduating from the program, doing a Ph.D.). Third, *propositional knowledge*, which involves knowing about something by way of ideas and theories expressed in informative statements, was achieved in the research through the circulation of ideas, thoughts, theories, and ponderings (including “half-baked” ones) that were encouraged and very frequently shared by students during group meetings. While the majority of the discussions in meetings revolved around practical or practice-oriented knowledge, students were still very interested in sharing their ideas, thoughts and theories on various topics. Many of them also wanted to better

understand the “big picture”, to better understand the relationships between the pieces of knowledge they were acquiring and how they contribute to their overall learning and goals. Finally, *practical knowing*, the highest form of knowledge according to Heron, is knowing how to do something; to be competent or skilful in a particular task or endeavour. This was achieved by students actually engaging in the practice and rehearsal of skills related to their discipline, which occurred frequently near the end of semester 1 and throughout semester 2 of the research. Originally, students were very eager to engage in acquiring experiential knowledge and sought out as many opportunities as possible to engage in this form of learning. However, once they began to have regular opportunities to engage in experiential forms of learning through the meetings and in their classes, the students’ focus quickly turned to a desire for practical knowing; they wanted to be competent as consultants, despite their novice status.

Overall the collaborative inquiry methodology appears to have been an effective way to carry out research of this nature as it allowed a voice to the participants, it accounted for the involvement and influence of the researcher, and it enabled a joint creation and telling of the story (e.g., Barab, Barnett, & Squire, 2002; Cunliffe, 2002; Grossman, Wineberg, & Woolworth, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1999) of the events that unfolded throughout the research period.

The Development of the Community of Practice

One of the key research questions in this study asked if a community of practice can be created in a graduate student context and in what ways group processes initiated by the introduction of a non-formal learning environment compare and contrast with the tenets of the communities of practice framework. These questions formed the basis for

my attempt to create and facilitate a community of practice among the students during the course of this study. As the following pages indicate, the answer to the question of whether a community of practice, by definition, was formed over the four semesters of the data collection phase could be argued. However, the more important issue from a social constructionist point of view is the understanding that it is not as important to examine whether a community of practice, *by definition*, was formed, as it is to understand the impact of engaging students in the non-formal learning process. For this reason, more space in this document is devoted to the latter area of focus in comparison to the former. Nevertheless, briefly examining the community building process in which I engaged the students over the course of their master's degree can contribute valuable information on how the group developed over the four semesters. While it is difficult to say for certain whether a community of practice, by definition was formed, there is little doubt that a group of people did willingly assemble on a regular basis for reasons related to learning and their domain of practice and many of them reported a beneficial experience in doing so. Wenger's (1999) five stages of community development serve as a useful framework for examining the progression of the group's development and how it relates to some of the communities of practice literature.

Wenger's Five Stages of Development

In general, it appears that the group did flow through Wenger's five stages of development. The first stage – potential – involved finding “enough common ground among members for them to feel connected and see the value of sharing insights, stories, and techniques” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 71). The initial reason that many of the students gave for attending the first meeting was to help me with my research and based on some

of their responses in interviews, it would appear that it was not initially clear to them exactly what the meetings were for. However, once the students began to understand the undefined topic format and they started talking about the learning issues that were pertinent to them, they quickly discovered the potential benefits of having the meetings. “What energizes the community is the discovery that other people face similar problems, share a passion for the same topics, have data, tools, and approaches they can contribute, and have valuable insights they can learn from each other” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 71). For this group of students, the focus from the start was squarely on gathering tips and learning consultation skills in preparation for their internship and being successful as students in the program.

The second stage – coalescing – occurred very early in the group’s development. Wenger and his colleagues (2002) explain: “When a community is able to combine a good understanding of what already exists with a vision of where it can go, it is ready to move to the coalescing stage” (p. 82). For this group of new students, it appeared that their fear of the unknown in the program and their view of themselves as novices made them very willing to coalesce with each other early in the process as a way to gain as much information and mutual support as possible. This was evident in their expressed desire to connect more often with each other and with other more experienced people in the field (e.g., former students, current professionals, etc.). The meetings offered an ideal location for this coalescing to happen, as it served as a safe place to share insecurities, confusions, and frustrations with the group, and possibly get some advice from each other, myself, and other more experienced students and graduates in the room. Wenger and colleagues state that “it often takes time for a community to develop to the point that

people genuinely trust each other, share knowledge that is truly useful, and believe the community provides enough value that it has a good chance to survive” (2002, p. 82). However, for the second year students in their very first semester of their degree, it seemed that their focus on academic survival made them willing to trust each other almost instantly and believe that there was value in the community.

Towards the end of the first semester the participation rate began to drop somewhat; a pattern that continued throughout the rest of the research with a few notable exceptions. As Wenger et al. (2002) explain: After the first event[s], the reality of community work...typically sets in, and people’s energy for the community can fall off sharply. Other commitments can pull people away from participating” (p. 84). This was the point where a “core group” (Wenger et al., 2002) of members began to emerge and take charge of the community and the meetings and to develop a “deep insight into each other’s individual practice, each other’s reactions and style of thinking, and a collective understanding of the practice as a whole” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 85). In this case, a group of three students attended almost all of the meetings during the first two semesters. There were also two students who could be considered part of the “active” group described by Wenger and colleagues (2002): “These members attend meetings regularly and participate occasionally in the community forums, but without the regular intensity of the core group” (p. 56). The rest of the students - including thesis students, doctoral students, and former students in the program – would be considered peripheral members of the community. Most of them attended meetings infrequently, however the majority stayed connected to the group through their occasional involvement or by asking the core and active members what happened at meetings. While this type of partial involvement is

normally viewed as an undesirable form of involvement in many teams or groups, Wenger and colleagues (2002) point out that these peripheral activities are an essential dimension of the community of practice as they allow a variety of levels of participation (from peripheral participation to core membership) and, in their own way, the peripheral participants are learning a lot.

The second semester represented the maturing stage, or the third stage of the community development model. “The main issue a community faces shifts from establishing value to clarifying the community’s focus, role, and boundaries” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 97). This semester was fully focused on the students taking charge of their learning and asking for what they wanted – in particular, to learn about and practice workshops. Wenger and colleagues write “As a community matures, it often finds areas where it collectively needs to develop more knowledge. Identifying knowledge gaps can be a very healthy process” (p. 99). For this particular group of students, one of the larger knowledge gaps was on the topics of group learning activities and workshops.

Interestingly, when we began to work on these topics a few peripheral members began to show up more regularly. This could be taken as an indication that the choice of areas of focus was something to which most of the students could relate and something that they all agreed was important to their practice. While the students had many questions and provided a number of ideas for activities, clearly they wanted to see what a consulting workshop looked like and to gain practical tools to use when giving workshops. While the group was willing to participate in the idea-generating process, they were clear that they first wanted to see an experienced person conduct a workshop before attempting one themselves. The students’ questions about workshops were very specific at times, while

at other times they were very broad and focused on trying to understand how all of the pieces of their learning fit together. In most cases I invited the students to share their thoughts and ideas on each topic with the rest of the group and then added my own commentary, all the while trying to make links to what I expected (from my own experience in the program) them to be learning in their courses at that time.

The fourth stage – stewardship – is described as the group's drive to sustain its momentum through the natural shifts in practice that occur. Through the summer semester the energy invested in the community was very minimal, as students focused on their internships and supervision meetings. They did not see each other much outside of the supervision meetings and the majority of their contact was via e-mail and phone. This contributed to low group energy levels while the students were fully invested in their first ongoing consulting relationships, which, in turn, contributed to less contact between group members. This situation reflects a similar one studied by Wenger and colleagues (2002) in which they observed that declining energy can sometimes be a vicious cycle. The authors described a community of practice in which the core members were pulled away on another project and the peripheral members did not pick up the slack. So the community lay basically dormant for six months until the core members returned. Although the students in the current research still had regular contact with each other, for all intents and purposes, their community was also dormant in many ways over the summer. Wenger and colleagues state: "As in any mature life, maintaining freshness and liveliness takes energy and attention" (p. 104). This decline in momentum and energy in the community continued through the fourth semester for the main group of participants as they focused on completing their internships and prepared to graduate. Interestingly,

while the participation of the community's core group members declined in the fourth semester, some of the more peripheral members began to attend more meetings and participate more in the discussions. Although these new regulars at the meetings didn't give any particular reason for the change in attendance, I would speculate that this was due, in part, to their availability for the meetings, and also to their desire to mentor the new students.

One of the possible reasons or influencing factors in the community's poor stewardship over the summer months could be the fact that the students were not consulted on how they would like to remain in contact as a group. More specifically, I didn't ask the students if they wanted to use the WebCT online LMS in lieu of regular meetings, I simply decided that it would be more feasible given the circumstances of the summer semester. In designing the research protocol (based on my own experiences in the program), I decided that since the students would not be around much over the summer months (some students would actually be out of the province) that it would be more beneficial and simple for them to engage with each other over the Internet. This idea was also influenced by the growing use and promotion of e-learning tools in the field of education as a viable alternative for learning. When I approached the students with the idea of using WebCT, the response was very positive and students talked about how they could see themselves using it. However during the summer months the majority of the tools, with the exception of the resources section, were barely used. Lynch (2004) explains that people are "not likely to use the tools and techniques arising from research in which they have had no stake" (p. 62). In retrospect, it might have been better if the students had been consulted on how to proceed over the summer months, or possibly

there could have been a combination of meetings and e-learning tools. The low rate of usage of the majority of the WebCT tools might also have simply been another indication of the general decline of student involvement with each other over the summer months.

The final stage of Wenger and colleagues' (2002) stages of community development is labelled the transformation stage. The authors explain: "Sometimes a dramatic event, a sudden influx of new members, or a fall in the level of energy calls for a radical transformation – perhaps a return to an earlier incubation or growth stage, or even the community's ending" (p. 109). For the community in this research, it would seem that there were a few factors that contributed to the transformation of the community. First the influx of new students – a group whom professors characterized as being more keen, confident, and active in their own learning than the previous group – created a significant shift in the focus of the meetings. There was a complete return to an earlier incubation period as the same topics that were covered in the meetings during the first semester were covered again, only this time there were a number of second year students in the room to share their advice and experiences. The second year students appeared to put their own questions and concerns aside in the meetings in order to privilege those of the first year students. Second, the fact that the second year students had, for the most part, completed their internships and were focused on graduating from the program may have contributed to their focus being less on school-related activities and more on beginning their consulting careers. Therefore, their energy may no longer have been invested in working with others to continue learning; rather it was focused on getting the job done and moving on. Based on these two observations, the fourth semester could be viewed as the death of the former community and the rebirth of a new

community made up primarily of the new group of students and a few second year students.

Despite many of the new students frequently asking me if the meetings would continue after my data collection was completed, I was not able to continue the meetings due to time constraints and other commitments. Interestingly, while the new students showed much enthusiasm for the meetings and a desire for them to continue, they made no noticeable attempts to continue them on their own in the second semester of their program. This points to the possibility that the community was relying on a facilitator for its survival. However, as appendix B shows, many students continued to use the WebCT site long after the data collection period for this research, indicating that while the community of practice may not have continued in its original form, some of the materials that were produced throughout the community's life cycle (the majority of them created and/or uploaded by the facilitator) were still providing benefits to group members after its ending.

Despite fulfilling the criteria for the stages of development, there are a few major reasons why it could be argued that a community of practice did not actually form. The main issue revolves around the mutual engagement of group members. Many times throughout the research, a number of students commented that they believed the group of students would not have assembled regularly as a group for learning purposes if I had not facilitated the process. In fact, there were a few occasions during the meetings where, in my absence, meetings did not start, or ended immediately after an early departure by me. This makes me seriously question if this group can be considered a community of practice because although they were all willing to participate in the meetings, students did

not seem to engage in them unless I was there to guide them along. While this is not necessarily a negative outcome it does point to the continued need for a facilitator if the community of practice was to survive.

The above concerns about the necessity for me to facilitate the group's learning can be contrasted with other research such as the one conducted by Janson and colleagues (2004), in which the community of practice evolved more organically, without a facilitator, and did not rely on one single member to guide it. The authors pointed out:

Although the developmental model of a CoP resembles the generic one of groups (Yalom, 1970), its one main distinguishing characteristic is that a CoP draws its vigor internally from the determination of its group members. By definition, CoPs self-form and self-direct (as our group did), as opposed to other groups, which have external regulation and governing mechanisms. (Janson et al., 2004, p. 174)

This would appear to challenge the view that the participants in the current research became a community of practice, since the group did not self-form and, while it self-directed in some ways, this was only self-direction within the structure that I created and facilitated. However, any time I was not there to facilitate the community (e.g., being late for the start of a meeting or having to leave early), it did not function on its own.

While it could be questioned whether the group of students in the current research formed a community of practice by definition, it is clear that there was a significant amount of learning that occurred over the course of the four semesters. Although not all of the students participated regularly in the meetings and e-learning tools, they all agreed that the experience of gathering regularly in a group to discuss topics that are determined by the group members was a valuable tool in their learning experience over the course of

their degree. Undoubtedly, the stronger the joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire is in a community of practice, the greater the potential there will be for learning. However, this does not preclude less strong communities from adding value to students' learning. This renders the question of whether a "true" community of practice was formed somewhat less essential to this research, since the goal of enhancing social learning among students outside of the classroom appears to have been met from all perspectives. This view on the relative unimportance of determining fact or reality falls in line with the tenets of social constructionism, which suggest that what is most important is to understand how the adoption of a particular view of reality impacts those involved. Therefore, the focus can shift to discussing the impact of the different aspects of the research and how they contributed to the students' learning.

Facilitating the Community of Practice

In examining the literature on facilitation in communities of practice, it appears that in many ways my experiences and challenges with this group were similar to what has been found with the facilitation of other communities of practice. For example, Tarmizi, de Vreede, and Zigurs (2006) found that the main roles of the facilitator in communities of practice include being an information source, guide, and inspirator for the group; three roles that occupied a large portion of my time while acting as the facilitator. In addition, the authors found that creating and maintaining an open, positive, and participative environment was the most important task for facilitators. This supports my assertions and students' feedback that one of the main reasons why the non-formal learning context was helpful was because of the openness and collaborative nature of the environment that was created.

Not surprisingly, Tarmizi et al. (2006) found that the most difficult task for facilitators was encouraging participation in the community's activities. Although I purposely refrained from soliciting new members or encouraging those who came infrequently to participate more often, the low turnout at some meetings did affect the group. These effects ranged from the lack of enough people to have a variety of perspectives in the room to the influence on students to not attend the meetings if their friends were not planning to attend. As was the case in semester #3 of the current research, Tarmizi and colleagues found that participation was even more of a challenge for virtual communities, explaining that the root causes of nonparticipation in virtual communities are even more numerous and complex than those of face-to-face communities. Despite the challenges of soliciting participation in communities of practice, virtual or otherwise, research conducted by Yoo, Suh, and Lee (2002) did find a direct link between a sense of community and increased participation in virtual communities. This also appears to be true in face-to-face communities as well, as evidenced in the research by Zhao and Kuh (2004), which found that participation in a learning community was positively linked to student engagement. However based on the reports of students in the current research, a sense of community appeared to be lacking in the third semester, which, combined with the availability of other communication methods already in use, may have contributed to the limited use of the communication tools in WebCT. This may also have been the case for some students in the fourth semester who felt that the work became more individualized as students neared the completion of their final semester.

The findings of the current research and other similar findings on virtual communities of practice point to an emerging problem in higher education, as most institutions are relying increasingly on distance learning as an alternative (or complement to) classroom learning. Despite the explosion of technologies and tools to foster online learning in business, education, and other fields, they do not appear to provide an adequate substitute for the learning that occurs in face-to-face dialogue. This could partly be due to the lack of proper engagement in using the technologies by some users. For example, one professor in this research described his experience using WebCT to enhance his course by providing a virtual meeting place and discussion forum where students could engage in dialogue with each other about their readings as they prepared for the following week's class. He explained that since students knew their participation would affect their grade, the majority of them would go online a few hours before the course and add their comments. This strategic move enabled them to get their participation mark, but did nothing to promote or enhance dialogue between students outside of the classroom.

Another interesting finding regarding facilitation comes from Fontaine (2001) who argues that there are two different types of communities of practice. "Bottom-up" communities are self-forming and evolve from a core group of people who share a similar passion. These communities tend to grow and coalesce on their own without any outside intervention. However, often these groups also do not receive any support; financial or otherwise. In contrast, "top down" communities are deliberately created in order to assemble people who may share a similar passion for a particular topic but who may not already be part of a group, network, or community related to this topic. Fontaine explains

that one of the biggest problems with top-down communities is that they often suffer from a lack of participation. The author asserts that in order to counter this problem created communities should be designed with specific roles, including the role of a facilitator.

The above findings by Fontaine (2001) raise an important issue that is essential to acknowledge in a research project such as this one. The issue centres around the question of whether the creation of a top-down community of practice and the automatic inclusion of a facilitator (without input from the community members) of the community of practice had any potential negative impacts on the group's learning. A few authors (e.g., Bentley, 1994; Kirk & Broussine, 2000) argue that some elements of facilitation can be detrimental to the development of groups. For example, Bentley (1994) reminds us that facilitators can easily disempower groups by making suggestions or offering help before it has been requested, or by trying to establish an order to processes instead of letting the group resolve them. Certainly the question of disempowerment must be asked in the current research, in light of the professors' views of the students as anxious and continually looking for a recipe, as well as professors' and students' views of me mainly as a resource person to the students. However, when this is combined with the comments of a number of students who felt that a community of practice (or anything comparable) would not have formed if I had not created one, it would appear that the merits of attempting to create and facilitate a community of practice outweighed the potential shortcomings.

Another caution with regards to the facilitation process comes from Kirk and Broussine (2000), who argue that the process of facilitation cannot escape the politics that

reside within the wider context of the organization to which the community belongs (in the case of my research, the university). Specifically, the authors make the case that organizations are political, the process of facilitation within organizations is political, and facilitators are political. They argue that since the facilitation process is embedded within a larger context, it is inevitable that the facilitation process will be influenced by the politics of the organization. More important to this research is Kirk and Broussine's argument that facilitators are political. This entails the possibility of being influenced by the politics of the organization, but also by one's own personal biases, opinions, and preferences. While I'd like to believe that my facilitation was, as much as possible, without a political slant, I can not argue the fact that my views on learning, universities, and many other aspects related to the context of this research acted as "politics" of sorts in my research design, data collection, facilitation, and even how I am choosing to tell the story of this research.

Kirk and Broussine (2000) remind the facilitator that he or she must remain aware of the political forces at play within the system of which they are a part and be cognizant of the gaps that can exist between principles that they espouse (our "talk") and what they enact in their practice (the "walk"). This awareness was created in the current research through the inclusion of a reflective journal and by soliciting the feedback of students on the power dimensions that existed in their relationship with me and with their professors (although I do acknowledge that the small, yet still present, power differential that existed between myself and the students may have impacted their answers to this question).

Kirk and Broussine's (2000) research highlights the fact that the political realm within organizations includes the power dynamics that can exist in the many relationships

within the organization, including those associated with supervisors. This supports the comments of students and my own observations that one of the most important characteristics of the facilitator in the non-formal environment that was created was my lack of legitimate (position) power over the students. As Hughes (2002) explains in the context of the workplace; where the facilitator or supervisor occupies a position of power over the staff member, “the likelihood is minimal that staff will develop sufficient trust in their supervisors to permit the latter a direct and personal role in their learning” (p. 69). Hughes then continues on to say that similar considerations could apply to the teacher-student relationship at the post-secondary level: “There is little consideration in the literature of university teaching of the effect of teachers’ assessment roles on their abilities to access and directly intervene in the learning processes of students through facilitative practices” (p. 69).

Espoused Theories versus Theories in Use

Another challenge mentioned by students that is related to the differences between their relationships with professors and their relationship with me, concerns the mismatch between professors’ espoused theories and their practical theories (Shotter, 1993b) or theories in use (Argyris & Schön, 1974). As Eraut (2000) explains in his research on non-formal learning and tacit knowledge in professional work: “The central problem for most managers and professionals is that they are intellectually and emotionally committed to espoused theories which describe the world as they would like it to be, but which do not accurately describe their own actions” (p. 123). Eraut (1994) discusses this mismatch between espoused theories and theories in use specifically in the education context, stating that the mismatch is the result of a dualistic approach to professional education:

Espoused theories are developed in education contexts and their comprehension rewarded by the assessment system: they also represent the way professions like to see themselves and present themselves to the public. Theories in use are developed quite separately to cope with the exigencies of practice and even if explicit would not “be deemed for public communication” as they would diminish the image of the profession. Apart from preserving the often mourned but rarely narrowed theory/practice gap in many professions, espoused theories provide professionals with a “professional conscience” which urges them to judge their work according to a form of idealized practice which is unachievable. Over time this leads either to skepticism or to frustration and burnout; the third route is to become professional educators and perpetuate the cycle. (Eraut, 2000, p. 123)

While this comment may appear critical of professional educators, a number of students in the research commented that despite some of their professors talking about their consulting experiences, their descriptions often left the students wanting more details on exactly what was done and how it was done. Students often felt they were getting superficial or theoretical explanations of events and situations when what they really wanted was a detailed description of the events and circumstances that transpired.

In addition, students were not only interested in hearing about descriptions of exemplary outcomes or learning the way consulting sessions and activities should be carried out, they also wanted to know about when, where, how and why they failed. Students wanted to hear “war stories”; descriptions of the difficult or challenging moments and failures faced by consultants in the field just as much as learning about their successes. A number of students commented on how their professors never shared stories

of failure with them. Watkins and Marsick (1992) point out that “Mistakes are potent tools for learning... People are more likely to reflect on mistakes to determine their causes and prevent their repetition” (p. 291). Students wanted to hear about the mistakes that their professors (and any other consultants working in the field) made so that they could learn from them. Some students mentioned that this lack of sharing negative aspects, particularly mistakes, served to reinforce the power differential between the professors and themselves.

Students also said that most of their practice (“mock”) consulting sessions with colleagues were not as applicable to their practice as they would have liked because the sessions did not feel “real” enough and felt too “staged”. In other words in the mock sessions students were being asked to act based on the (espoused) theories that they were taught but some of them did not find this very effective, and instead would have preferred to discuss or witness experts’ (professors or others) theories in use.

Other students felt that the advice of some of their professors on specific consulting issues was somewhat less credible to them in their burgeoning consulting practices because these professors were no longer actively consulting in the field or were never actual consultants. Despite the students’ high degree of respect for the knowledge and academic experience of these particular professors, their practical knowledge of consulting was seen as being theoretical and untested in the field. Ironically, this exposure to professors’ espoused theories instead of theories in use seemed to have influenced some students, who began to adopt a similar practice of describing their own actions in terms of espoused theories instead of theories in use as a strategy for achieving better grades. For example, some students explained to me that during their internships

they often described their consultations to their supervisors in terms of what they thought they should have done in certain consulting contexts (i.e., espoused theories) as opposed to what actually happened with their clients (i.e., theories in use). Perhaps professors and students shared similar reasons for only wanting to reveal their espoused theories instead of theories in use, which often include mistakes and shortcomings: a fear of being judged.

Paradigms of Facilitation

Based on the findings, it would appear that there is a discrepancy between the students' perceptions of their professors teaching methods and the professors' perceptions of their own teaching methods. One possible way to explain this discrepancy is to examine the issue from the perspective of differing paradigms. Although students were not directly asked about paradigms of facilitation or specifically about professors' teaching methods, many of their interview responses, particularly in discussions about the differences between their professors and my facilitation, revealed their thoughts and perceptions of their teachers' methods. Professors were also not directly asked about their teaching paradigms; however, based on the interviews with them, my experience as a former student in the program, my current role in the program as a facilitator and resource person, and my own personal relationships with the professors, I would qualify the majority of the professors' methods as more humanistic in nature. Interestingly, the descriptions of the students in the current research of their professors' methods would generally fall under the behaviourist paradigm, not the humanistic one. Yet their descriptions of my facilitation of the meetings with them could be considered more humanistic. Examining the possible reasons why students viewed the professors' methods as behaviourist and why they appeared to view my facilitation as more humanistic in

nature may shed some light on how the students perceived the differences in learning that occurred in each context.

Brookfield (1989) explains that “The behaviorist paradigm is drawn from the thought of Skinner, and, in adult education, it has been influential in the development of competency-based adult education... The assumption behind the behaviorist paradigm is that the facilitator’s task is to ensure that learners attain previously observable, behavioral outcomes” (p. 202). The students in the current research appeared to be very outcome-based in much of their thinking. Despite their comments that they knew professors were there to help them learn and that evaluation was not as important as effective learning, the perception of their professors as behaviourist in their teaching methods remained.

Looking more closely at the behaviourist paradigm, it may be a fitting way of describing some of the tasks that are inherent in the professors’ role as the teacher and the traditional forms of educational assessment that are prevalent in the university setting. Brookfield says: “This paradigm of facilitation is seen most prominently in contexts where the objectives to be attained are unambiguous, where their attainment can be judged according to commonly agreed upon criteria of successful performance, and where a clear imbalance exists between teachers’ and learners’ areas of expertise” (p. 202). For many students, these criteria may have been the most prominent ones in the teacher-student academic relationship despite the other varying factors. For example, in their courses the learning objectives and criteria for evaluation were normally clearly laid out and became the focal point of the course for many of the students. Also, while professors may or may not have emphasized the imbalance of levels of expertise between

themselves and the students, it's clear from the meetings and interviews that the students perceived a significant imbalance.

In contrast to what I would describe as a “behaviourist” label that students seemed to ascribe to their professors (i.e. my interpretation, based on how students described their perceptions of their professors), the qualities that the students described as being critical for the facilitator's role appeared to align more with the humanistic paradigm. Brookfield (1989) explains that in the humanistic paradigm “the activity of facilitating learning is conceived as being essentially collaborative, with strong emphasis on learners and teachers negotiating objectives, methods, and evaluative criteria. Facilitators in this tradition respect the integrity of learners and grant learners' interests and demands a great deal of validity” (p. 203). This falls in line with the comments of many of the students about the perceived differences between the professors and myself (as the facilitator). A number of them referred to the importance of me letting them choose what they wanted to talk about in the meetings and the fact that the process, content, and activities in the meetings were always negotiated within the group. In contrast, students felt that there was little or no negotiation of the objectives, methods, or evaluative criteria of the majority of their classes. Brookfield also states that in the humanistic paradigm “education is seen as a democratic, cooperative venture, with facilitators assuming no particular status within a learning group simply by virtue of their knowledge or experience” (p. 203). While I was certainly assigned some level of higher status based on my knowledge and experience in the group, the students were adamant in explaining that my status was somewhere in between the one they attributed to their colleagues and that of their professors. They commonly referred to me as being “more like us” or even “one of us”, making it clear

that they saw me as being more similar to them than to a professor. The students also commented that my participation in the group was not normally in the role of leader, rather it reflected a more participatory, egalitarian, and often deferential position in the group. This aligns with the humanistic view of Carl Rogers, who aims “to become as much a participant in the group as a facilitator, willingly carrying his share of influence in and responsibility for the growth of the group, but not wanting to control it” (Foley, 2001, p. 73).

Formal versus Informal and Non-Formal Learning Environments

A large portion of the data and analysis in this research was focused on understanding what was different between the formal education that students received throughout their master’s degree in their classes and the out-of-class non-formal learning environment that I created with them in order to see how they can complement each other in an academic context. The benefits of out-of-class experiences for university-level students have been studied and recognized for many decades (e.g., Kuh, 1993, 1995; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1990; Wilson, 1966). Kuh and colleagues (1990) assert that attention to out-of-class experience is warranted for four major reasons: a) students spend most of their time outside of the classroom, b) colleagues can have considerable influence on how a student spends his or her time and can therefore have an impact on how much of it is devoted to educationally purposeful activities, c) out-of-class experiences provide opportunities to acquire important skills that are not often addressed in the classroom, and d) participation in groups outside of the classroom can contribute to a sense of community. As discussed below, this research supported all four of these assertions and their value in students’ learning process throughout their degree.

Based on the interviews with students, there were very clear distinctions between the learning that occurred in classes versus the learning in meetings that I facilitated, however, each contributed to part of their overall learning. Most of the students' comments pointed to the perception that there were some inadequacies or gaps in the formal education setting which were generally able to be addressed through non-formal means during the research. This is not to say that the non-formal context was better than the formal context or that the non-formal environment is a remedial tool to make up for the shortcomings of the formal environment, rather that there were some issues and topics surrounding their learning that were better addressed in a non-formal environment.

While there is an important distinction between informal learning situations (in which participants learn without any outside intervention) and non-formal learning situations (which occurs in a planned but highly adaptable manner) in the literature, both of these types of learning are often contrasted with formal learning situations. Also, while there has been significant research on informal learning contexts, studies on non-formal learning contexts are scarce. For this reason, in some instances I have borrowed ideas and research from the literature on informal learning which contrasts it with formal learning in order to support my argument about the benefits of learning outside of formal contexts. In so doing, I remind the reader of the distinctions to be made between informal and non-formal learning environments, however I argue that the conclusions drawn from the research on informal learning that I cite below can be generalized to other learning contexts (such as a non-formal learning environment) that do not fall under the guise of formal learning.

As mentioned previously, a few of the students commented that they preferred and/or felt they learned more in the meetings with me than in their classes. While this is not likely the case (mainly because the core courses in the program cover the main topics of the profession and were often the catalyst for many of the discussions in the meetings), it points to the students' desire to learn about the more tacit aspects of their profession in addition to the explicit theoretical and technical requirements and procedures that make up their training. This falls in line with research on learning in other professional training contexts in which participants reported that the majority of their learning did not occur through formal education or courses. For example Knapper and Cropley (2000) stated that in the USA adults spend over 500 hours a year engaged in learning projects that occur largely outside of the formal education system. They also reported that in Norway well over half of all systematic learning takes place outside of the school context. Similarly, Marsick and Watkins (1990) concluded that only 20 percent of what employees in their study learned came from formalized, structured training. In a study by Crossman, Lane, and White (1999), participants stated that informal and tacit learning had a greater impact on their jobs than formal learning.

While these findings, along with the reports of students in this research, seem to indicate that non-formal learning is more valuable than formal learning, Burns and Schaefer (2003) caution that "informal learning is not a substitute for training or education" (p. 12). Svensson, Ellström, and Aberg (2004) agree with them, saying: "Informal learning...is important but not sufficient for [building] knowledge... It needs to be supported by formal education" (p. 479). This view was strongly held by a number of the professors in this research as well, when asked about the value of informal and

non-formal learning. For example one professor explained how the learning between students outside of the class often results from what was learned in class:

I think a lot of the learning that is happening outside of the class ... is about what's happening in the class. So you need something to start that discussion or that learning outside. It might be to agree or disagree with what's happening there and in fact what's happening in the class should be content that helps the students to be more critical... and also that aspect of how to survive, that's really the student aspect that we don't necessarily cover in our classes. (Professor 3)

This professor then elaborated on the reciprocity between the two learning environments, saying:

I think what we need to do is not see mediated and unmediated learning as opposites. As I just said, I think one brings the other one, the mediated brings a lot of unmediated... But the mediated learning situation could be structured in such a way that has the students discuss the content more [outside of class]. I think as profs we could do more to help to facilitate the mix of the two. [So that's how] the mediated influences the unmediated. How does the unmediated influence the mediated? I think for this to happen the profs need to be more open. (Professor 3)

Malcolm et al. (2003) also go beyond a dualist, binary thinking about formal and informal (and non-formal) education by stipulating that their research found that learning experiences contain aspects of both formal and informal learning. However the authors caution that "it is important not to see informal and formal learning as somehow separate, waiting to be integrated... The challenge is to recognize them and identify them, and understand the implications" (p. 315). One way of recognizing the implications and

importance of informal and non-formal learning is by understanding the differences in experiences that they contribute to the overall learning processes of students. This may also provide some clues as to why many of the students claimed to value the informal and non-formal over the formal.

The Formal Curriculum is Only One Aspect of Student Learning

While the majority of the classroom education of most students is focused on learning the formal curriculum designed by their institute of learning and delivered by their teachers or professors, Eraut (2000) proposed that the formal curriculum is only one aspect of student learning. He explained that:

Pupils are also learning how to present work for assessment, how to participate in shared discussions; algorithms and schemas for reading and problem-solving; a hidden curriculum of orderly, disciplined behaviour, working to deadlines and submission to authority; and a rich array of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour from peer group interaction. (p. 131)

Based on this view, a student's progression through an academic program can be seen as far more than simply learning the formal curriculum that is being taught. This was apparent in the comments of many of the students in the current research who said that their courses did not satisfy all of their learning needs and they were forced to search for a variety of other methods to help them find the information they needed to be successful as a student. Research by Kuh (1993) on undergraduate students' out-of-class activities would seem to corroborate this finding as well. In the research, he found that the majority of students' learning out of class was related to five categories: 1) personal competence (e.g., self-awareness, autonomy, confidence), 2) cognitive complexity (e.g., reflective

judgment, application of knowledge), 3) knowledge and academic skills, 4) practical competence (e.g., practical competence, vocational competence), and 5) altruism and aestheticism. A closer look at these categories reveals that many of them are related to academia, and therefore support the notion that students spend much of their time outside of the classroom trying to seek out ways to complement their formal learning.

The view of formal education as being only one part of the student experience in academia was also advanced by Lauren B. Resnick, a past president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), in her 1987 presidential address, when she suggested that students must also engage in the “game of school” (which I would argue, refers to the tacit aspects of surviving as a student) in order to be successful: “The process of schooling seems to encourage the idea that the ‘game of school’ is to learn symbolic rules of various kinds, that there is not supposed to be much continuity between what one knows outside school and what one learns in school” (Resnick, 1987, p. 15). The AERA president also noted the discontinuity between knowledge acquired and used outside of the classroom and the knowledge required in school:

There is growing evidence, then, that not only may schooling not contribute in a direct and obvious way to performance outside of school, but also that knowledge acquired outside of school is not always used to support in-school learning.

Schooling is coming to look increasingly isolated from the rest of what we do...

Growing evidence... points to the possibility that very little can be transported directly from school to out-of-school use. Both the structure of the knowledge used and the social conditions of its use may be more fundamentally mismatched than we previously thought. (Resnick, 1987, p. 15)

The author further advanced the notion that schooling contains four major discontinuities relating to cognitive activities out of the classroom. First, schooling focuses on individual performance while most mental work outside of school is shared. Second, schooling promotes and evaluates unaided thought (particularly during student assessments) while cognitive activities out of school normally involve cognitive tools (e.g., books, notes, calculators, tools, etc.). Third, schooling cultivates symbolic thinking while most activities outside of the classroom involve direct engagement with objects and situations. Finally, schooling tends to generate general knowledge, while outside of the classroom situation-specific knowledge and competencies are required.

These four elements were common themes in the meetings and interviews with students throughout the current research (see Appendix J). They were also what many students felt were some of the major differences between classes and the meetings with me. Thus, while the meetings with me were school-based, in the sense that they took place in a university setting and were deliberately focused on learning, I would argue that they were more similar to out of school activities than to formal schooling ones since they were more focused on the tacit aspects of being a student and future professional.

Throughout their degree, students continually searched for colleagues and cognitive tools to help them understand and successfully navigate the challenges of academia and their professional work. They also looked for information about, and opportunities to directly engage in, the core activities of their practice and to learn the specific skills that are required to become competent. Certainly some of their courses provided a number of these opportunities to the students during their degree, but the prevailing consensus was that the students did not feel it was enough to adequately

prepare them for their internships and ultimately for their professional careers after graduation. Reinharz (1981) explains that “there is a tendency to breed conservative attitudes and restricted thinking in graduate training programmes which should be countered by striving instead to train people to be imaginative... More often than not, these attitudes are fostered during the training programme by its reward structure” (p. 429). Students in the current research became so fixated on the reward structure that the point of learning changed from a focus on learning for the purposes of becoming a competent practitioner to a focus on learning as a strategy or method for obtaining rewards for being a “good” student (e.g., scholarships, good grades, coveted internships, increased praise and/or mentoring from a professor).

What’s Missing from the Formal Curriculum?

Based on the logic of the arguments above, the lives, academic survival, and future professional careers of the students in this research were impacted by a number of different factors - including a hidden curriculum – while only being supplied with a formal curriculum. For many of the students, this was inadequate and disconnected from the realities of their academic lives and future careers. This begs the question of what elements were missing from the education of these students that they considered essential to their learning and advancement.

The Connection between Learning and Experience

One possibility is that students were experiencing a disconnection between learning and their experiences. As mentioned at the outset of this document, while the perceptions of the students may have differed from those of past (and future) students, as well as the perceptions of the professors and other stakeholders in their education, they

represent the realities that the students co-constructed among themselves and they have a significant impact on the course of the students' learning. These co-constructed realities represent a key aspect of teaching and learning that Brookfield (1991) calls breathtaking in its obviousness and simplicity. It is the notion of grounding teaching in learning, or, said another way it is the idea that in order to be effective, teachers must take into account how learners experience learning. The author describes the experience of many students engaged in higher learning for the first time, saying:

Adults recall their entrances into higher education with vivid memories of confusion, fear, and an inability to distinguish between friends or enemies in the anonymous and potentially hostile crowd clustered around them. They speak of their first experiences of education with the same sense of stunned alarm articulated by tourists who find themselves in the middle of the New York City subway system for the first time, only to discover that the map guiding them through the system is back in the hotel room. (p. 51)

These comments fall in line with statements made by a number of members of both groups of students in my research, who felt lost when they first entered the program. It is precisely this feeling that many students said motivated them to initially attend the meetings with me. The questions they asked in the initial (and subsequent) meetings corroborate the students' statements and attest to these fears and confusion.

The Connection between Informal Learning and Competency

Another possibility, which comes from research by Boud and Middleton (2003) on workplace learning, suggests that there are three essential areas related to individuals being competent in their practice that are addressed by informal learning (and I would

argue non-formal learning as well) but not by formal learning. First, learners seek a mastery of organizational processes, including keeping pace with administrative requirements and becoming competent in the skills required to complete their work-related tasks. For the students in the current research, this included mastering the academic curriculum and assessments and displaying competence in the “game of school”. Often the “rules” for success are not clearly laid out, leading students to seek out other sources (e.g., colleagues, former students, friends in other programs) for advice.

The second area involves negotiating the political, which includes negotiating relationships within the everyday workplace and strategic positioning to ensure a successful career path. For the students in the current research, this involved learning from friends, former students, colleagues, and others how to negotiate relationships with colleagues, professors, administrative staff, and pertinent others in order to maximize opportunities for learning and advancement. In an internship program such as the one in this research, strategic positioning can often be an important factor in obtaining select internship experiences or opportunities to be mentored. Therefore learning how to negotiate the political aspects of being a student can be a key aspect of being successful.

The third essential area involves dealing with the atypical, which includes situations for which there is no set procedure or process and therefore strategies must be developed. Once again these challenges prompted students to turn to people other than their formal “educators” to find ways to cope with the realities they perceived themselves as facing as students. Because the students in the current research viewed themselves as novices for the greatest part of the research, most of the situations (related to the game of school and their professional training) they encountered were atypical for them,

prompting a desire for continual guidance and instruction on how to proceed. The atypical nature of students' learning was enhanced by the fact that very little literature or information on how to be a student (i.e., how to "play" the "game of school") was available to them, and also the nature of consulting work in their field is quite variable, making it hard to generalize the essential skills and knowledge required. Based on this discrepancy between what is provided to students through their formal education and what students feel is essential to their academic survival and success, it is no surprise that they viewed the opportunity to engage with each other in a non-formal learning environment outside of the classroom as being beneficial, and for some, even essential to their learning experience.

The Connection between Learning and Emotion

A third element that many students felt was missing from their formal education was the inclusion of emotion into the learning experience, or more specifically, their misperception that emotion should be separated from their learning. There have been numerous studies that have documented the importance of the affective as a key element in the transformative learning process (e.g., Barlas, 2000, 2001; Clark, 1993; Egan, 1985; Heron, 1992; Hunter, 1980; Scott, 1991; Taylor, 1994). This evidence was corroborated in the current research by students who stated that one helpful aspect of the meetings was that they provided a place where an open expression of thoughts, feelings, and emotions was acceptable. The students did not perceive there to be the same degree of freedom of expression in the classroom or with their professors due to a variety of aspects, such as lack of time, fear of negative evaluation by the teacher, and the students' perceptions of the inappropriateness of emotions in the classroom context. For example, one student

described experiencing a very challenging and somewhat urgent situation (which she described as a crisis) in one of her internship consulting experiences, yet she did not contact her supervisor until more than a day later and chose to only immediately speak to her colleagues about it. When I asked her why she opted to wait to talk to her supervisor, she explained that she felt she needed to be calm and less emotional before contacting her supervisor. While waiting, in this instance, was not detrimental to the ultimate outcome, reluctance or even a delay in reporting serious problems or challenges within one's internship could have potentially dangerous consequences. Another student explained to me that she was very careful to avoid sharing any emotions when writing in the journal that she was required to keep for one of her classes, despite wishing that she could have been comfortable enough to share them. She said: "with my journaling I took the emotional content out. I'd never say something like 'I am worried about the way this athlete reacted' and I think sometimes it's nice to have those emotions because it's less clinical" (Participant 3, Semester 4).

With regards to implementing the affective element into teaching, Yorks and Kasl (2002) explain that "[Although] adult educators routinely develop strategies that provide pathways into the felt knowing of the self and others... these pathways are often relegated to secondary roles, being perceived by educators as a diversion from the "real" learning, which is lodged in reflection and analysis" (p. 187). This has caused the role of emotion and feeling to be undertheorized and underutilized or improperly utilized in the majority of higher learning classrooms (Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Yorks and Kasl (2002) explain that:

In part, this reflects a strong cultural bias in English-speaking society for subordinating feeling and emotion to rational, propositional thought and discourse. One consequence of this undertheorizing is the tendency for writers in adult education to conceptualize rational discourse and the affective as separate and distinct from one another, even while acknowledging that people learn holistically. (p. 189)

Tisdell, Hanley, and Taylor (2000) commented that despite many adult educators being interested in promoting multiple ways of knowing, they often struggle with trying to integrate emotions and feeling into students' learning experiences, and they also struggle with their own comfort levels when emotion and feeling emerge in the learning process. The teachers in the current research did not directly comment on this aspect of the learning process, however, based on their comments on other related topics and the comments of students, it would appear that they were open to the affective component of learning, but did not necessarily actively encourage discussions or expressions of affect in the classroom. It also appears that the students were not willing to speak about affect to their professors, despite their teachers' openness to doing so. In contrast to this, the affective component was one of the more central themes to the meetings in the sense that students regularly spoke about their feelings and the emotional impact of particular events and circumstances related to their learning. Students were also very open with me personally while I facilitated the meetings, and in my role as a resource person in the training center. Likewise, I was also very open about the affective elements of my own learning process with students during the meetings and in conversations outside of the classroom.

Rigid Higher Learning Institutions

Despite the anecdotal accounts and research evidence regarding the benefits of informal and non-formal learning, many educational establishments – in particular institutes of higher learning – have failed to include any significant forms of these learning practices into their educational mandate. As Eraut (2000) explains: “To focus only on the explicit learning of formally presented knowledge is to fail to recognize the complexity of learning” (p. 131). While it would appear that many researchers and teachers recognize the importance of both formal and informal/non-formal learning, most higher education administrators fail to provide the proper time (e.g., structuring class schedules to allow students extra time to discuss informally before their next class begins) and resources (e.g., physical space designated for informal/non-formal learning purposes) that are necessary for teachers to enable the incorporation of informal and non-formal learning strategies into the overall education of their students (i.e. outside of the classroom) as a complement to their classroom education.

Brockbank and McGill (1998) commented that: “Higher education represents an extraordinary capacity to extend understanding, knowledge, and innovation. However in respect of the practice relating to teaching and learning the institutions do tend to be freighted with methods that have an unerring continuity and resistance to change” (p. 91). This notion was supported in the current research by all four professors that were interviewed, who agreed that the university has done little or nothing to promote any forms of school-related learning between students outside of the classroom. Also, while all of the professors said that they try to incorporate social learning activities into the classroom by engaging discussions, assigning group projects, etc., the extent of their

involvement in helping students to learn with, and from, each other outside of the classroom is limited to suggesting to students that it would be beneficial for them to get together or assigning them group projects. Professors explained that this is, in part, due to the time constraints related to their other academic duties, such as conducting their own research and sitting on committees, as well as the demands of their own personal lives outside of the school context.

Another teaching challenge that was corroborated by the students in this research relates to the structure of the content and process of curriculum delivery. Torbert (1981) speaks of this in his somewhat dated but still relevant book chapter titled “Why educational research has been so uneducational”. In the chapter, he explains that educational research provides little or no access to theory or data that could identify and lead towards good educational practice. Torbert states that one of the main reasons for this is that most current teaching practices and research are based on a model of reality that favours unilateral control for gaining information from, or having effects on, others. In other words, the education system does not allow room for new ways of teaching and learning, unless they fit with current administrative views on teaching and learning. Torbert explains:

The effort at unilateral control presumes that the initial actor (whether researcher or practitioner) knows what is significant from the outset and that this knowledge is to be put to the service of controlling the situation outside the actor, in order to implement the pre-defined design as efficiently as possible. If students, subordinates, or research subjects seek to question whether there isn't something more significant at stake in the first place, the initial actor tends to redouble the

effort to control the situation unilaterally. If s/he fails to do so, s/he tends to regard the effort as a failure and the situation as “out of control”. (p. 142)

While it is unlikely that most classrooms are as rigid today as the preceding description by Torbert from 1981, I would argue that some elements of this unilateral control mentality still exist in many classroom settings, whether in actuality or in the minds of students. This may help to explain why a number of students in this research felt that having a non-formal forum in which there was very little structure and no specific agenda was so helpful for discussing some issues that were not easily discussed in a classroom setting due to time or the nature of the topic. For example, in this research, some students said that they didn't feel they had any input into the topics that were discussed in some of their classes. Similarly, when talking during the interviews about the differences between meetings and classes, a number of them referred to the “imposed topics” during the classes which sometimes left them feeling uninvolved.

Other students spoke frequently about their perception that some of their courses were very rigidly structured and how they felt that there was little opportunity for flexibility within them, particularly with respect to time. More specifically, a number of students admitted that they refrained from asking questions, engaging in discussions, or sharing their opinions and suggestions during some classes because they perceived the professor as having a very full, strict, and time-constrained agenda for the class and they did not want to interfere with it. For some students this was done out of a desire to help the professor to get through the busy agenda for the class, while others did not want to be seen negatively by the professor for asking too many questions or getting off topic.

In other circumstances the students said they felt like the discussion was more like students taking turns talking as opposed to an actual engaged dialogue. In a published conversation between them, Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo refer to this as “bureaucratized dialogical method” (Leach and Moon 1999), reflecting professors’ attempts to engage students in dialogue by imposing a rigid process where everyone must speak. Macedo explains:

This rigidity transforms dialogical teaching, not into a search for the object of knowledge, but into a superficial form of democracy in which all students must forcefully participate in a turn-taking task of ‘blah-blah-blah’... The uncritical license to take equal turns speaking in a rigid fashion gives rise to a ‘blah-blah-blah’ dialogue resulting in a form of silencing while speaking. (Leach & Moon, 1999, p. 53)

Just as ironic as the notion of imposed dialogue as silencing while speaking was the report by a number of students that the fact of knowing they were obliged to participate in the discussion in some of their classes caused them to ignore the majority of the actual dialogue in order to come up with an intelligent response when it was their turn to speak.

What all of these comments point to is the fact that students are looking for avenues in which they can express themselves freely and discuss topics related to their learning in a way that they are most comfortable. While ideally this would take place in the classroom with a professor or supervisor present to guide the discussion and provide advice and feedback, the realities of the classroom and students’ fears of evaluation do not generally permit this. In addition, simply letting students entirely design the content and process of their courses would not serve them well, since they are not in a position to

know what is most important to their future success as a professional. Courses necessarily have an agenda and specific content that needs to be covered, despite students' complaints or protests. Thus, the challenge becomes one of finding other venues that can complement the formal environment in order to satisfy students' learning needs, both expressed and actual.

Instrumental Professors and Detrimental Students

While this research is focused on the learning challenges students faced throughout their master's degree, the positive aspects of the professors' personalities, their teaching abilities, and the academic curriculum should not be overlooked as they undoubtedly played a crucial role in students' learning experiences. Students made it very clear, especially when sharing criticisms or suggestions for change, that they thoroughly enjoyed, appreciated, and respected their professors. Many of them said they were hesitant at first to share their criticisms with me because they did not want to mislead me into thinking they didn't like the program or the professors. In fact, many of the students pointed out that these were some of the best professors that they've had in their educational experiences. However, despite these positive aspects, there were still a number of academic and other challenges that the students faced (including some regarding their professors) throughout their master's degree.

To place the responsibility for students' learning squarely on the shoulders of teachers would be irresponsible and inappropriate. It is important to not overlook how some students' detrimental approaches in regards to their own and their colleagues' learning were a contributing factor in how their learning unfolded and progressed throughout their degree. As Reinharz (1981) explains: Students themselves can bring

stifling attitudes (such as excessive instrumentalism) with them” (p. 429). One way to examine the variety in students’ approaches to learning comes from the work of Moon (2004) who advances the notion of “deep” and “surface” approaches to learning. She explains:

In a typical surface approach the general intention of the learner is to “absorb” (in her terms) as much of the content as it is necessary for the task at hand. The learner might do this by memorizing material in a routine manner without reflecting on it or the underpinning purposes or structure of it without relating it or previous learning or knowledge. (p. 59)

In contrast to the surface approach, Moon explains that:

A deep approach to material of learning is characterized by an intention in the learner to understand the material of learning, seeking the meaning and understanding the ideas in it. The learner who takes a deep approach seeks the underpinning principles and endeavours to relate the material to previous knowledge and understandings. (p. 59)

Based on students’ accounts of their own and their colleagues’ learning, subscribing to a deep approach to learning was a challenge for many of them on many occasions. Students stated that they wanted to thoroughly learn and understand the curriculum and skills however this did not always happen. For some, this was due to certain aspects of courses that were not of great interest to them, or students failed to see the value in it and therefore were not engaged or motivated to learn. For others it was a question of not having the time to fully “digest” the readings and exercises because of the busy course load.

Moon describes another possible cause for students having a shallow approach to their learning. She says: It may also be a consequence of the learner's belief that this is the 'proper way' to learn" (p. 59). While no students alluded directly to this possibility, it would not be surprising if this was the case for some of the students in this research, particularly since higher education appears to be becoming more and more competitive. One final possible reason given by Moon for a shallow approach to learning among students is that "It can be a consequence of a state of anxiety or pressure, for example, in learning for assessment situations" (p. 59). Findings from research by Entwistle (1996) indicate that it is harder for learners to sustain a deep approach to learning when they are anxious or under pressure. This appears to be the case in many situations described by the students, where they struggled to keep up with the demands of their classes and life/jobs outside of school. The participants described a number of scenarios in which their main goal was not learning, rather it was to be successful on the assessment of their learning. This was particularly the case near the end of each semester as most of the major projects and papers were due. Interviews with professors seemed to corroborate this, as they indicated that students were very concerned with how they would be assessed and often asked many questions to this regard.

Another way of understanding some of the students' approaches to their learning comes from the work of Biggs (1993), who found that students often employ a "strategic" approach to learning. Moon (2004) explains: "The strategic approach concerns the way in which a learner chooses to tackle a task. The aim of a strategic learner is to succeed, particularly in assessment tasks... Her commitment is to success on the programme, not necessarily to interest or the nature of the learning" (p. 61). In other words, if a student

perceived that a deep approach was necessary for a particular assessment then that would be the method of choice for learning. This explanation of student approaches may be more accurate in describing how the students in this research engaged in their academic learning endeavours. Moon points to the work of Svensson (1997), which indicates that “There seems to be plenty of evidence that modern learners in higher education need to be strategic. Passion about their own interests in a discipline will not enable them to progress successfully through a modular programme in which there is frequent assessment” (Moon, 2004, p. 61). This comment by Moon is highly reminiscent of the remarks above made by the AERA president who described a learning system in which students need to “play” the “game of school”, and where schooling is becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of what we do.

Key Differences in Meetings versus Classes

While some students may have attended the meetings as part of a strategic approach to learning the fact that most students were interested and motivated to attend extra-curricular meetings with me that would not likely help them (at least not directly) on any classroom assessment seems to cast doubt that all of the students were only strategizing for better grades. Their participation would suggest the possibility that many of these students were genuinely interested in an opportunity to engage in deeper learning about their field of practice. If this is the case, then the focus of this research can move toward a focus on the examination of potential reasons why students might be motivated to take more time out of their busy schedules to engage in learning that is relevant, but would not directly impact the assessment of their learning in the program.

Tudor's (1993) work on learner-centredness suggests four possible reasons why the students may have been motivated to attend the meetings. His first suggestion is that students are more likely to set appropriate goals when they are allowed to contribute to the process on the basis of their own experiences. As mentioned above, some students in the current research felt uninvolved in some of their classes because the material was imposed and did not allow them to add any input on their goals for the course (and their future) based on their needs and experiences. This can be contrasted with the students' experiences of the meetings, in which the content and the goals of the session were completely determined by students who negotiated what they wanted to achieve through the meetings based on their experiences in and out of the program.

Similar to Tudor's (1993) first suggestion is his second stipulation that learning is more effective if the methodology and study mode are geared around student preferences. Again, as the student quotes below indicate, many of them did not feel they had much impact on the choice of methodology or study mode of the formal curriculum in their classes. Contrarily, students who attended the meetings reported feeling free to suggest their preferred modes of study and methodology for learning. At times students chose to engage in the meetings through open, honest, uncensored dialogue, while in other situations they preferred to learn experientially. On a few occasions where more experienced visitors attended meetings, the format was more of a question-and-answer format.

The third suggestion made by Tudor (1993) is that students get more out of learning activities if they have a say in deciding their content and in organizing the activities. The meetings provided participants with regular opportunities to bring their

topics of interest or concern to the table to be discussed without fear of judgment or grades being affected. Students also had many opportunities to organize parts of the meetings. For example, one student took part of a meeting to present one of her projects for feedback from her peers. Also, in semester 2 students brought in, presented, and directed their other colleagues in the meetings in participating in learning activities that could be used in group consulting settings and workshops.

Finally Tudor's (1993) fourth suggestion is that learning will, in a general sense, benefit students if they feel involved in shaping their study program. When asked what was the major difference between the meetings and their classes, students repeatedly referred to the fact that they were directly involved in deciding the content of the meetings and the process of the meetings. They had the sense that these meetings were their meetings, designed for them, by them, for the purpose of improving their learning. Therefore they were seen as directly addressing the interests and concerns of the people who attended and they were always flexible in the event that a particular area of interest emerged or needed immediate attention.

Power

The issue of power dynamics emerged as a major topic of discussion in many of the interviews I conducted with students, and appears to have played a significant role in their relationships with me and with their professors and impacted their learning. This impact appears to have been most noticeable in two major areas. First, students expressed their feelings of powerlessness with regards to their status as newcomers in graduate studies and their associated insecurities regarding their knowledge and abilities. Second there was significant dialogue in most interviews about how the differences in power

dynamics in the relationships of students with their professors versus the students' relationships with me (primarily in the role of facilitator) affected the students' level of comfort, particularly when discussing issues related to their fears.

The Impostor Syndrome

In his work with adult learners, Brookfield (1991) used the term “the impostor syndrome” to describe a shared feeling among new learners as they begin studies in higher education. Brookfield explains:

It seems as if there is a strong element of authority-dependence in many adults' socialization which predisposes them to regress to childlike behaviour upon entering an adult classroom... Many of them seem to perceive themselves as inadequate impostors who wish to hide their inadequacies as best they can by seizing on cues tossed off by teachers about what behaviours are expected of students. (p. 41)

Although he was speaking in the context of adult learning, my findings would indicate that this feeling extends to students moving into higher learning programs who are not in the “adult learning” category (e.g., students entering higher education directly from an undergraduate degree).

During interviews and individual meetings in the current research many students alluded to their feelings of insecurity regarding their knowledge and abilities. They elaborated on a number of individual and group strategies designed to mask or minimize their perceived weaknesses. For example, when the students' supervisor offered to provide them with feedback on their consulting style if they submitted a videotape of them consulting with a client, only one student took him up on his offer. Another student

explained to me that she did not tape herself because she was too afraid of being assessed by her professor in this manner. She explained that she did not have enough confidence in her abilities and she feared that the professor's assessment would be negative.

Interestingly, when asked if she would have videotaped herself in order to receive feedback from someone who is not her professor, she said she would have loved to do so because she really wanted to get feedback on her consulting (but not from a person who had power over her grades).

Brookfield (1991) raises a very interesting and ironic point in his research regarding the impostor syndrome. He says: What strikes me about this impostor syndrome is how much it parallels my own experience, not only as a learner, but as a supposed 'expert' on adult learning and education" (p. 41). Palmer (1997, 1999) elaborates on this point in his research with elementary school teachers, in which he examines the role of fear and uncertainty in teachers. Palmer explains that: "Teaching is a... vulnerable act, performed, as it is, at the dangerous intersection of the public and the personal" (1997, p. 1). Palmer notes that not only do students fear the evaluation of their teachers, but the opposite is often true as well: "When we talk about the scrutiny that faculty fear, we think most often of peer reviews made to determine raises, promotions, and tenure. But I think there is another source of fear in us easily as powerful as peer judgment but hardly ever named: our fear of the judgment of the young" (1997, p. 1). In this case, the "young" refers to elementary students; however I would argue that this fear not only exists but that it could even be more pronounced in a situation such as a university setting where the age and knowledge gaps between professors and students may be much smaller.

For many of the students in the current research, the feeling of being an impostor appeared to be strong. Their fear of being evaluated by their professors seemed to be escalated by their view of their professors as experts who (despite saying it's "ok" for students to make mistakes and be nervous or intimidated) do not make mistakes and are not nervous or intimidated by others. This feeling caused the perception among many of the students that there was a lack of empathy for their fears and concerns from their professors, and, as Yorks and Kasl (2002) assert, empathy is often a precondition for trust. Therefore this impostor syndrome may help explain why some students were reluctant to share their concerns, weaknesses, etc. with their professors – perhaps because they did not trust that the professor would empathize with their situation or they did not trust that their concerns or weaknesses would not be used against them later on. While the interviews revealed that students were well aware that this scenario was highly unlikely and they recognized this fear as being somewhat irrational, they reported that it still stopped them from sharing many of their thoughts with their professors.

In contrast to this, in the meetings with students, feelings of fear, frustration, and incompetence were often discussed, as well as potential errors, questionable judgement calls, and confusions regarding consulting experiences. As the facilitator and also a participant in the group, I shared my own emotions and experiences on these topics with the group as well. In the interviews, a number of students explained that this helped earn the students' trust and respect, and also helped to remind them that negative experiences are part of the learning process, no matter at what level.

Power Dimensions in the Student-Professor Relationship versus the Student-Facilitator Relationship

As the results indicate, perceptions of power had large and contrasting implications between the students' relationships with their professors and with me as a facilitator. While very little actual research has been conducted in the area (e.g., Tarmizi et al., 2006), the power relationship between graduate students and their supervisors is considered to be one of the most important determinants of graduate students' success (Aguinis, Nesler, Quigley, Lee, & Tedeschi, 1996; Bargar & Mayo-Chamberlain, 1983). One of the few detailed studies on the power relationship between graduate students and their professors (Aguinis et al., 1996) employed French and Raven's (1959) power taxonomy to understand the dynamics of this relationship and may shed some light on the results of the current research. The authors used the taxonomy to examine the power of graduate supervisors as perceived by their graduate students and the effects of the five power bases on three types of outcome variables: student's perceptions, their intentions, and their behaviours. Their results indicated that graduate students' perceptions of their supervising professor's power are related to a number of variables critical to student satisfaction and success.

In examining the individual relationships between the power bases and their correlates, Aguinis and colleagues (1996) found that expert power – which is related to students' beliefs that the professor can provide him or her with special knowledge - was positively related to students' perceptions of their supervisor's trustworthiness (i.e., students' willingness to share concerns, weaknesses, fears, etc.) and credibility. This would appear to corroborate the findings in this research which indicated that students

had a high degree of trust in their professors' knowledge and expertise. The students mentioned that the opinions of professors who were not consultants had less credibility on matters of consultation; however these professors were still seen as credible experts in their proper fields of study. With regards to the facilitator, students generally viewed me as somewhere in-between the level of a novice and expert, based on their comments that I fit above their level of knowledge but below that of their professors. They appeared to respect my knowledge and experience in their field of study, however I don't believe that most of them viewed me as an expert based on their comments that I was still a student, much like them, but more advanced.

Aguinis and colleagues (1996) found that the higher the coercive power of their supervisor – which is related to the students' belief that the professor has the ability to punish him or her – the more likely the students were to report negative outcomes such as a poor professor-student relationship. Students in the current research had big fears of being punished (through low grades, restricted opportunities, etc.) by their professors and it had an obvious impact on their relationships with their professors. While they trusted their professors to provide them with high quality information and training, they still were reluctant to trust them with their perceived issues of incompetence. In contrast to (and likely because of) this, students were eager to talk about their insecurities and issues of incompetence with me (and their classmates), because they viewed me as having minimal coercive power over them, yet able to provide a degree of expertise higher than that of their colleagues (but not as high as that of their professors).

With regards to referent power, – which is related to students' desires to be associated with the professor – Aguinis and colleagues (1996) found there to be a

relationship to trustworthiness and compliance. In particular if the professor did not have referent power and was perceived to be high in coercive power, then they were viewed as being less trustworthy. What this suggests for the current research is that if students could not relate to a professor and that professor had the power to punish them, then the students were less likely to trust the professor with concerns, weaknesses, etc. This relates to the findings of Yorks and Kasl (2002), that empathy is a precondition for trust. In my research, some of the students' fears in being open with professors, particularly about mistakes and insecurities, may have been related to the issue of coercive power as mentioned above. My interviews with them revealed that students generally viewed their professors as having high coercive power and when this combined with low referent power in a few circumstances – particularly when students felt the professor could not relate to their needs – it may have caused a lack of trust and therefore a reluctance to disclose negative information about themselves.

Aguinis and colleagues (1996) found that reward power – based on the students' belief that the professor has the ability to provide him or her with desired tangible or intangible benefits - was associated with students having a perceived high quality relationship with their supervisor. In the current research it seems that students viewed their professors' reward power as both something positive and negative in their relationship. It was viewed as something positive because the professors possessed the power to help the students achieve their goal of graduating from the program. Professors also possessed the power to connect students with high profile people and possible internship opportunities. However the professors' reward power also appeared to be negative in some ways, particularly because of its influence on competition among

colleagues. Students viewed these opportunities provided by their professors to be connected to important people (e.g., through internships, access to high profile colleagues) as limited, thus making them a commodity in short supply. The same perception appeared to apply to students' thoughts about their grades as well in the sense that some of them viewed good grades to be a commodity in short supply. While these perceptions may not have distanced students from their professors – in fact they probably did the opposite due to students trying to appear favourable to their professors – the competition that was created among students by attempting to obtain the rewards from the professors was detrimental to the relationships between some of them.

Aguinis and colleagues (1996) note that: "Reward power has a strong and positive relationship with compliance when referent power is high" (p. 287). Although I did possess a small amount of reward power at certain points in the research, particularly in my ability (to a lesser degree than professors) on a few occasions to connect students with potential internships, in general I did not possess much reward power in the eyes of the students. Or if I did possess reward power (e.g., knowledge, resources, and activities that were not covered in class), the collaborative and open nature of the meetings made these rewards available to all students who participated in the meetings.

Finally, the issue of legitimate power (or position power) – based on the students' perceptions that the professor has the legitimate right to influence them (because of his or her role as professor) and that the student is obligated to comply – was found to be associated with trustworthiness. More specifically, Aguinis and colleagues (1996) explain that "a faculty supervisor is not seen as trustworthy when he or she has coercive power and this perception of untrustworthiness is even stronger when a supervisor not only has

the ability to punish a student but can also use this ability legitimately” (p. 287). While this may or may not have been an accurate picture, many students perceived professors as having and using coercive power and legitimate power. This could help explain the students’ self-proclaimed low degree of trust in talking about mistakes, confusions, or issues of perceived incompetence with their professors. Simply put, no matter how much students liked their professors, they were not willing to risk looking or sounding incompetent in front of them. However, as noted above, the students seemed almost desperate at times to talk about their challenges during the meetings and with me while I worked as a resource person in the training centre. They explained that it was my low degree of legitimate, coercive, and reward power, combined with my (limited) expert power that placed me in an ideal role to help them fill some of the gaps in their learning.

Other factors may have also had a significant impact on the power dimensions in the professor-student relationships in this research. For example, Kuh and Hu (2001) found in their research with undergraduate students that the effects of student-faculty interactions were conditional. The authors stated that “students who were better prepared academically and who devoted more effort to their studies interacted more frequently with faculty members” (p. 327). However, Kuh and Hu caution: “It is not clear whether this is because such students were more assertive in seeking out faculty members or whether faculty members invited students who performed well academically to make contact... Most likely, both forms of student and faculty behavior are operating” (p. 327). Regardless of the cause, more frequent interactions between students and their professors may have contributed to better relationships and a lesser professor-student power differential for some of the students.

While the frequency of interactions may have had an effect on the professor-student relationships, Sax, Bryant, and Harper, (2005) explain that: “the literature suggests that the quantity of students’ involvement with faculty must be understood in the context of the quality that defines such interactions” (p. 644). Thus both the quantity and quality of the interactions between students and their professors may have played a role in the power relationships between them. This can be seen in the comments of a number of students who said that while the quantity of interactions with their professors was high (e.g., participation in classes, supervision meetings, conversations outside of class), the quality was lacking in the sense that in most cases students did not talk about the real issues and challenges that concerned them the most (in part because the professor was often part of these concerns).

PART THREE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

To briefly summarize this research; the purpose of conducting the study was to enhance learning among a group of master's students outside of the classroom through the creation and facilitation of a community of practice. What emerged from the findings was an in-depth account of the challenges that graduate students face while navigating the requirements of the university education system in pursuit of their graduate degree. The findings also revealed how power dimensions in the students' relationships with facilitators and professors can have a strong impact on their relationships with them, which, in turn, can have an impact on their learning. In addition, the research promoted the use of an alternative, non-formal context for learning as a way of complementing the formal learning environment of students. This environment provided students with a forum and process that allowed them to explore different aspects of their learning in ways that are not generally possible in the classroom. Finally, this research helped to expand the literature and the thinking about communities of practice by looking at new ways of creating and cultivating them, as well as trying to uncover the most critical elements that contribute to learning within them.

The study asked the following three main research questions:

1. Can a community of practice be created in a graduate student context? In what ways do group processes initiated by the introduction of a non-formal learning environment compare and contrast with the tenets of the communities of practice framework?

2. What roles does a person acting as a collaborative researcher, co-participant, group facilitator, resource person, and former student in the program play in the informal and non-formal learning processes among community of practice members?
3. How does engaging students in discussions on undefined topics facilitated by non-teaching staff outside of the classroom impact their learning? How does the creation of this type of facilitated learning environment impact on the other contexts and relationships that are part of the students' academic program?

The data collected to answer these three research questions provided a number of insights into the academic lives of the graduate students in the study which, when combined with current literature in the areas under study, allow some general conclusions to be drawn.

The first of these conclusions relates to the creation of a community of practice in the research and the learning that resulted from this process. Despite the guidelines and criteria set out by authors such as Wenger (1998a, 1998b) and McDermott (199a, 199b, 2000) to define and describe communities of practice, the findings of this research indicate that it is not so much the form of the community of practice that is essential in order to support learning, rather it is the process of mutual engagement, creating a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire, as well as negotiating meaning that creates opportunities for learning. In other words, researchers and practitioners can gain more knowledge by focusing on the processes and outcomes of the community of practice rather than trying to decipher whether a group qualifies as a community of practice or not. For certain there is a need for benchmarks to differentiate communities of practice from other types of groups and communities; however this research demonstrates that many of the benefits of this type of community can be achieved without necessarily

meeting all of the criteria of a formal community of practice (as long as there is a facilitator, since attempts to create a community of practice involved using a top-down approach). Certainly there are drawbacks as well (including the potential for greater learning in an “actual” community of practice), but for the purposes of this research, the community still served the learning function that was intended despite not meeting all of the criteria for a community of practice. This research shows that assembling a group of people who share a common interest but who most likely would not have coalesced otherwise can still provide many learning benefits when afforded the proper conditions (e.g., space for learning, facilitation).

A second conclusion that can be drawn from this research relates to the role of power in the academic context and how it can impact the way students interact with their professors and supervisors. The students in this research made it very clear that they were not willing to risk appearing incompetent in front of anyone who had the power to evaluate them. While overall this was not surprising, the lengths to which students went in avoiding any situation that might cause a professor to question their knowledge or abilities is somewhat concerning as it seriously impacted the professor’s ability to know in what areas their students needed help and subsequently their ability to provide that help to them.

The most valuable part of this finding was the discovery that even though students respected and admired their professors, and even though they understood and believed that the professors’ priorities were not to evaluate them, but rather to help them learn, students were still not willing to discuss their fears, mistakes, or shortcomings. This points to an inherent power differential between students and their professors that, at least

in this research, no student was able to fully overcome. And since, as Pettman (1996) explains in her analogy of the “bearded mother”, a teacher’s paid responsibility is to judge the quality of students’ work, then this power imbalance may be creating a very dangerous situation where there is a large gap between what some students are revealing to their professors and the “realities” of their situation, particularly if the student is struggling. This gap between espoused practices and actual practices supports Moon’s (2004) notion that students are adopting a strategic approach to learning rather than focusing on deep learning. It also supports Resnick’s (1987) position that students feel they must play the “game of school” in order to survive academically. However, when given the opportunity to discuss fears, mistake, and shortcomings with colleagues and knowledgeable others in a facilitated context that is void of any legitimate or position power, many students in this research were eager to share their apprehensions with others. This supports the notion that most students do want to expand their learning with each other beyond the classroom and that they are willing to expose their fears and shortcomings about their learning and abilities in order to get assistance, but only under conditions where they perceive that it will not affect their grades.

A third conclusion drawn from the research is that having a person acting in the role of facilitator of social learning and resource person to graduate students can play an important part in their learning. However the characteristics of the facilitator appear to be as important in gaining students’ trust as the actual process of facilitation itself. Two of the most crucial characteristics, based on interviews and meetings with students, appear to be a lack of positional power and an advanced degree of knowledge and experience in the students’ field of study (at least compared to the students). Based on the findings from

the study, it appears that a professor acting in the role of facilitator (at least a professor who is in a position to evaluate the students) could not have achieved the same level of openness with the students as was achieved in this research. In fact it is unlikely that these results would have been obtained if a professor was present in the room, even as an observer. The results appear to indicate that the role of facilitator and professor (evaluator) are mutually exclusive if one is trying to create a non-formal environment to foster student learning with their peers, at least in regards to certain sensitive topics for students.

A fourth conclusion drawn from the research findings points to the complementarities between non-formal and formal learning environments in fostering student learning. This research demonstrated how both the formal and the non-formal learning environments provided an important piece of student learning at the graduate level. The learning in the formal (classroom) environment provided students with the core information, theories, practices and training in their field of study (as well as some of the tacit knowledge), while the non-formal learning environment was mainly focused on tacit knowledge related to the practice of consulting, as well as tacit knowledge on how to survive as a student. The research revealed that both play an important and distinctive role in students' overall learning and can function in a complementary way with each other. However, for a number of reasons (described in the research), the majority of the content from the non-formal environment could not be adequately covered in the classroom and vice-versa. This points to a need and a utility for having both contexts as part of the students' learning process.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, as well as the discussion and conclusions, I propose that in order for students to achieve their highest potential in their educational endeavours, it is essential to provide them with the opportunity to engage regularly with colleagues and knowledgeable others in a facilitated, non-evaluative, non-formal learning environment in addition to their formal learning environment. The benefits of implementing such a non-formal environment are numerous. Chief among these is that it would create a complementary, facilitated environment to students' formal education, within which students could have the freedom to engage with each other and knowledgeable others in a meaningful and beneficial manner without the constraint of needing to cover a particular curriculum. Such a system could help eliminate many of the "gaps" that students say exist in their learning by creating a context that is complementary to their formal learning environment, where students trust other members (including the facilitator) enough to talk about the "real" issues that affect their lives as students and future professionals, and they can (and are willing to) access the people who could potentially help them in this endeavour.

Having an intermediary person who can act as a resource person/facilitator/guardian of student needs and "knowledgeable other" without evaluative powers could enhance the chances for academic success of those students who do not feel that their formal education is sufficient, yet lack the ability to find adequate ways to supplement their learning. It could also help to ease the burden on professors in and out of the classroom as they struggle to meet the increasing demands of university teaching and research, often without any additional resources. In addition, students would know that

they have another venue in which they can further discuss topics and ask questions not directly relevant to the subject matter, which would free them to be more focused on the material being covered in class by reserving some of their other related or non-related questions and thus allowing material to be more thoroughly covered by the professor.

Having a facilitated non-formal learning environment to complement the formal one could take a variety of forms. In terms of facilitation, there could be something similar to the role(s) that I played with the group – manager of a learning space, resource person, and group facilitator. In cases such as mine, the facilitation would simply be one of the tasks associated with one's role as the manager of the learning space. However, this would still require the finances to create a learning space and to have a full or part-time manager to oversee it. Another option would be for universities to hire a full-time facilitator who could rotate regularly from one group of students to another group (e.g., different student communities of practice in different programs) throughout the day and the week. While this would be financially feasible, there is the strong possibility that the facilitator may not be respected by many of the student communities of practice since he or she would unlikely be seen as possessing a higher degree of knowledge than the students in all of the different fields of the groups with whom he or she would work. However his or her expertise in facilitation could alleviate this problem and give them enough credibility to be successful.

A third option, and the one that would seem most feasible and most acceptable to students, would be to have a Ph.D. student (or a postdoctoral student) as the group's facilitator. The doctoral student could be given course credits for his or her time or be paid through a teaching or research assistantship. While there are many benefits to such a

system, rigorous controls would need to be put in place to ensure that there are no abuses to the position afforded to the doctoral student. A final option would be to create a network with one or more recent alumni who are just beginning in the field. In the case of having a group of recent graduates, they could work as co-facilitators so that the responsibility (and time commitment) does not fall on any individual. This would allow these former students to stay connected to the program and to assist the next generation of professionals entering their field. The downfall to this would be the danger that if there was no money available, the voluntary nature of the position would not ensure that there would always be a facilitator on hand to lead the meetings and the group could be in danger of either coming to an end, or becoming one in which there is less access to knowledge outside of the group of current students (i.e., less access to expertise).

A potential benefit of having a facilitator that is responsible for helping students learn outside of the classroom could be that professors would have access to someone who can help them adjust, update, or re-design their courses based on where students express the largest gaps in their learning or their biggest struggles. The knowledge gained from this process could then be used to improve the design and delivery of the curriculum in a way that is more reflective of the experiences, challenges, and learning methods of students. Having a person working directly with professors as a voice for the students could also be a way for professors to get access to the realities and challenges that students face in a way that is not threatening to the students. This would ensure that courses are designed and adapted to students' needs on a regular basis by using direct feedback from the students. Professors and the facilitator could then discuss and determine which, if any changes need to be made, based not only on the expressed desires

of the students, but also on professors' knowledge of effective tools, processes, and strategies for learning and the goals of the course.

The underlying message here is that having regular facilitated non-formal meetings can provide another venue for students to engage with each other to improve their learning capabilities, but it can also act as a tool for professors and administrators to gain important feedback on ways to enhance students' formal education environment in a way that sets the students at ease and invites them to be honest in expressing their challenges and fears. Said another way, non-formal meetings (or any other type of non-formal activity focused on learning for that matter) are not considered a replacement for formal learning, rather they are seen as a way to complement and enhance the formal learning environment by providing students with a forum where they can address certain issues in a more direct manner, since there is no other agenda or curriculum. The investment in terms of time (for a facilitator and for students) is small compared to what could be gained from implementing a process such as this. The result could be a successful holistic approach to student learning that satisfies students and prepares them fully for their professional life while easing the burden on professors of trying to cover all aspects of the students' learning and training needs in their courses.

If implementing a facilitated, non-formal learning process among students is not a feasible option, then I believe this research still can contribute some valuable suggestions on what professors can do to enhance students' learning both in and out of the classroom. First, professors must recognize the power that is inherent in the position that they hold as teachers and evaluators and how this can limit how some students may interact with them or be willing to divulge about their academic struggles. Based on this research, it appears

that professor's open, inviting, and helpful personalities were not enough to overcome the students' reluctance to talk about the real issues they face. Keeping this in mind, professors can try to think about creating other forums where students can share these fears and concerns in a way that is not threatening to them. More importantly, professors also need to find a way to get access to this information so that they can be in a position to help the students! For example, professors could have a suggestion box or some other way to solicit regular feedback from students in an anonymous way. This would allow teachers to get ongoing and immediate (or near immediate) feedback and therefore allow them to adjust to the needs of students on a continual basis instead of only getting feedback from students on their course evaluation forms at the end of the semester. While these evaluation forms provide a benefit to professors as a tool to improve their teaching in the future, this method does not allow for the students who are giving the feedback to benefit from its implementation by their professor since the class will have ended by the time the professor receives the feedback. And as the findings of this research and the tenets of social constructionism and communities of practice highlight, each group of students will be distinct since its members are co-creating their reality.

Another recommendation for professors is to allow students input into their learning. The students in this research acknowledged that their professors did allow them some input into the course design and the projects. However students still felt like what they wanted to learn and what they were being taught were very far apart. The causes for this could be multiple – for example this could be a product of the constraints of the course which does not allow the professor to make major modifications. It could also be that what students are asking to change will not be beneficial to them (i.e., they do not

have the experience to know what will be most helpful to them throughout their degree). Regardless of the causes, if allowing students input into their learning is not feasible, then it is critical to at least help students to better understand the connection between what they are doing in the classroom and what they will be doing as professionals once they graduate. Sometimes this link is obvious to the professor, but not to the students. Therefore ensuring that students understand the direct links between what they are being asked to do and their future careers is essential to their engagement in the task. Without this understanding, students will be tempted to engage in a surface approach to learning or to adopt a strategic approach to their coursework.

A third recommendation for professors where having a facilitated non-formal process is not feasible is to provide more guidance to graduate students early in the process. This can be in the form of information, or by connecting them to the appropriate resources (e.g., campus resources, older students, former students, other professors). Both groups of students in this research reported coming into the program with a tremendous amount of fear and doubt about their abilities. They were unsure of where to find answers to their questions and for most, unsure of even what questions they should be asking. Perhaps some of this is a natural and necessary part of student learning and growth, however students in this research felt that it unnecessarily detracted from their learning. For professors, developing a helping relationship with students very early in the process can help to build a trusting relationship with the students and possibly overcome some of the barriers that are inherent in the professor-student relationship.

A final recommendation for all professors is to be open and honest with students about their own fears, concerns, insecurities, and failures when they were students in the

same position, and also in their present day lives as the students' professor. Not talking about these challenges and fears perpetuates the illusion that students have of their professors/evaluators as expert, always confident, always successful, and expecting the same from their students. This depersonalizes them in students' eyes and creates a psychological barrier or distance between the students and their professors because the students no longer see the human side of their teachers. My feeling is that there is a perception among teachers that somehow he or she will be seen as less credible if his or her weaknesses are known, but it is my belief that it will produce exactly the opposite effect among students – they will see themselves in their professors' stories, both weak and strong points, and they will be more relaxed (and likely more open with professors) knowing that it is not perfection that has led their professors to become experts in their fields, rather it is engagement in the material and a dedication to learning and improving their skills.

In conclusion it is important for me to point out that I believe that professors could, and many do, do all of the same things (and often more) that I have done with the students during this research in the role of facilitator and resource person. However, I don't believe that most students are willing to accept them in this role and allow the full impact of professors' methods to contribute to their learning due to the perceived power dynamics that are inherent in the professor-student relationship. It is clear that, while the current system employed to formally educate students contains many positive aspects and countless devoted teachers, administrators, and others, it may only be one part of all of the learning that students need to become competent in their area of study and future career(s). If we are to make an honest effort at giving students every opportunity to

succeed and excel in school and ultimately in life then we must be willing to embrace new ways of thinking about and designing learning and the relationships that are an essential part of the learning process.

Limitations of the Research

This research has a number of limitations that should be addressed due to their potential impact in the research process, the data collection and analysis, and the dissemination of results. Chief among these limitations is the fact that this research represents a single case, and while the results may provide some insight into issues faced by at least some graduate students, the study cannot make any claims as to how common some of these issues might be among students at this level in similar and dissimilar programs. This limitation holds true even within the professional program that was the focus of this research, highlighted by the fact that my own experiences in the program were different than the experiences of both the primary and secondary group of participants in this investigation.

Another important limitation of the research revolves around the combination of roles and unique characteristics that I possessed as a researcher and facilitator. Given the many different ways in which I was interconnected with the student group, it is difficult, if not impossible to decipher how each one contributed to the overall impact that I was able to have with the group. This could limit the usefulness of some of the recommendations above regarding the qualities and characteristics of an ideal facilitator because it is not known if the same result could be had with a facilitator who does not have the same characteristics and relationship to the students and the program more generally.

A third limitation of the research rests with the assertion that this research represents one interpretation of the research participants' experience. In addition, the story that I chose to tell was neither complete (in the sense trying to give an accurate account of the entirety of the students' experience) nor neutral (in the sense of trying to depict both the positive and negative aspects of the students' experience). The goal was to directly and critically address some of the issues that this group of students faced, which, for the most part, consisted of fears and challenging situations. In so doing, some important voices - particularly those of the professors involved with the students in the research - were underrepresented. The story that was told may be limiting, particularly with regards to the utility of the results and conclusions, since a number of other aspects of the students' overall experience were not discussed.

Contributions

This research makes contributions to literature in a variety of fields, including communities of practice, social constructionism, sport psychology, and education. First, it contributes to the communities of practice literature by continuing to explore new ways to foster the development of communities of practice, create new ways of understanding the integral aspects of community formation, and challenging notions and definitions that define the communities of practice literature. Second, it highlights the importance of tacit learning in graduate student learning. Third, it demonstrates the impact on learning that is created when one attempts to create and facilitate a community of practice among students in a professional program (where the focus is on practice), regardless of whether a community is actually formed.

This research contributes to the literature on social constructionism by expanding its reach into the realms of sport psychology and communities of practice. In particular, it offers a new way to view the co-creation of meaning within the context of a practice-based social context. It also demonstrates how multiple realities may exist within the education system (and even within the classroom), in particular between the perceptions of students and teachers regarding their relationship with each other. These differences can lead to serious power imbalances, which could serve to silence the voices of struggling students.

This research contributes to the literature in the field of sport psychology by offering new possibilities for understanding the learning and training process for consultants at the graduate level. It also highlights the importance of offering students other learning opportunities that complement the formal and informal learning in which they engage during their master's degree. In particular, it supports the utility of offering a facilitated, non-formal learning context as one way to address student interests and concerns around their learning. It also demonstrates that having a specific space that is dedicated to formal, informal, and non-formal learning opportunities is a beneficial way to foster learning among students.

Finally, the research contributes to the literature in education by underlining the challenges that some graduate students may face in their relationships with professors. In particular, this research points to the notion that power issues may have a very important effect in the professor-student relationship which could limit the professor's ability to get access to some of the information they need from students to help them learn. This may limit their ability to address some of the issues and challenges faced by students,

particularly those who view their degree as an exercise in “survival”. One issue that compounds this process is the lack of options for students to give feedback anonymously to professors before they complete a course, leading to the possibility that professors may not be gaining access to students’ needs in their courses until it’s too late. In most universities the only option for students is to complete a course evaluation, which takes place at the end of the term and therefore does not impact the teaching of that course until the next year, when the student is no longer in the class.

Future Research

There are a number of topics that have emerged from this research that would be ideal areas for future investigation. One key area of study would involve the examination of the role of student communities of practice that were formed “naturally” (i.e. without facilitation) within universities and how they impact the learning experiences of students, particularly in relationship to classroom learning. Another key area of study would investigate differences in the perceptions of professors and students regarding the professor-student relationship, the learning context, and the learning process. On a similar note, uncovering the differences in perceived power dimensions between professors and students would also provide valuable insight into the learning process.

On a more general note, a large-scale longitudinal investigation of how students negotiate the demands of the graduate-level education learning environment would add a wealth of understanding as to the challenges and issues that occupy students throughout their degree. This may also give a better indication of the transition students must make from being an undergraduate to becoming a graduate student. One final suggested area for future research would be to replicate this research in a number of settings with

facilitators that occupy various roles related to the students' learning (e.g. professor who does not directly teach the group of students, professional working in the students' field of study, Ph.D. student, skilled facilitator with little or no experience in the students' field of study).

PART FOUR: REFERENCES AND APPENDICES

CHAPTER VII

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APPENDIX A**Timeline of Data Collection****Sept (Year 1)**

- 7 New students
- 9 weekly meetings (Recorded + Notes)
- Individual interviews at end of semester (Transcribed)
- Personal reflections

Jan (Year 1)

- Same 7 students
- 6 Bi-weekly meetings (Recorded + Notes)
- Individual interviews at end of semester (Transcribed)
- Personal reflections

May (Year 1)

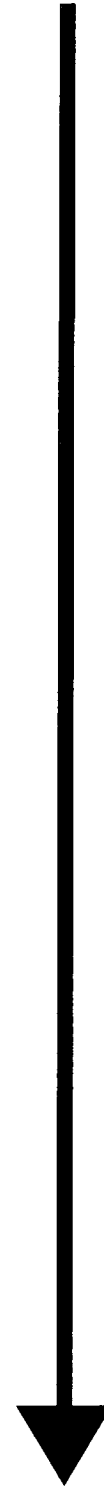
- Students begin internships
- No weekly meetings
- Use of WebCT instead
- Individual interviews at end of semester (Transcribed)
- Personal reflections

Sept (Year 2)

- Same 7 students
- 8 New students
- 5 Bi-weekly meetings (Recorded + Notes)
- Individual interviews at end of semester (Transcribed)
- Personal reflections

Dec (Year 2)

- Final interviews with all students except one (transcribed)
- Final interview with last student in May
- Interviews with 4 profs after final interview (Transcribed)



APPENDIX B

Meeting Attendance

Meeting	Participants
1	#1, #3, #7, #8 + 2 M.A. & 1 Ph.D
2	#1 (late), #2 (late), #3 (late) #4, #6 (late), #8, + 3 M.A.
3	#1, #2, #3, #4, #6, #7, + 2 M.A.
4	#1, #2, #3, #4, #6, #8, + 2 M.A., 1 Ph.D. & 1 Former Student
5	#2, #3, #4, #7, #8, + 1 M.A. & 1 Ph.D.
6	#1, #2, #3, #4, #8 + 1 M.A.
7	#1 (late), #2, #3 (late), #4, #5 (late), #6 (late), #8
8	#3 (late), #4, #6 (late), #7 (late), #8
9	#2, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8
10	#2, #3, #4
11	#1, #2, #3, #4, #6, #8, + 1 M.A. & 1 Ph.D.
12	#2, #3, #4, #5
13	#1, #2, #3, #4, #6, #8
14	#1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, + 1 Ph.D.
15	#2, #3, #4, #5, + 1 M.A.
16	#1, #4, #6, #7, #9, #10, #11, #12, #13, #14, #15, + 2 M.A., 1 Ph.D., & 1 P.T.
17	#1, #2 (late), #3, #4, #6, #7, #11, #12, #15, + 1 M.A. & 1 Ph.D.
18	#1, #4, #7, #10, #11, #14, + 1 Former Student
19	#1, #7, #8, #9, #12, #13, + 2 M.A. (1 late)
20	#13, #15

M.A. = Master's student in the thesis program

Ph.D. = Doctoral student/ former student in the program

P.T. = Part-time student in the professional program

APPENDIX C

Student WebCT Usage

Participant #	First Access	Last Access	Hits	Read
<u>Posted</u>				
#1	June 19, 2005	March 27, 2006	116	27
1				
#2	---	---	0	0
0				
#3	May 23, 2005	January 30, 2006	95	25
0				
#4	May 21, 2005	March 19, 2006	78	23
2				
#5	August 30, 2005	January 16, 2007	105	26
0				
#6	May 24, 2005	September 16, 2005	63	5
1				
#7	August 27, 2005	January 4, 2006	20	0
0				
#8	---	---	0	0
0				
#9	September 15, 2005	September 15, 2005	9	0
1				
#10	September 25, 2005	September 19, 2007	9	3
0				
#11	September 19, 2005	December 4, 2006	10	5
0				
#12	September 15, 2005	July 16, 2007	15	6
0				
#13	September 15, 2005	October 25, 2005	28	19
0				
#14	October 12, 2005	May 11, 2006	66	27
0				
#15	September 13, 2006	September 13, 2006	7	4
0				
P.T. #1	January 16, 2006	January 30, 2006	20	0
0				
P.T. #2	---	---	0	0
0				
Thesis #1	September 15, 2005	February 15, 2007	146	21
1				
Thesis #2	October 16, 2005	October 22, 2005	20	13
0				
Thesis #3	September 15, 2005	September 15, 2005	22	13
1				

Thesis #4 2	September 15, 2005	September 6, 2006	78	15
Thesis #5 0	September 17, 2007	September 17, 2007	2	0
Thesis #6 0	October 19, 2005	January 11, 2006	5	0
Thesis #7 0	September 15, 2005	May 9, 2006	32	14
Ph.D. #1 1	September 29, 2005	September 29, 2005	25	21
Ph.D. #2 0	September 23, 2006	September 23, 2006	3	2
Ph.D. #3 0	September 30, 2005	September 30, 2005	26	22
Former #1 0	September 16, 2005	September 16, 2005	16	12
Former #2 0	---	---	0	0
TOTAL 10			1036	303

P. T. = Part time students in the professional program

Thesis = Current thesis students

Ph.D. = Former students/Current Ph.D. students

Former = Former students

Hits = Number of documents accessed

Read = Number of different documents read

Posted = Number of posts on the threaded discussion page

APPENDIX D

Interview Schedule

Semester	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Participant #1	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Participant #2	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Participant #3	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Participant #4	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Participant #5	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Participant #6	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Participant #7	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Participant #8	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
NEW STUDENTS					
Participant #9	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Participant #10	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Participant #11	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Participant #12	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Participant #13	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Participant #14	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Participant #15	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
PROFESSORS					
Professor #1	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Professor #2	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Professor #3	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Professor #4	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO

APPENDIX E

Interview Guide – Semesters 1 & 2

1. Can you give me an update on how things are going for you as a student in the [sport psychology] program?
2. Can you talk to me about some of the most important things you have learned about being a student and/or a future practitioner in the field of applied sport psychology? How did you learn these things? From whom did you learn them? Can you describe the scenario in which the learning took place?
3. Can you describe to me how your process of learning has occurred during class time? What did you learn? How did you learn it? From whom?
4. Can you describe to me your process of learning outside of class time? What did you learn? How did you learn it? From whom?
5. How involved with each other are students when they are not in the classroom? What kinds of things do they do together? Do they engage in any activities that are related to sport psychology? Are there smaller groups of people who spend a lot of time together? What do they do?
6. How involved are you personally with classmates in the time when you are not in class with them? What kind of activities do you engage in? Would you like to be more (or less) involved than you currently are? Why?
7. Can you describe anything about this process that has contributed to you learning? What are some of your ideas for changing this process?
8. What impact would you say this is having on the learning of you and your colleagues?
9. Do you feel like there is anything missing in terms of your learning process in the program?

APPENDIX F

Interview Guide - Semester 3

1. How involved with each other were the students in your program this past summer? classroom?
 - a. Did they get together? Where, When, etc?
 - b. What kinds of things did they do together?
 - c. Do they engage in any activities that were related to their field?
 - d. Are there smaller groups of people who spent a lot of time together?
 - i. What did they do?
2. How involved were you personally with classmates this summer?
 - a. Who did you spend your time with?
 - b. What kind of activities did you engage in?
 - c. Would you have liked to be more (or less) involved than you were? Why?
 - d. Would you have liked to get involved with other people/groups? Why?
3. What were the major factors and/or events outside of class time that contributed to your learning this summer?
4. Did you share your competencies (i.e., knowledge and skills related to your field) with your colleagues outside of class this summer?
5. Did being away from your colleagues (more on your own) this summer affect your learning?
6. Are there ways that you feel could have helped you to learn more from other students outside of class time?
7. Did professors encourage or support interactions between students outside of the classroom?
8. Did you find opportunities to connect with other students (e.g., former students, 2nd years, etc.)? Were these useful?
9. Are there ways that you feel that professors could have helped students to learn more from each other outside of class time this summer?
10. Are there ways that you feel I could have helped students to learn more from each other outside of class time this summer?
11. Did you use the WebCT site this summer? Why or why not? What was useful? What was not useful? Can you suggest any improvements?
12. Is there anything that would have helped you to learn better this summer?

APPENDIX G

Interview Guide - Semester 4

(All Students – First and Second Year)

1. Can you give me an update on how things are going for you as a student in the [sport psychology] program?
2. Can you talk to me about some of the most important things you have learned about being a student and/or a future practitioner in the field of applied sport psychology? How did you learn these things? From whom did you learn them? Can you describe the scenario in which the learning took place?
3. Can you describe to me how your process of learning occurred during class time? What did you learn? How did you learn it? From whom?
4. Can you describe to me your process of learning outside of class time? What did you learn? How did you learn it? From whom?
5. How involved with each other were students when they were not in the classroom? What kinds of things did they do together? Did they engage in any activities that are related to sport psychology? Are there smaller groups of people who spent a lot of time together? What did they do?
6. How involved were you personally with classmates in the time when you were not in class with them? What kind of activities did you engage in? Would you have liked to be more (or less) involved than you were? Why?
7. How involved were you personally with your first (second) year colleagues? What kind of activities did you engage in? Would you have liked to be more (or less) involved than you were? Why?
8. Can you describe anything about this process of engagement with your 1st or 2nd year colleagues that has contributed to you learning? What are some of your ideas for changing this process?
9. What impact would you say this engaging out of the classroom had on the learning of you and your colleagues?
10. Do you feel like there is anything missing in terms of your learning process in the program?

APPENDIX H

Interview Guide - Overall (Semester 4)

(All Students – First and Second Year)

1. Can you give me your overall perception of your learning throughout the program?
2. Can you give me your perception of the value of the learning you did with your 1st and 2nd colleagues (and others) outside of the classroom throughout your program?
3. Can you give me your overall perception of the meetings I facilitated? Were they useful?
4. What you have liked to change about the meeting process or content that would have made it more suited to you? What was missing?
5. Can you give me your perception of my role as a facilitator and resource person with your group? Was it useful?
6. What could I have improved about my facilitation that would have made it more suited to you and/or the group?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your learning experiences that you think would be helpful to this research?

APPENDIX I

Interview Guide – Professors

1. Can you give me a description of how things went for yourself and the students in the [sport psychology] program last year?
2. How do you feel about the progression of the students' learning? How do they compare to students in previous years? Is anything different from other years?
3. Can you provide some examples of ways in which you structure the class to support your views of learning?
4. What view of the learning process do you feel is adopted by the faculty as a whole? How do your own views fit with this perspective?
5. How important is learning through social engagement inside the classroom to you? Why?
6. How important is informal learning outside of the classroom to you? Why?
7. How do you think the program could be changed to better suit the learning needs of students?
8. What are some of the recent “markers” that have shown you that students were progressing (or not progressing) in their learning?
9. Can you talk to me about some of the most important instances where you feel students learned about the meaning of being a student and/or a future practitioner in the field of applied sport psychology? What happened?
10. Have you noticed or heard about how involved with each other are students when they are not in the classroom? What kinds of things do they do together? Do they engage in any activities that are related to sport psychology? Have you noticed smaller groups of people who spend a lot of time together? What do they do?
11. How involved are you personally with students in the time when you are not in class with them? What kind of activities do you engage in with them outside of class time? Would you like to be more (or less) involved than you currently are? Why?
12. Do you feel it is important to support social learning outside of the classroom? Why?

13. Can you give me your opinion about the regular activities that I have been organizing outside of class time? Do you feel these are helpful to students? Why or why not?
14. Do you feel these activities are changing the ways in which students are learning about applied sport psychology? If yes, how? If no, why not?
15. Do you feel like there is anything missing in terms of the learning process of students in the program?

APPENDIX J

List of Meeting Reflections

Meetings	Date	Reflection
1	Oct 5 2004	YES
2	Oct 12 2004	YES
3	Oct 21 2004	YES
4	Oct 28 2004	YES
5	Nov 2 2004	YES
6	Nov 9 2004	YES
7	Nov 16 2004	YES
8	Nov 23 2004	YES
9	Nov 30 2004	NO
10	Jan 31 2005	NO
11	Feb 7 2005	NO
12	Feb 14 2005	YES
No meeting	Feb 28 2005	YES
13	March 7 2005	NO
14	March 14 2005	YES
15	March 21 2005	YES
16	Sept 22 2005	YES
17	Oct 6 2005	NO
18	Oct 20 2005	NO
19	Nov 3 2005	NO
20	Nov 17 2005	NO

APPENDIX K

Node Listing

Nodes in Set: All Nodes

Number of Nodes: 90

- 1 (1) /Community of Practice
- 2 (1 1) /Community of Practice/Mutual Engagement
- 3 (1 2) /Community of Practice/Joint Enterprise
- 4 (1 3) /Community of Practice/Shared Repertoire
- 5 (1 4) /Community of Practice/Negotiation of Meaning
- 6 (1 5) /Community of Practice/Building the Community of Practice
- 7 (1 6) /Community of Practice/Peripheral Participation
- 8 (2) /Group Facilitation
- 9 (2 1) /Group Facilitation/Facilitator Qualities
- 10 (2 2) /Group Facilitation/Prof vs Facilitator
- 11 (2 3) /Group Facilitation/Meeting Process
- 12 (2 4) /Group Facilitation/Meeting Content
- 13 (2 5) /Group Facilitation/Suggestions for Change in Meetings
- 14 (2 6) /Group Facilitation/WebCT
- 15 (2 7) /Group Facilitation/Facilitator as Resource Person
- 16 (2 8) /Group Facilitation/Meetings vs~ Classes
- 17 (2 9) /Group Facilitation/Language
- 18 (2 10) /Group Facilitation/Attending~Not Attending Meetings
- 19 (2 11) /Group Facilitation/Learning from Facilitator vs from Co
- 20 (3) /Learning
- 21 (3 1) /Learning/Classroom Learning
- 22 (3 2) /Learning/Learning Around Projects
- 23 (3 3) /Learning/Learning Around Class Time
- 24 (3 4) /Learning/Learning Around Internship
- 25 (3 5) /Learning/Social Events
- 26 (3 6) /Learning/Other Informal Learning
- 27 (3 7) /Learning/Importance of Social Learning
- 28 (3 8) /Learning/Practical vs~ Theory
- 29 (3 9) /Learning/1-on-1 Learning Outside of Class
- 30 (3 10) /Learning/General Learning Outside of Class
- 31 (3 11) /Learning/General Social Learning
- 32 (3 12) /Learning/Working From Home
- 33 (3 13) /Learning/What's Missing From Their Education
- 34 (3 14) /Learning/Learning Through Observation
- 35 (3 15) /Learning/Independent vs Social learner Questi
- 36 (3 16) /Learning/E-Mail~MSN
- 37 (3 17) /Learning/Barriers to Social Learning
- 38 (3 18) /Learning/Access to Resources
- 39 (3 19) /Learning/Supervision Meetings
- 40 (4) /Professors
- 41 (4 1) /Professors/Relationship with Students
- 42 (4 2) /Professors/Support for Informal Learning

43	(4 3) /Professors/Professor Views on Students
44	(4 4) /Professors/Professor Views on Learning
45	(4 5) /Professors/Evaluation
46	(4 6) /Professors/Professor Views on My Role
47	(4 7) /Professors/Professor Views on Social Events
48	(4 8) /Professors/Professor Views on Training Centre
49	(4 9) /Professors/Professor View on University & Learn
50	(4 10) /Professors/Summary of Learning
51	(4 11) /Professors/Professor Views on 1st & 2nd Years
52	(4 12) /Professors/Mentoring
53	(4 13) /Professors/Mediated vs Unmediated Learning
54	(5) /Training Centre
55	(5 1) /Training Centre/Use for Informal Learning
56	(5 2) /Training Centre/Use for Projects
57	(5 3) /Training Centre/Use for Training
58	(6) /Students
59	(6 1) /Students/Relationship 1st & 2nd Year Students
60	(6 2) /Students/Relationship - Students in Same Year
61	(6 3) /Students/Mentoring
62	(6 4) /Students/General Perceptions of Program
63	(6 5) /Students/Suggestions on Improving the Program
64	(6 6) /Students/Collaborating
65	(6 7) /Students/Learning Styles
66	(6 8) /Students/Learning with Thesis Students
67	(6 9) /Students/Competition
68	(6 10) /Students/Overall Impressions - Looking Back
69	(6 11) /Students/Being From Ottawa
70	(7) /Great Quotes
71	(8) /Social Constructionism
72	(9) /Progression Through Semester
73	(10) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections
74	(10 1) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Great Examples to Use
75	(10 2) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussion About Profs
76	(10 3) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussion on Internships
77	(10 4) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussion on Workshops
78	(10 5) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Other Interesting Stuff
79	(10 6) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Mentoring-Type Discussions
80	(10 7) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussions about Social Aspect
81	(10 8) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussions about Courses
82	(10 9) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussion about Conferences
83	(10 10) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussion about Self
84	(10 11) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussion about Training Centre
85	(10 12) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussion about Facilitator~Resources
86	(10 13) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussion about Accreditation
87	(10 14) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussion about Activities
88	(10 15) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussion about Projects
89	(10 16) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Discussion about Consulting
90	(10 17) /Notes, Transcripts & Reflections/Mix of 1st and 2nd Year Students

APPENDIX L

Partial Transcripts

Portion of the transcript from Interview 4 between participant #6 (P6:) and my self

(J:)

J: Do you feel like those meetings were different from the classes you were taking? Or do you think it was pretty much the same thing as the classes?

P6: No it was definitely different. Personally for me, I don't want to talk for the others, when I came to these meetings I felt more like the expert on myself. Like I'm sitting on the board of experts, we just have to brainstorm to find the ideas, they are there. And then you would give us the rest after. I like that we had that opportunity and in a classroom, even though they try to tell us that we know, we don't really get that much time to actually brainstorm these kinds of things, we have to get through the material. And it's hard when you have a prof, like it's a different dynamic. We don't see you as a prof, we see you as a superior knowledge, but someone that we can just bounce ideas back and forth and probably we'll come up with something and if not you have something for us. But with a prof you always have that... more of a.... it's not as easy going I find. It's a little bit more "we have to get through this" or there were presentations or something on goal setting let's say... And it's fun to have a presentation but to ask questions after, like A) we want to ask questions, B) most of the time we didn't have time to ask questions. So it's more like the delivery of information and then we just absorb it. Here we have the chance to casually discuss. I thought it was a completely different dynamic.

J: I just want to touch a little bit more on what you just said. Can you talk to me a little bit more about the difference between my role with you in the group and when you are in a classroom with a professor, what the big difference there is? How does that change things for you?

P6: I definitely feel like we have better rapport with the profs than we would ever have in undergrad, like by all means, I don't want to say that... Maybe I feel that... they here with us for three hours and they are all available to us, but they are not always here and they are not always available. And it's not as easy to just pick up the phone and call your prof or e-mail your prof because you have that, well I have that... "Am I asking the right question, or am I supposed to know this and I just missed it because I was daydreaming?" or something. And you always just constantly.... And it's just because you are taught in school that your prof is here (gesturing) and you are the student and even if it's at the master's level I feel that there is that exchange and by all means it's casual in the classroom. But for me as a student I still have a hard time saying.... I still have a hard time calling [a professor] sometimes because I am like "ugh, this is weird. This is my prof and I'm calling him by his first name". So until you get out of school I think you always have that student-prof kind of relationship,

even though they try to tell you “no it’s casual, call me by my first name” in your head you know that you still have to look up to this person and respect them and whatever. And we still have the respect for you but I find that it’s a lot more easy-going, like I don’t mind just asking you any questions and because you weren’t there for class so you don’t know if we covered it or not. But it’s just a different dynamic, you are also a student, you are in the learning process too, so I feel more like I am asking... Like if I was in first year, I’d feel like I am asking a fourth year student. Like “you did this? How did it go?” and I feel like you are still in it. Like we have profs that are not consulting, so the questions might be irrelevant to them, and maybe they’ve consulted at the beginning but they haven’t done it in like 30 years. You don’t know what they are doing right now and some it’s not part of their research. They are into research and they want to do their own thing and that’s fine too, like if I had a research question I have that person to go to. But you are still into it and still, it’s still what you are doing. I think it’s just a little easier to bounce those ideas back.

J: So now, taking what you said, do you think that if I was a professor, would it be different do you think, the interaction with the group that we’ve had? Do you think it would be perceived different or it would happen differently?

P6: If you became a professor now, no. But if you were a professor before we started maybe. It depends. I have this huge thing with people, the first impression; the way you are introduced to them makes a huge difference. Like when you are introduced to your prof you are like “Ok this is my prof, I am a student”. Let’s say we didn’t know you were a prof and you introduced yourself as James, the person that’s going to be sitting at this desk almost 90% of the time you are here, and we didn’t know that you were a prof, probably it wouldn’t have had a difference. And if you wouldn’t have taught us, it probably also would have been different because we wouldn’t associate you as the person who corrects our work, the person we need to prove ourselves to. But had you been teaching us, in that superior setting and been introduced to us that way, and we had not met you more in a casual setting first, I would have probably been like “I’ve gotta watch.... Be more...”

J: Why do you think that is? What’s the difference in there?

P6: I just have that with profs. Maybe it’s just me. Maybe it’s because I love the teacher and it’s a respect thing that I was taught in school that you respect your professor. Do what you are told to do. Not, not ask questions that are important, cause I do, but I just make sure that my questions are intelligent questions, well thought out, so that it looks like I’ve done research, it looks like I made the effort, that I am not just using them as my own resource of information. And I just find that when I am asking another student or you a question and I just don’t know the answer and I haven’t had a chance to look into it, like sometimes you might have something that will trigger, and I won’t feel that I am... that they are like “what is she doing here?”.

J: I'm just trying to read into what you are saying a little bit. Is it a comfort level? Are you more comfortable asking any question with a student or someone like myself versus a professor?

P6: Yeah it's a comfort thing, it's just I guess I'm one to over analyze things. And I understand you're told that there's no such thing as a stupid question and like... But in my opinion there are stupid questions. I hate to be asked questions when I have the answer right here and I went and got it and I made the effort. I'm always worried that maybe the answer was somewhere really close and I just needed to open the right book and it would have been there. So when I ask a prof a question I really take the time to... like when I was doing my [XXXXXX] paper I would do what I had to do and I would look at every book and I would analyze this and I would write my table. And when I had my table and I had my stuff, then I would go ask the prof. Because I had it and then he could look at it and be like "no you are way off" and he would help me with that. But had I gone in with nothing he would be like "why are you coming to see me? You haven't done the work, so why am I going to help you?" But when I am working on my table and I don't know what to do with it, I'll turn to [a colleague] and we'll do it together and I won't be shy to say that I don't get it because we are working at the same level. To me, using her is like an extra resource and my prof is like the final step, to make sure that everything that I've done is what he wanted. So I wouldn't go necessarily without something tangible to my prof as opposed to going to like classmates or to you as a process towards going to ask the question to the prof that I'm really not sure of.

J: That's very interesting.... And what's your sense of other students? Do you think it's the same for them or it's different for them?

P6: There are some people that I see have gone to ask the profs questions, and I was just like "you should bring something with you. Don't go..." and I've stopped people from going to see particular profs like "don't go see him if you don't know what you want because he's just going to sit there and say 'what do you want?' He's not going to look for the questions. If you don't have the question and you don't have your answer he's not going to help you" And I had to stop people to make them realize that, so they would be like "oh" and they went and got what they needed and they went back, and thanked me later because they would have probably gotten killed in her office. But it depends, like some people are not shy and they don't care. I just happen to be one that does care and am a little shy when it comes to asking questions. It's not even that I care about my reputation or how I look, it's more like I just don't want to feel stupid. And I am always worried that they are going to stump me, so I just always want to make sure that I have all the answers that I can have and that if I don't then I can say "I haven't had a chance to look at that" . But I guess most people have done a good job. We always seem to ask each other first: "I don't know how to do this, can someone help me?" And then if no one has the answer "we should go see him" and we kind of like coax ourselves to go see the prof because most people aren't But we use them, we use the profs.

(An irrelevant portion of the interview had been omitted here)

P6: We don't see a gap between us and you because we still see you as a student I guess. But I guess if you kept this on for like 10 years, well eventually in 10 years hopefully some of us will be professionals and we would become the intimidating factor so that would be something to explore. But I don't think... once in a while it would be beneficial to have like [a former student] came in to talk and I don't think it was intimidating at all. And it was good because she has the consulting accreditation now and it was interesting to find that information and we wouldn't have gotten it from anyone else because I think she's the only one that's done it. So that was beneficial and I don't think that we would have felt judged by her.

J: Now how does the fact that you still kind of see me as a student. How does that change how you interact with me versus let's say [professor _] or another professor?

P6: I think I don't feel judged. I don't feel that there's a right or wrong. Or I don't feel a power struggle. Although we have a level of respect, but I would still put a prof then you then us. But at the same time I know that if I go to the [local pub] that I might run into you and I'm ok with that. We see you more in social and less formal contexts so it's easier to not put up barriers again, but I don't really see [professors] other than when they are in front of us teaching and when they are in their office. So it's hard to get buddy-buddy or not see them as profs because you have never had a chance to associate them as anything else. But for you we see you at the training centre and like "hey how's it going?" and we have those conversations and we have those informal moments and it's easier for me to be like "oh it's just James". You've seen us at our worst and our best kind of thing and you see us here just chatting away and you join in our conversations and stuff.

J: Do you think professors could do that? Do you think it's possible or that it just doesn't work because of their profession, because of their job as a professor?

P6: I think if I was a professor I would have to have that professional barrier just for protection of myself, protection of my job. I know [professor _] has some good friends that are students and that's fine because they are Ph.D. students most of the time, they've probably already done 2 years masters and they become more friends, like from the general population. And just for the example for the undergrads and stuff I'd feel that I don't think I could and I think it would be weird to have...like I've called [professor _] at his place and stuff and I kind of found it weird and uncomfortable because I know he is kind of, he can be a little bit more friends with us because we are older and we're a smaller group, whatever. But at the same time if I was a professor and one of my students in my professional area came in and was like "hey what's up? It was fun getting drunk with you last night" I'd be like "ugh, maybe not here and now". Like I don't think it should be any different.

J: So if I was a professor the relationship would be different?

P6: I think so. And just out of respect for your job and for you so that you can still look professional. Because you never know who is going to walk in the door and we wouldn't want to put you in a situation where your job is questioned because of your interactions with your students.

J: So just to take that one step further, so if I was a professor I probably wouldn't be able to do with your group what I've been able to do with them? Would that be accurate?

P6: I think so, especially if you were one of our professors.

J: Ok. Yeah that's what I am talking about.

P6: If you were like one of our professors teaching a class, I think it would have been harder for you to get us to come because we would have just seen it as another class. I would have still probably come but we would have probably had a different... yeah just based on vocabulary and how you speak and how you act, it would have been a little different.

J: Ok. Anything else on that area that you feel is important?

P6: I don't think so.

(An irrelevant portion of the interview has been omitted here)

J: And in that little hierarchy that you just drew with your hands where would you put me right now in terms of what I am doing with the group?

P6: I would put you right up after us. Like I'd put the undergrads first, then I'd put us and then I'd mix all of the thesis together as one... and then I'd put the Ph.D. students after because I would go up there and I'd talk to [a former student] or I'd talk to you before I'd talk to [the professor] or whatever. And then I would probably put the profs that we work with after that and then I'd put the other profs higher, not higher but I just wouldn't communicate with them unless I really had to. That's more of a hierarchy for asking information.

J: Now would you see my role with your group any different from what the other Ph.D. students are doing? Is there any difference there or would you just kind of go to any of them?

P6: Oh no, I would definitely put you before, it would be the same idea as the profs, like I would put you and then the other Ph.D. students and then the profs we know and then the profs we don't know but we know might have the resource we are looking for.

J: Why that order?

P6: Just because we already have a relationship so there's... I don't have to introduce... Like an uncomfortable situation is like "hi I'm [XXXXXX] I'm in... Sorry to disturb you and I'm wasting more of your time trying to explain to you who I am and where I come from" as opposed to just like knocking on your door "James do you have this article?" "No," "Ok bye". With [former student] it's close with you because she's more and more around because she knows a lot. But still not as comfortable as asking you just because she's not... Like, you know our stories because we've talked to you about almost everything. You know what we are doing and you've followed us through this year so of course you'd be #1 because we don't have to go over the background and with the profs it's the same thing. Like meeting a prof for the first time is awkward enough, having to ask them something, I'd much rather ask you if it's like [professor] who only taught us one class and we are not going to see him again. I'd still feel more comfortable asking him than [professor _] like he taught me undergrad but no one else would know him if they didn't go to [this university]. And so I wouldn't want to knock on his door. First of all he wouldn't have any intervention stuff but....

Portion of the transcript from Interview 4 between Participant #5 (P5) and myself (J:)

P5: Yeah I definitely see you as a mentor. Like any time I had a concern I could ask you and I know you are always here to listen and to soothe our fears or worries. Like when I asked you to help me with my statement of experience, there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted you to do this because I knew that you would give me honest feedback and by honest feedback I mean that you wouldn't only tell me "oh it's great" but you would find if there's anything wrong and you would honestly tell me "this doesn't work" and "let's work around it". I knew that I could get that feedback from you. And you are very open. I never felt judged by you or anything like that. Like I think of all the people you are probably the one that I was more, I approached more.

J: Including teachers and colleagues?

P5: Yeah. You were definitely so... I would ask the teachers, you remember when I said I would ask the teachers if I had like a consulting issue, well you are up there with the teachers. Yeah.

J: Now how do you see me fitting in? You have teachers, you have students, you have me. How do you see me fitting into the whole scheme of things?

P5: I'd probably see you more as a teacher. Someone that has more experience and so more concrete things to offer. Like feedback and advice because I know you have been out there for a while.

J: Now is there any difference between myself and the teachers? Is there any difference in terms of...

P5: You are more available.

J: More available, ok so the time issue.

P5: I know that sometimes after a class I would restrain from asking something to [professor _] or... Like I'd have a specific question that I do want to ask about one of my students and I am kind of holding back asking [professor _] or [professor _] just because I know they are crunched for time. Like with [professor _] specifically, he was our supervisor during the summer and so during the summer when I had a question I would e-mail him no worries because I know he specifically told us that that's what he's getting paid for the summer, "so use me". But now that the summer is over and so I am wondering if I can still use him. I will eventually ask but I am more tentative with them as opposed to you. If you are here and I have an issue and it just happens to pop into my head when you are around, I will be like "hey James can I bug you for a minute".

J: Now other than the time factor, are there any major differences between myself and a professor? I guess my question is could theoretically a professor, if they had the time

available as much as I have been able to be available, would they be able to be the same thing to you? Would you still... would that fulfill all of what you are looking for based on the relationship that we've had?

P5: Ummm, I don't know if it would be the same.

J: That's my question. Is there any real significant difference from professors to what I've been doing in terms of... other than time.

P5: Well you are above us, like you know what I mean, knowledge wise and experience wise, you are above us. But when we interact I don't feel that superiority. I don't feel that with you. You come down to our level and you just feel like a buddy. I don't feel any intimidation. Not that I am really intimidated by our profs but there is a different level of contact there, just maybe because you are closer in age with us as well. I don't know if [professor _] is that far from our age.

J: Not that far.

P5: Maybe because you have experienced the program yourself.

J: So could, theoretically or realistically, however you want to say that, could your professors do what I am doing?

P5: I don't think so.

J: Why don't you think they can?

P5: Honestly I don't think they are as attentive to our needs as you are.

J: Ok.

P5: I know they have a lot on their plate and when they are in the class. Like even when they are in the class like sometimes I don't feel like [professor _] is really there. Like there's lots of things going on or sometimes he'll rush out. It's understandable, like I know he's got a million things on his plate to do. But with you, you are more in tune with our needs I think. Yeah.

J: Now do you think that those things are products of circumstance or personality like he's busy or has life circumstances or whatever...

P5: Yeah I think it's maybe more circumstances, yeah.

J: Ok so I'll ask my question again, do you think theoretically a professor who had the time... I'll cut to the chase here... Do you think that someone in the position of a professor could do what I have been doing with you? Are there any issues there?

P5: Not that your position is lower than theirs, but would they want to go down to that? Do you know what I mean?

J: What's the going down? What part do you see as going down to that?

P5: I don't know, I just perceive professors as being up there, right? And then coming down to help us, not that you are coming down to help us but maybe their egos would get in the way. I don't know, I don't know what I am saying.

J: I am just trying to understand, what's the difference in your mind between what professors do and what I do? And do they overlap? Can they be one and the same? If yes why, if no why? I guess I am trying to get at what's the difference?

P5: You are more in touch with us personally. You know what I mean?

J: Yup.

P5: Like professors, they have a certain content that they have to teach us so they do it for all of us, right? And yes then they are in touch with us on certain things. But if I were to ask [professor _] right now what's my internship, I don't know if he could tell me.

J: Now why do you think it is that it's different? Do you think it's just a matter of the fact that I have time to do that? Or do you think there's something more to it than that?

P5: I'm sure time is a factor and maybe just willingness. You are just more willing to help us out and do more of the dirty work.

J: What is the dirty work?

P5: Like listening to us vent or I don't know, just being like a buddy but a buddy that guides.

J: And could a professor do that? Could a professor be a buddy that guides?

P5: Ok technically yes if they had nothing else on their plate, not that you don't have anything else on your plate, but... yeah I think they could.

J: Ok because that's the important question for me. What I am looking at is... I've been doing something that generally professors don't do. I'm sure some great professors do it...

P5: Take the time.... Yeah.

J: So my question for the students is, was there something that I did that professors can't do. Not that they won't do or haven't done, just that they actually can't do. Something that's actually different in what I have been doing, because of their position as professors

is what I am getting at. Because I want to know is this just something that... when I make recommendations at the end of my research I want to know, do I just need to recommend to professors “if you can do more of these things, this is what will help” or do I need to say “this is not something that professors can do and so we need to look at a new way of doing it or a new person to do it, a new position to do it”.

P5: Maybe professors, not that they can't it's just us, we're maybe not as open to talking to professors the way we talk to you because they do have power over us. There's power over us and they are human beings and if you say something really out there they do have influence on our grades and things like that. And so they are human beings and they could always use that. So you know what I mean? So maybe we are not as open to sharing everything with profs and being as out there with them as we are with you.

J: Now do you think a professor with a super open personality could overcome that, like completely overcome that or do you think there will always be that...

P5: In an ideal world but we don't live in that kind of world and I don't think it's possible because they just have so many things on their plates. And you are trying to find something besides time but the fact is time is a big, big factor. Like I know [professor _] he has his kids and a lot of the time he would tell us like he doesn't want things in the morning because then he has to drive in traffic. That sets when his kids get to school and things like that. And like I know after certain meetings that he wasn't here to stick around he was like “ok guys I've got to go, I've got to pick up my kids”. Well if you've got to pick up your kids you've got to pick up your kids. And then all of his research... It's just not possible, I don't think it is.

J: So it's unrealistic is I guess what you are saying?

P5: Yeah. For them, yeah. To do what you do, like you are available to us. You know I e-mail you, you e-mail right away. The profs do too but we nag you every single day and you respond. The profs call us needy if we do it too much. What does that say? That says that they do have a limit and we as group think we've passed that limit. We've wanted too much from them, more than they were willing to give us.

J: And how do you... you personally and maybe if you have talked to your colleagues about it, does that affect you that they are using the term “needy”?

P5: I don't know if I personally was needy, maybe I was, but if I was needy it was because I needed something so I don't feel bad about it. It doesn't really bother me. I think it bothered certain people in the class because the profs were like “we're joking” but I think it definitely affected certain people. That's fine, call us “the neediest group. The neediest group that doesn't like imagery” (laughs). That can be our title.

J: So do you feel like what I was doing with your group or have been doing or will continue doing, do you feel that was important?

P5: Yes.

J: Why is that? Sorry 2 questions, what was important about it and why?

P5: What was important? It's hard to... I've been in this program with you in it from the beginning so I can't, I can't even imagine it being without you. I think a lot of us would have been lost. I know at the beginning I did attend some meetings at the start of the program and you had great workshops. Like I remember a workshop on communication, like I have it in one of my notes and it was great. It gave us a real taste, you really helped us. We had needs, you were open to what we needed "ok tell my guys, what do you want me to do a workshop on next time and I'll do it". And you were open to what we needed and that was great. Oh yeah the workshop that we did was what to communicate and when to communicate it. Was it when or how? No, how and what... anyways I have it in my notes. But it was good. It was a good workshop. See I remember your workshops. I never remember the profs workshops.

J: Why do you think you remember my workshops?

P5: Because it was what we needed. Like them telling us a bunch of info "ok yeah I am sure it registered in there somewhere" but it wasn't specific to what we needed. It wasn't specific to our needs and so we didn't, we weren't able to relate to it that much. But when you addressed our needs specifically then yeah we can relate more and we probably took in more that way.

J: So back to...

P5: What did you do, yeah... You really addressed our specific individual and also group needs more so than the profs I think. Yeah. You addressed our needs, whether it was to let us vent, I remember we had a venting session, that's what we needed to do and you let us do it and it was great. And then when we needed to talk or when I was more under stress about something you helped us. Or when I was trying to find an internship, you helped me with [a client], you got me in touch with him. Right away, "Ok I'll e-mail him and let him know you are e-mailing him". It was great.

J: I guess I am going to ask the question again... Are those things that wouldn't be able to work with a professor?

P5: (pause). I'm trying to come up with something good here.

J: No I don't want you to feel like you need to say something good, I just want to know if... it doesn't have to be anything complicated here. I'm just, when you are kind of presenting the information I am just coming back to the same question to see if there is a difference. Because if there is not then that's... I just want to know because I just want to understand what's the best way to help students learn and who can do that. If a professor can do that, that's great. If a professor can't do that then that's great too. I'm trying to understand what is the best way to get at your needs as a student and to help fulfill them.

P5: Ok there is a power difference between professors and students. Not that [professor _] and [professor _] were controlling or anything like that or super “you do what I say”. But it’s still there and I know it’s there and so I think just naturally you are not as open to people in higher power than you. You are just not as open to them. Not that I was closed off to them, but I think with you, yes I know you have more knowledge than me, and yes I know you have more experience than me, but I don’t feel that power. Like you are more at our level and so it’s just easier to talk to you and to open up and to really tell you what we are feeling, what our needs are, except when we are being taped (laughs)...naw. But yeah, so I think with profs there’s always going to be that resistance to really tell them everything. So I don’t know if they really do it.

J: Why the resistance?

P5: Because they are busy, you know they are busy so you don’t want to bug them too much. Things that can go through your head. I don’t know if I bug them too much they might get annoyed and give me a bad grade on my next paper. It’s silly thinking but you know...

J: So it basically comes down to power for you?

P5: Yeah. Not that I feel there’s a huge power... I mean yes they are way up there compared to me as a student, but....

J: Now if I became a professor tomorrow in the program, would that relationship change? Would you see me as anything different?

P5: Maybe then, no because we had started out on even ground if that makes sense.

J: So if I became a professor then there wouldn’t be that power differential?

P5: Maybe if you were my professor.

J: That’s what I mean, if I was a professor in one of your courses...

P5: Yeah I don’t know, maybe just the way we were introduced makes it different.

J: But would it change the things that you tell me and how open you are with me? If I became a professor and you were in one of my classes?

P5: Maybe.

J: Why? What would change and why?

P5: You have power over my grades. You have power over my future. It's not really that big of a deal in this program, you know what I mean. But the fact is you still do. I guess if I work hard then I will pass and I will... hopefully, but maybe not.

J: So what would that change for you? What would you do differently?

P5: Well I probably wouldn't talk to you about my boyfriend (laughs).

J: What else? Ok so you wouldn't be as open about your personal life, to generalize that...

P5: Probably not.

J: Are there any school related things?

P5: I probably wouldn't ask you as much. I don't think I'd go to you as much. If I went to the profs every single time I had a question, then it would be like super needy, not just needy, super needy. And so I do refrain from asking them everything that pops into my head. But with you, if it pops, I say it. There's no double thinking. If it's stupid, it's stupid. If not well good for me. Maybe that fear of being judged, maybe it's there more with the profs because they do judge us. I mean that's what grading is, is judging our work or judging us. And with you we don't have that dynamic.

Portion of the transcript from interview 4 between Participant #7 (P7) and myself (J:)

J: Now is that different from class?

P7: Um Hmm. It's different from class because... I see you as someone who's got way more experience but also I see you as a student still as well, so it's not as intimidating. Not that it would be intimidating to ask [professor _] or [professor _] or [professor _] because certainly it's not intimidating to ask them, I think it's just... you, just how you present yourself and stuff I guess.

J: When you say it's just me is that because of who I am in terms of my position as a student and not a professor or is it just who I am as person, or both?

P7: I think it's both. Because you have kind of taken us under your wing. I think it's both, because you have knowledge, and you have a lot of knowledge but you are not, I don't know, because you are a Ph.D. candidate you are still in a learning process too. Not to say that the profs don't learn as well, but it's different, I can't really explain it.

J: Well I'll explain to you why I am asking this, because part of the research is to look at if this was to be replicated with a different group at a different time, I'm just trying to understand who is the person that you would need to be able to be the facilitator. What

kind of person or what type of person or what person would be the ideal candidate for that type of a role. So I am trying to understand could it be a professor, could it be.... So who is that person and what is it that made it work between myself and your group. So I was trying to understand what are the qualities of that role?

P7: Ok. I think that certainly, I think [professor _] is the closest equivalent because of being in the seminar. But that's not to say that [professor _] isn't I think it's because your presence. Because you are always around. You are the person that if we have questions or problems, we tend to go to you. You are the person that coordinates all the A/V equipment. I think it's because you are around more often than not. But I think it's just that it's always emphasized without emphasizing it that it's a learning environment. Learning for you, learning for us, learning as individuals or as a group. I think it's just the presence of you being around. I think that's pretty much it. But I think it's also because you are relatively the same age too, because I think it would be a bit different if it was [professor _]...

J: That's my question is would it be different if it was a professor and why would it be different?

P7: Well I could see you as being doctor Galipeau and still being ok.

J: Why is that?

P7: Part of it is that, this sounds stupid but you come to class and you are dressed like us, not that you dress like a slob because you don't, but you dress fairly casual. When [professor _] comes to class, yeah [professor _] is a casual person but he's always like, they have to dress a certain way, right? So he's always in nice slacks or a nice shirt. So I think that's a big thing, I know it sounds silly but I think that's a big thing. Even [professor _], [professor _] is a pretty casual dresser, but he's like a smart casual dresser, not to say that you are not a smart casual dresser (laughs), it's just you have the student look. When I think back to other profs that I've had probably the other prof that I had in my undergrad, I think actually you probably dress better than him, it was [professor _]. He was kind of, he had a daughter my age, many times we chatted as a group of students, so it was a larger group. But I think it's just appearance and just being around, and dress, and all of that.

J: I don't want to put words in your mouth but would it be fair to say that it tends to be someone that's more of a peer almost? Someone who has more experience in the field but is more like a peer than a professor?

P7: Yeah, exactly. That's exactly it.

J: Ok. I am just trying to put together what you said and that's what I am hearing.

P7: Yeah, That's exactly it.

J: So that's pretty accurate?

P7: For sure, yeah.

J: Anything else you can think about that aspect of the person who facilitates the group?

P7: Well you would come and eat your lunch with us during the meetings too. It was not like "ok I'm going to sit here while you all eat your lunch" You were eating too and you just fit in so well.

(An irrelevant portion of the interview has been deleted here)

P7: Yeah like maybe if you had.... Like availability wasn't an issue, I mean I haven't been seeking to seek you (laughs), so but if I knew that I needed a question answered or whatever, I would have gone to you for sure. Because I see you as a person with a lot of knowledge that I can draw from. So maybe just being able to participate more in meetings and maybe if you decide that we should meet every week, maybe one week it's with [professor _] and the other week it's with you. Because it is different, probably because... I don't know why it's different. It's not that you're more in touch with us, it's not that at all because [professor _] is for sure, I just think it's just that, to me it seems that things are more about consulting right now but I know that [professor _] does a lot of consulting too... Maybe you're not as intimidating because of the teams that you are working with are somewhat similar to the teams that we are working with. You know [professor _] may work with... well you work with national team athletes as well too, so it doesn't really make sense (laughs).

J: Can I try and stick on this one for a little bit because I am curious because it's a very important point, because that seems to be coming out in other interviews as well that there is a difference and it is hard to nail down. So I am curious if you can kind of rack your brain to see if you can... you can think out loud if you need to...

P7: Yeah that's what I was just doing... Yeah I would think, I think it's because you make it more real. Like [professor _] will talk in class about things, and he'll bring examples as well, it just seems that your examples are more real or more recent or more applicable to us or more like close to us. I certainly don't feel that [professor _] is up here because I don't, but I don't feel like you are up here either, but I feel like you are more on our level. Too bad aren't videotaping this (laughs).

J: (joking) she's moving her hand around....(laughs)

P7: Um, so yeah, maybe it's because... [professor _] is young too, but maybe it's because you are relatively the same age, so probably the age difference between you and me and [professor _] is probably the same, but he seems like he's...you're a student still, maybe that's what it is, you are still learning. I don't know.

J: Ok let me ask a question that I would like to ask you. The fact that [professor _] is a professor in the program, and I am not, do you think that has an effect at all?

P7: I think he's still learning too, and I'm sure that he would probably say that he is as well, but yes I think so. I think just because it's maybe you're not as...initially, well he's not intimidating but maybe initially he was, but he's not very intimidating you know. But I think it's just because if you screw up then you're going to tell us and if we screw up we're going to tell you. And if we screw up we'll tell [professor _] but maybe he'll kind of change the way he lets us know how he screwed up, maybe he won't be as up front about it maybe, I don't know.

J: I guess kind of what I am getting at is maybe, there's a question of personality, and there's a question of position. So I am wondering if maybe you can identify either or of those that makes a difference for you, if you think it's the personality thing, if you think it's the position thing, if you think it's a combination of both?

P7: Um, I think it's both. And like I see you more as a mentor, like, yeah that's what it is, I see you more as a mentor, I can ask you questions about things and I see him more as an instructor, that's it. So that would be the position. But you both have similar personalities in the sense you listen well and you're the same type of people because you are in the same type of field... So maybe it is the position.

J: Now can you tell me what you see as the difference between a mentor and an instructor?

P7: I feel like I could go out for beers with you and talk about problems I am having with a client or a group. Whereas I would go and talk to [professor _] in his office about that. And maybe it's that is more informal, whereas it's more formal with him.

J: So what you're saying is that the difference is a formality issue because he's more of an instructor there's more of a formal feel to it.

P7: Yeah, but saying that, he's formal, but it's not really that formal.

J: How does that change how you would interact, when you talk about formal versus informal, how does that change the discussions you might have with [professor _] or someone in his position, versus someone in my position or myself?

P7: I think that first of all my working would be different. Like I would try and be more, I don't want to say educated, but maybe careful as to what I would say if I was in front of him. Whereas, like talking to you, because I am pretty abrupt and sometimes swear around a person, so I think I might just lay it on the line just the way it is you know. Whereas I might try and strategically say, because how I should be wording my words and having a discussion with [professor _]... so I think that's the biggest deal.

J: My question now is why? Why do you feel the need to...

P7: Swear with you and not her? (laughs). Um... that's a really hard question actually. Because I see you as a mentor, but I also see you as, I don't want to say equal because you have so much more experience, but I do see you as more of an equal as [professor _]. And even when you do get your Ph.D., I probably will still see you as an equal and I don't understand that.

J: You know what, that's a compliment....Um, do you feel that you get different things from the two different people? Like do they provide the same thing or do they provide something different?

P7: I think that from you we have received more practical knowledge, and from [professor _] we've received practical knowledge but like the theory stuff as well, like the research stuff. But from you it's been all practical in my mind.

J: And how do those two things fit in with your pursuits or your education?

P7: The reason I chose the [professional program] is so that I wouldn't have to do research because it's not something that I am interested in. I am really interested in the experiential learning so when we'd be reading and learning from our mistakes, not you know research and trying to figure out what works and what doesn't work and putting it into practice. I think that's pretty much the difference.

J: Now before we move on to another part, any other thoughts on what we just discussed?

P7: I don't think so, I think the questions that you asked kind of nailed it down because I was up in the clouds before and you brought it all down.

J: So would that be pretty accurate, you feel comfortable with it?

P7: Yeah.

J: And do you have a sense, I don't want you to speak for other students, but do you have a sense that that's how it is for other students as well?

P7: Um, I think it is the same. Yeah, I don't know about [student _] because I haven't, I've talked to her but I haven't really had a heart to heart with her, but I'm pretty sure that you would get that from other people in the program too.

J: Can I ask what makes you believe that?

P7: Just from conversations that we've had.... But you know just like how a lot of us are... negative experiences that we've had in courses, you know how talking about experiences and actually doing things is the way that we feel that we're learning as opposed to looking at all the theory and trying to apply it, but understanding that the theory is important but...

J: Now do you think someone in a position such as [professor _]'s, as an instructor, could do what I am doing, or do you think that the two don't really fit together?

P7: I think that he does a pretty good job at trying to do it, but I think because in that role he needs to have a little more distance you know. And I don't know if it's for the sake of the program that he has that distance and maybe it is, but I certainly, when I talk to people about what I am doing in my masters, people are like "oh wow" things like that. But I think that he, I can't see him being more like you without compromising what people think of the program maybe.

J: I'll give you a little background on the question. One of my main questions I am looking for in my research is to understand if someone is going to do what I have been doing with your group for the last year, what type of person does that need to be. I am trying to understand could a professor do that? Is that something that would work for students given that they have this kind of positional power as a professor. So I am just curious if you think that is something that would be viable or does it take someone from kind of the outside that's not a professor?

P7: I think that they could do it, but I don't think the school or the program would allow them to be that type of person, to kind of step down from that position and be more of an mentor in a way. I think that learning wise and stuff that would be better, but I just would wonder if the school or the program would accept it, that's all.

J: Now what do you think that would require, to do that kind of step down as you say?

P7: The university to have confidence in the program and the acceptance of what the program is about and give it recognition, the recognition it deserves, you know.

J: Ok, now kind of more nuts and bolts... what would that require that professor to do, what would they change?

P7: Oh ok. Um (pause)...

J: I guess my question is what's different? If the professor would have to change in some way to fit what the students would be comfortable with in that position, what would be different?

P7: Maybe like, instead of having meetings here, let's have breakfast meetings at [a restaurant]. Things like that, to make it less formal. That's pretty much it, just think of some areas where it's formal and see if you can make it more informal, to facilitate learning. I think you still learn, no matter where you have the meetings.

J: Now when you say less formal, are you speaking of the process or are you speaking about the place or something different? Is it the location or how things happen, or?

P7: Physical location, though this is a pretty informal setting, this centre is pretty informal... I think both (laughs) I like to sit on the fence.

J: That's fine but I am going to ask you why both?

P7: I know. Um so physical setting because you are not in a classroom sitting around a boardroom table, you know like if you are sitting having breakfast it's more personal, like when I am eating in front of someone I can have egg on my face (laughs) and it's not a big deal. So physical setting for those reasons, and what was the other one?

J: Process.

P7: Yeah process... I am trying to think of the courses he teaches and it would be hard for him to change the process unless they changed the requirements of the course. But, I don't know, maybe instead of doing written reports maybe doing more triad sessions and people observing and instead of writing a formal report, learning through observation and instead of writing it down and discussing it... I don't know... I don't know how you could change it...

J: But you think it would need to change? Going back to that stepping down, you think that would need to chaP7: Yeah I think so. I think so but I just don't know how it could be done.

J: But that's one of the things that you think would need to be changed but you're not sure how?

P7: Yeah.

J: Ok, anything else on that?

P7: Um, no, I don't think so.