

Youth As Researchers: Co-creating Sexual Health Education

by

Elizabeth Linda Elliot
BSN, University of Victoria, 2000

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF NURSING

in the Department of Human and Social Development

© Elizabeth Linda Elliot, 2005
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

Supervisor: Dr. Marjorie MacDonald

ABSTRACT

Calls for youth participation and solicitation of youth voice are commonplace for groups working with children and adolescents. There is minimal writing about the elements, challenges, and benefits of youth participation in the co-creation of peer education and cooperative inquiry research. This study sought to discover the process of seven youth and one adult using a cooperative inquiry methodology to co-create a sexual health peer education program.

In light of current critiques of the benefits of peer education as a method of instruction, this study sought to explicate the anecdotal experiences of the benefits and challenges of youth participation in peer education found by many practicing in this area. This study demonstrates that collaborative inquiry is a flexible and adaptable methodology when youth and adults want to co-research. A finding of this study, not currently apparent in the peer education literature, is a connection made that Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social development and zones of proximal development offers a theoretical and practical basis for praxis within collaborative inquiry studies and peer education program development within youth and adult collaborations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	v
List of Figures.....	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter One – Study Overview.....	1
Introduction	1
The Issue	1
Background.....	5
The Research Question.....	9
Research Objectives.....	10
Chapter Two – Literature Review.....	11
Peer Education.....	11
Youth Participation	15
Chapter 3 – Theoretical perspectives.....	21
Research Underpinnings.....	21
Power and Empowerment.....	22
Liberation, Empowerment, and Practice	29
Theoretical Underpinnings	34
Chapter 4 - Methodology	37
Getting to the Inquiry	37
Inquiry Paradigm and Methodology.....	41
Research Paradigm.....	42
Research Methodology.....	46
Conducting the Study.....	50
Research Participants	50
Research Assumptions	52
Ethics.....	52
Inquiry Location	56
Data Collection	57
Data Analysis.....	58
Chapter Five - Findings.....	64
Creating a Text	64
Creating Meaning from Experience	65
Forms of Knowing & Outcomes	65
Cycles of Experience	66
Figure 1 - Action and Reflection Cycles	67
Dialogue as a Guide to Assist Learning.....	68
Outline of Our Cycles.....	68

Starting Out and Planning - Cycle One	70
Developing Our Inquiry	70
Working Together.....	72
Too Much Like Homework.....	75
Developing Knowledge – Research, Teaching, and Sexual Health – Cycle Two	75
Building Knowledge	75
Overcoming Assumptions of Knowledge	76
Adult Roles.....	76
Learning While Guiding	79
Learning and Knowing - Building Practice in Sexual Health Education – Cycle Three	84
Putting It Together.....	84
Engaging with Other Students and Mapping Our Knowing – Cycle Four.....	86
Putting Our Work Into Practice	87
Challenges in Presentational Learning	88
Levels of Abstraction.....	90
It Does Not Always Go As Planned	92
Presentation Debriefing.....	94
Together and On Our Own.....	94
Summing Up the Analysis	95
Chapter Six - Discussion	98
Participation	99
Do You Know If You Are An Adolescent Yet?.....	102
Vive le Difference	108
Leaving Your Adult Behind?.....	111
From Here to Where?	112
Do You Have a Policy for That?.....	115
Tidbits	116
Rules of the Game	117
Influencing Peer Education	117
Shifting Sexual Health Education.....	120
Conclusion	121
Literature Cited.....	123
Appendix	128
Appendix Research Study Planning Outline	128

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Grade Eight Response to the Values Game	91
Table 2 - Peer Educators Response to the Values Game	91

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - Action and Reflection Cycles	67
---	----

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis resulted from the energy, vision, and encouragement of an amazing group of caring individuals. The guidance and support I received throughout the inquiry process is moving and humbling.

I would like to acknowledge my daughter Caleigh Gehl. I have appreciated immensely the love and support that you have offered while I have pursued my education. I love our talks and our laughter, thank-you for sharing your thoughts and experiences with me. I respect your gracious acceptance of scrambled eggs and toast for dinner, yet again, while I completed *just one more change*. I am proud of you Caleigh. I love you beyond measure and I am grateful to be your mom.

My co-researchers in this inquiry were a wonderful group of unique individuals. The knowing I gained and the fun I had with my co-researchers was immense. I would like to thank my seven co-researchers for their time, energy, and commitment to our inquiry and especially for their ongoing involvement in helping me with my *homework*. Our work together has significantly influenced the way I will continue my work with youth.

Without the ongoing support of the school district this study would not have moved beyond an idea. Thank-you to Betty Milne, Janice Rose, Jane Chabot, Al McLeod, and the school board for your support of the inquiry, you already model youth participation so well. Your encouragement, suggestions, and support were immensely valuable, thank-you for taking the time to promote youth participation in your work.

To Marjorie MacDonald, thank-you for being such a great champion and for your immense support when I thought I might crumble. I appreciate your thoughtfulness, attention to detail, great editing advice, and your terrific sense of humour. You allowed me the opportunity to explore creatively where the inquiry journey led me. You have significantly influenced my learning and I am thankful for your patience, breadth of knowledge, and wonderful mentorship. Your work with communities and youth has contributed greatly to my knowledge.

My family has been a steadfast support and I want to thank my parents Anja and Norman Elliot for your tremendous love, support, and encouragement. You have always supported my learning and I am profoundly thankful that you encouraged my education at a young age. During an especially difficult time you have helped me by asking how things were going, listening, and encouraging even the smallest of efforts; I will always be grateful for that support. To Kim Lamberton, my sister, I am so glad that you are only a phone call away. I appreciate our conversations, your ongoing encouragement, and how much you and your family brighten my day.

more than all the words in the world. I am grateful for your friendship, support, and encouragement.

To Jennifer Mullet and David de Rosenroll, thank-you for taking the time to be part of my thesis committee. Your own writing and suggestions for areas of development in my work have been thought provoking and have contributed to my growth. I have appreciated how your questions and ideas have helped me to explore concepts that I may have missed on my own. Thank-you for having the patience and flexibility to adapt to my pace during the inquiry.

jL, your timely arrival occurred during the latter stages of this process. Your encouragement and air force one philosophy were great motivators in helping me to take steps forward when I just wanted to lag behind. Thank-you for your friendship, your wonderful sense of humour, and most of all for your strength and centering presence when I have been a chaotic whirlwind.

To Sally Kimpson and Mary Ellen Purkis, thank-you for opening up the exciting and confusing worlds of poststructuralism and postmodernism for me. This introduction has given me a new and important lens with which to view my work. I have a new appreciation of working with critical intent. Thank-you Sally for contributions to my initial proposal, I greatly appreciated your thoughtful comments.

Thank-you Mary Hill for supporting innovation and educational endeavours in our workplace, your vision of the importance of providing space for creativity is immensely helpful. To my friend Sandy Alexander, thank-you for your ongoing support and encouragement, I am glad we share a passion for sexual health education and our discussions have greatly influenced my work with youth. Thank-you Cathy Whitehead for your creative work with peer education, you model youth participation so well. Thanks Pat for your ongoing support and for listening so well.

Thank-you to all my co-learners in the Master's of Nursing Policy and Practice program, I enjoyed our classes and the knowledge I gained from our work together immensely. To Jo'Anne Yearley, our many conversations up and down the Malahat have contributed greatly to my work, thank-you for your friendship and contribution to my learning.

Thank-you to Dr. Anne Marshall for fulfilling the position of external examiner for my thesis defense; your comments and questions were thought-provoking and I appreciated your thorough reading of my thesis.

CHAPTER ONE – STUDY OVERVIEW

Introduction

As a public health nurse (PHN) who is an enthusiastic champion of age-appropriate sexual health education, I have an interest in educational endeavours that support comprehensive sexual health education in our local community. Over the last nine years, my work as a PHN on the school-team with the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA), Duncan Public Health, and as a nurse at an independent boarding school has included several opportunities for involvement in adolescent sexual health education. Additionally, I have also had the opportunity to work with youth in tobacco prevention programs.

Experiencing the energy, enthusiasm, depth of knowledge, and understanding that youth bring to their roles as youth health educators along with the recognition that students value the participation of their peers led me to consider how one might partner with youth in the development of a sexual health education program. This thesis will give an account of how a group of seven students and I undertook a collaborative inquiry to research the process of co-developing a sexual health education program for grade 8 students in School District 79 on Vancouver Island, BC.

The Issue

Over the years that I have taught sexual health education, my practice in this area has undergone several stages of metamorphosis. I began teaching sexuality education in my role as a school nurse in 1993. At that time, the curriculum focused on teaching students about *safe sex*. Unfortunately, this type of

program neglected some important aspects such as the developmental, relational, emotional, power, gender, ability, sexual orientation, family values, economic, media, and social considerations inherent in sexuality. However, my own newly developing experiences with sexual health education at the time also lacked this deeper understanding. A few years later, while attempting to find a way to work with the dissonance we experienced when teaching students about safe sex, my teaching partner at the time and I jumped onto the abstinence-based program bandwagon. I put away the bananas that had served me well as condom models and moved into a program that discussed all the risks associated with sexual activity and the need to wait until marriage before initiating sexual activity. Somehow, the broad term of sexuality consistently took on a narrow definition that revolved around sexual activities.

Teaching an abstinence-only model proved worse than teaching the safe sex model of sex education. In my classroom work I was teaching kids why it was important not to have sex, while in my work at the health centre on the same campus with the same students I was actively seeking to make sure that students were provided with condoms and other contraceptive materials. Lupton and Tulloch (1996) describe how “teachers found it difficult juggling the moral issues around sexuality on the one hand, and the practicalities of needing to instruct students on safer sex techniques on the other, the imperatives of which often conflict (Clift and Stears, 1991)” (p. 267). At the best of times, it is at least challenging for sexual health educators to come to terms with the perceptions, understandings, values, knowing, and experiences that situate their own personally held understandings of sexuality. This difficulty increases when one must also consider these concepts

within the constraints of “the politics of the school, in which teachers must conform to a set curriculum and attempt to avoid upsetting parents’ sensibilities in dealing with potentially controversial topics” (Lupton & Tulloch, 1996, p. 267). Working with adolescents in clinic and classroom settings and researching the work of other sexual health educators intensified the incompatibility I felt between my own personal views of adolescent sexuality and how we were teaching the subject. Over time, following dialogue with youth and adults and after gaining experience from presenting sexual health materials in different ways, I found a space that moved away from a dichotomy of either abstinence or safer sex, which provides a better congruency for my teaching methods. Now, my understanding of effective sexual health education revolves around a philosophy that seeks to provide opportunities for adolescents to learn and develop understandings about sexuality in a broad context.

Three facets underpin my philosophy of working with youth in adolescent sexual health education. First, students should have the opportunity to consider their own sexuality within the context of the family, social, and relationship influences in their lives. Second, assisting students to examine how they come to hold positions of equity in relationships whereby they have the ability to meet their personal needs in respectful ways, and learn options of dealing with situations in which this is not occurring, is an essential component of sexual health education. Third, students have the right to make their own decisions. Although it may be difficult as a nurse, teacher, or especially a parent to see youth move into sexual relationships, it is important that students have access to non-judgmental sexual health information. This does not mean that adults should deny the existence of the

potential concerns associated with sexual activity including infections, emotional consequences, and unplanned pregnancy. Rather it means that adolescents need the opportunity to explore their own sexuality within an environment that allows for the presentation of accurate information and values diversity in sexual orientation; provides emotional support; discusses pleasure; and offers access to clinical services and contraception as needed (Gourlay, 1996; Health Canada, 1994; Hedgepeth & Helmich, 1996; Kirby, 1999; Lupton & Tulloch, 1996). Hadley (1998) recounts some of the challenges that currently exist for youth in the area of sexual health:

by a combination of inadequate sex education, at home and at school, poor access to confidential advice and a lack of openness and honesty in society about sexual health issues, young people continue to embark on their sexual relationships ill equipped with the necessary information and skills to manage their sexual health. (p. 1).

Ultimately, effective sexuality education attends to some of these challenges and engages with the social reality of students while seeking to postpone the onset of first intercourse and increasing the use of contraception amongst sexually active youth.

A way of engaging with the social reality of students is to offer a wide range of education programs and methods for addressing sexuality. One method that seeks to incorporate the knowledge of students into sexual health education is peer education, which is a potential asset to a comprehensive sexual health education program. Peer education should not stand alone, but instead, as Kirby (1992) explains, "effective classroom curricula should be reinforced with school-wide programs such as peer programs, group discussion sessions, individual counseling,

theatrical presentations, and media events” (p. 286). Currently, the sexuality education in our school district would benefit from increased comprehensiveness and greater diversity in the types of programs offered. The inquiry group in this study co-created a sexual health education program titled *411 For Everyone*, which offers a potential adjunct to support curricula currently addressing the need for sexual health education program diversity within our school district.

Background

In School District 79, where the study took place, sexual health education is a curriculum component in personal planning, family life, or physical education classes. Many schools use the Family Life Education Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1987), as their current guideline for teaching sexual health education. Although teachers involved with teaching sexual health and school board administrators note that the program is dated, teachers point to the “students’ engagement” with the program, in that the videos and topics spark interest and discussion, as a demonstration of its ongoing effectiveness. As part of the overall sexual health education in the school district, PHNs teach puberty classes to girls in grade five and boys in grade six, which outline the physical, emotional, and intellectual changes that occur during the maturation process. Often we receive requests from teachers working with the family life components of the curriculum and when time permits, another nurse and I teach classes about various topics, including relationships, sexually transmitted infections, and contraception.

It is difficult to offer these one-time sessions for several reasons. While dropping in for a one-time session is fun and informative for the students, there is

always a concern about what is taken-up and what is missed if we *parachute* in to present a one-hour session on sexuality. If this drop-in session is the only session about sexual health that students will receive, then this concern becomes increasingly relevant. For instance, if I drop-in to give a presentation about birth control, but the students have not had opportunities to explore the crucial aspects of relationships, desire, individual power, family values and their own beliefs about sexuality, then youth may be left with the impression that if the nurse is speaking about birth control then perhaps this means that they are supposed to be having sex. Within my practice, my concern is to ensure that sexual health education occurs in a comprehensive fashion that considers these and other facets of students' lives. Many teachers and nurses do this exceptionally well. Others may not have the opportunity to address the topic fully for a variety of reasons, including time constraints, personal discomfort with discussing the topic, and pressure created by the need to cover a variety of material within a short time frame.

While speaking with teachers working in the middle and high schools, I came to realize that various methods for teaching sexual health exist. Some of these teachers have a well thought out curriculum and want Public Health Nurses to come in to support their ongoing efforts. However, other teachers have set aside one class for sexual health for the semester and request our help because they are uncomfortable with the topic, or feel that Public Health may offer more timely and accurate information. As Lupton and Tulloch (1996) describe,

some teachers may be assigned to teach classes on sexuality and HIV/AIDS involuntarily and without training in the area, and find the experience confronting and embarrassing, while others have an

interest in the area and have received a greater extent of training to successfully negotiate the mine-field of sex and AIDS education. (p. 267)

A number of teachers say that students believe the information is more credible coming from a *health expert*.

Often our success with one class brings more requests and this intensifies my discomfort with our current method of offering classes in this manner. Our requests come from teachers teaching grades eight to twelve and it is impossible for us to offer classes to every teacher that asks. It is hard to turn teachers down and it is difficult to offer classes on a first-come first-serve basis when we would prefer to support teachers and students in a better fashion. On occasion, we do present one-time classes, but our hope is to find better ways to support and work more comprehensively with teachers across the school district in the development and presentation of innovative sexual health education programs.

Within our school district, teachers are currently the major educators in this arena and this will likely continue into the future. They are well positioned for this because they share relationships with students, have expertise in teaching, and have the opportunity to work with families. When working within schools, however, it is essential to acknowledge that families, while not always in a helpful manner, are the primary educators in sexual health. We know that “the family is the first and most powerful influence on a learner’s sexual knowledge, attitudes, values, and comfort level with sexuality” (Hedgepeth & Helmich, 1996, p. 35). Additionally, peers provide “another important source of information-and misinformation- and a touchstone for sexual attitudes” (p. 35). Lupton and Tulloch (1996) echo Hedgepeth

and Helmich and tell us that “the discourses and meanings around sexuality and HIV/AIDS emerging from other sites such as peer relationships, the family and the mass media may conflict with as well as support the intended messages of school-based education” (p. 266). In varying amounts and with varying quality of information, church groups, community groups, and the media also serve to construct youth sexuality.

It would be presumptuous and naive on my part to believe that PHNs could or should come into schools carrying the torch of comprehensive sexual health education. Sexual health education occurs in many areas of our lives and throughout our lifespan. Ideally, comprehensive sexual health education involves students, families, and school communities contributing together. This is not always the reality however, and many aspects of families and schools make it difficult for this type of education to emerge. For instance, for teachers there are “difficulties associated with teaching students from different cultural backgrounds, including students with strong Christian beliefs and from ethnic groups that disapprove of the public mention of sexuality” (Lupton and Tulloch, 1996, p. 267). For students there are sometimes difficulties in sharing their questions and experiences with teachers who youth feel maybe in a position to pass judgment on their thoughts or activities, which may in turn affect their academic standing. For the most part this appears to be student perception rather than reality; however, this translates into an awkwardness that could make it difficult for some students to engage in an open discussion with a teacher. As for families, in my practice at our youth health clinic when I ask youth about talking with their parents or what would happen at home if their parents found their birth control often I hear comments like “there is no way I

could talk to my parents about this, they would kill me". It is important for teachers, parents, and nurses to consider how youth relate their experience so that we can work through our own embarrassment and discomfort to find ways of supporting youth in coming to know about sexuality.

The Research Question

The original idea for this research study evolved from the recognition that despite the current uptake of peer education programs and calls for youth involvement (Brooker & Macdonald 1999; Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health 2000; Fielding 2001; Kincheloe & Steinberg 1998; Krensky 2001), youth are rarely included in the initial research, planning, and development of programs that they in turn teach. More often, adults create a program for the youth and tell them how to teach it.

My personal experience suggests that youth, other students, and adults working with peer education programs all benefit from their involvement in peer-facilitated approaches to teaching. These benefits include personal development through teaching experience, public speaking, and knowledge development for the youth taking on the role of peer educator, as well as increased knowledge acquisition and improved program credibility for younger students. Some students are more apt to believe what a peer or someone closer to their own age tells them rather than an adult who may seem distant from their age group and therefore unable to comprehend their experience. In working with peer education, the adults involved have the opportunity to gain a greater appreciation of the intricacies of working with youth, including the chance to listen and learn from youth while broadening their

understanding of the abilities, capacity, and knowledge that students have to offer adults.

This study provided an opportunity to explore how a group comprised of students and a public health nurse worked together to develop a sexual health education class. While the inquiry set out to study the development of a sexual health education class, the purpose of the inquiry was process related rather than outcome driven. In other words, although the purpose of the project was to develop a program, the inquiry centred on studying how youth and adults working together could partner in the co-creation of a sexual health education class and the components needed to make this type of journey possible.

The research question this study sought to answer is: “what is the process that youth in a school community undertake when participating in the development of a sexual health education program?”

Research Objectives

The objectives of the research study were to explore:

1. the processes that students, with diverse attitudes, experiences, and beliefs undertake to work together,
2. what influences the ability of youth to participate in program development in meaningful ways, and
3. what students experience as the benefits and challenges of this form of participation.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review aspects of the literature on peer education and youth participation that informed the study. Reading continued throughout the research phases and the discussion in Chapter 6 will further detail those writings that have since challenged and extended my understandings of peer education, youth-adult partnerships, and sexual health education.

Peer Education

Peer education has multiple meanings and it is important to delineate the variety of definitions that accompany the term. The concept of peer intervention originally developed in the area of behavioural psychology primarily for drug prevention programs. Shiner (1999) explains that the concept “has flourished to such an extent that it has become well established within schools” (p. 555). Shiner states that within peer education theory, there is “no consensus about what the term ‘peer’ describes” (p. 557). While cautioning, “it should not be assumed that age constitutes a sufficient basis for identification between people” (p. 558), Shiner explains that peer education often occurs between similar age groups. de Rosenroll (1994) broadens the definition of peer programs and describes peer helping as an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of peer relationships, “so that a peer helper can also be a peer tutor, a peer counselor, a peer mediator, or a peer facilitator” (p. 3), that may include, but is not limited to people of a similar age. For instance, in theory, two student nurses may be peers because of their shared role as students although a wide difference in their ages may exist. Although de Rosenroll

(1994) does not specifically note the term peer education within his definition, in this study, I will include peer education as a form of peer helping.

Research clearly shows the benefits of peer education for the students receiving the education as well as for the educators themselves (e.g. Badura, Millard, Peluso, & Ortman, 2000; Cowie, 1999; Dunn, Ross, Caines, & Howorth, 1998). Zibalese-Crawford (1997) points out that “peer education is known to be one of the most effective means of reaching teens” (p. 83). While Badura et al. (2000) note that “after completing a full semester of peer education training, students improved in terms of leadership, peer-education relevant knowledge, and potential health behaviours...these findings strongly support the efficacy of peer education training” (p. 475). Similarly, Sawyer and Pinciaro (1997) found that “students’ reactions to the peer experience were overwhelmingly positive. Many of the peers reported they felt more confident in their own abilities and more open toward others” (p. 217). Dunn et al. (1998) found that “some adolescents may be more comfortable receiving sexuality-related information from peers than adults and peers may also have added credibility because of their perceived recent experience of the issues under discussion” (p. 340). While current writing supports the benefits of peer education, authors Brackett-Milburn and Wilson, (2000), Walker and Avis, (1999), and de Rosenroll (1986) also caution that, to work well, peer education programs need dedicated time devoted to planning, development, training, and evaluation.

Since “peer education is itself a social process, the development of which is influenced, sometimes radically, by its setting, organizational content, key personnel, and the values and expectations of all participants” (Brackett-Milburn &

Wilson, 2000, p. 96), it is difficult to define what makes an individual peer education program successful. However, experience leads me to point to student involvement on an ongoing basis, students evaluating the method of instruction as valuable, and peer educators gaining knowledge, skills, and increased confidence as appropriate indicators for determining a successful program. There are however, some clearly defined reasons why peer education programs may not work (Walker & Avis, 1999) and these findings inform an understanding of what is needed for a peer education program to make progress. Walker and Avis (1999) indicate seven reasons why peer education programs fail:

- (i) a lack of clear aims and objectives for the project; (ii) an inconsistency between the project design and the external environment/constraints which should dictate the project's design;
- (iii) a lack of investment in peer education; (iv) a lack of appreciation that peer education is a complex process to manage and requires highly skilled personnel; (v) inadequate training and support for peer educators; (vi) a lack of clarity around boundary issues; and (vii) a failure to secure multi-agency support. (p. 573-574)

Allowing for the time needed to consider these practicalities is an essential component of developing peer education programs.

When adolescents take on a peer educator role, especially when working with younger students in sexual health education, some aspects require special attention. First, students need appropriate training and support. Given the sensitivity of sexual health education, it is imperative that sexuality educators, whether peers or adults, have the appropriate skills, knowledge, resources, and sensitivity to teach

programs appropriately. Gourlay (1996) posits, "it seems reasonable to argue that the efficacy of sexuality education is inextricably linked to the skills and insights of educators" (p. 47). Some of these skills and insights include knowledge of the topic; the ability to make others feel comfortable; respecting the experience of others; and accessing current information. Additionally, educators must have an understanding of their own assumptions and values and how these might influence the teaching process. Finally, sexual health educators require knowledge of the developmental and informational needs of students. As such, an essential component of working with peer educators is to include ways in which they can develop knowledge and explore their current conceptions about sexual health.

Second, peer-led initiatives, although potentially rewarding, are time consuming and groups wanting to develop this type of program need to be cognizant of the commitments needed to provide the ongoing training and support of students involved in peer education. According to de Rosenroll (1986), program development for peer helping involves three phases: pre-training, training, and post-training. Within these stages, a variety of issues need attention including, but not limited to, enlisting support for the program, stating program objectives, selecting peer helpers, training development and processes, and designing peer duties. Punctuated throughout each stage is the need for ongoing evaluation.

A third important issue for developing peer helping programs is the consideration of the legal, ethical, and emotional implications of involving students in a peer helping process. It is important that peer helpers have the opportunity to discuss and understand the limitations and boundaries of their role. This would include working with peer educators to define the limits of confidentiality; for

instance, when they need to get adult support for another student and how to let other students know that there are times when they need to get adult help. Part of this work “includes ensuring that peer helpers have appropriate skills to help their peers and that their peers’ life issues are not too emotionally demanding for the peer helper” (de Rosenroll, 1986, p. 23). My experience suggests that students participating in peer education programs encounter fewer ethical issues, such as disclosure, than students involved in peer counselling, at least during the educational session. In our school district, peer educators often come from a different school location, spend a limited amount of time with younger students, and because of the distance between students created by the large number of people in the classroom setting, are less likely to be the recipient of personal disclosures. However, given the perception of students at their own schools that peer educators have some expertise in the area of sexual health, there may be some implications for peer counsellor relationships with their own age group. For example, in our school setting, other students may see the peer educators as a source of knowledge about information or about accessing clinical services; thus, the training associated with peer education should include discussion of how to approach ethical concerns and peer counselling about sexual health.

Youth Participation

Peer education programs come in a variety of formats. Program development may occur in an *expert* driven design, or the program may use a partnership in which those who will teach the program share in its development. Respectively, these could be termed “peer delivery” and “peer development” models.

Shiner (1999) describes the difference between peer development and peer delivery. The concepts of peer development and peer delivery are related to the relative influence of peers within projects. In peer development, youth have the opportunity for greater ownership in project development, while peer delivery involves youth delivering an intervention or educational session. In discussing some school-based peer education projects, Shiner explains, “the extent to which the peer educators owned these projects was clearly limited. They had little influence over key decisions” (p. 562). This understanding was tremendously important to this research inquiry since an essential aspect of the study was to have students involved throughout the project planning, development, presentation, and evaluation. As Valaitis (2002) describes, “young people’s participation in community is considered vital for their health and development. Their participation is important for ensuring that programs for young people are responsive to their needs” (p. 251). Involving students in the development of programs rather than solely in the delivery provides the opportunity for students to contribute their knowledge and experience to the process of deciding how the presentation should look, what information it will include, and what delivery methods would best suit the material. In essence, this form of participation helps students to gain a deeper understanding of the subject, provides them the chance to learn skills in development and research, and places students in a role that positions them as co-creators of the program.

Participation in communities has become an increasingly studied concept; however, a call for collaboration in school communities rarely mentions the inclusion of youth or students as potential partners. When authors mention the need to incorporate youth perspectives, they often neglect to mention ways that this might

occur. One example is a recent document created by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health (2000), which states that “policymakers and experts need to consult with youth to determine their response to the desired directions and strategic directions outlined in this document” (p. 3). Although it is a positive sign that the group wants to consult with youth, given the group’s understanding that youth inclusion is important for program relevance, to be more inclusive it would have been preferable for the committee to consult with youth before the development of its strategic direction. The committee goes on to express that “health initiatives to promote the health and well-being of adolescents must be undertaken in collaboration with education, social services, and other sectors” (p.7). The ways that youth would be included in this process is not detailed. Groups making important decisions about youth too often neglect to include youth in the process. Lack of inclusion may result from time commitments, which constrain who participates; or because despite having a philosophical understanding of the importance of including youth, planners and policymakers have little experience working with youth or lack the ability to envision how this participation might occur.

When calling for the inclusion of youth into a program, committee, or policy development, it should not come as an afterthought; instead, involving youth requires consideration of the particular context, what their involvement would entail, and should not involve tokenism. Having said that, for many adults, working with youth as partners is a new concept and requires a shift in their thinking. Opportunities to work with youth, even in small ways at first, may complement this shift since experience and learning provide a guide for future interactions and allow

youth, adults, and committees to see how the process of partnerships might fit. In other words, groups might need to try out working with youth in different capacities to see what works best for those involved.

Although one student's views will not represent the view of her or his peers, youth should have opportunities to engage in partnership roles and to account for their own experiences in collaboration. When describing Pipher's (1994) book written about the experiences of adolescents girls, Shandler (1999) eloquently explains,

as I finished Pipher's introduction, I felt her describing me....She wrote about our teenage experience with clarity and sensitivity. However, Pipher viewed the whirlwind from the outside. Her portrayal of young females was accurate, but her representation was limited by her role as a psychologist, a parent, and most importantly, as an adult....Pipher not only spoke about me; she spoke to me, offering honesty, acceptance, and hope.

Yet, by book's end, I was left unsettled. In fact, I felt Pipher was speaking for me, and I wanted to speak for myself. (p. xiii)

My intention is not to critique Pipher's (1994) book, for as a woman, a mom and an adult it spoke to me and reminded me of my own experiences as a young woman. I find her book helpful in my adult and parent roles. Yet, I agree with Shandler (1999) that adolescents need to speak for themselves. This does not discount adults writing about the experiences of youth, but rather acknowledges the complexity of adults attempting to speak about youth even with the best intentions in mind.

Valaitis (2002) found that “youth perceived that they were not heard and felt disempowered” (p. 248) within their communities. Accompanying this feeling was an expression by the youth that they could make a difference in their schools given the opportunity to participate and for their contributions to be valued. Her research with youth leads Valaitis to call for the provision of “meaningful opportunities for community participation that is valued by youth, and accompanied by youth-friendly adult supports” (p. 262). I concur with Valaitis that youth are exceptional contributors to communities when given the opportunity to participate. Their energy, knowledge, and interest in their schools place youth in an excellent position to contribute to the development of contextually-relevant sexual health education in their school and broader community; their participation expands the comprehensiveness and relevance of the current sexual health education curriculum.

A small group of writers, (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999; Fielding, 2001; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Krensky, 2001; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998) describe examples of truly innovative work with youth that could guide inclusive work with youth in the areas of program development and research. These researchers have found creative ways to co-research with youth or have youth as sole researchers contributing to a school environment. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) have a wonderful description of the potential of students becoming researchers in their worlds: “students as researchers gain new ways of knowing and producing knowledge that challenge the common sense views of reality with which most individuals [adults] have grown so comfortable” (p. 2). Students bring their own perspective and experience to inquiry. When developing a process on ways to co-research with youth in a high school setting, Fielding (2001) found that

it quickly became evident that the sophistication and insight of the students was substantial, that their concerns and aspirations mirrored those expressed by staff and that the issues they wished to explore included matters of profound significance, both to themselves and to their teachers. (p. 126)

Fielding also noted that the students sought a curriculum that accounted for the standpoints of others. He explains “whilst recognizing the necessity of teacher perspectives and priorities informing the programme they nonetheless urged the school to acknowledge and incorporate their perspectives as students; a negotiated curriculum and a negotiated pedagogy seemed to them to make more sense” (2001, p. 128). It is beneficial for students to have the opportunity to look more deeply into the issues that affect their lives.

This study drew on the ideas presented by the authors in this literature review and sought to build on the notion that youth might participate more fully in programs that affect them. An important concept in the inquiry was that the research would serve to shift understandings of how youth and adults could collaborate as partners and what would influence their ability to participate in ways that they find meaningful.

CHAPTER 3 – THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Research Underpinnings

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the theoretical perspectives that underpin the research. Multiple theoretical understandings have informed my work as a nurse and as a student, both in my undergraduate and graduate studies. Significant contributors to my knowing include concepts from critical social theory, feminism, postmodernism, transformational leadership, community development, health promotion, population health, theories of sexual health, and more recently feminist poststructuralism. In addition to the broader theoretical perspectives mentioned here, specific notions that led me to this research study are power and empowerment, youth in school communities, and participation. As this list demonstrates these concepts, taken together, form a *mélange* that would cause many to cringe at the array of conflicting and contradictory tensions presented. However, Davies (1992) eases this tension by suggesting that,

an encompassing of multiplicity is only problematic if one is required to be unitary and rational in the liberal, humanist, masculinist sense. Poststructuralism opens up the possibility of encompassing the apparently contradictory with ease – even, on occasion with pleasure.
(p. 59)

Similarly, Laurel Richardson (1991), whose writing consistently appeals to me, helps me to consider that although many discourses constitute my subjectivity and perceptions, the process of recognizing how I am multiply constituted provides an opportunity to “doubt that any discourse has a privileged place, any method or theory a universal and general claim to authoritative knowledge” (p. 173). From this

postmodern perspective, I take the welcome understanding that my impressions are transitory and open to the generation of new alternatives, allowing me to accept that concepts valued today do not have to remain steadfast. In other words, it is okay to try out a new idea, story, or practice to see whether it fits. This knowing is particularly helpful when intense reflection on theory and practice has the nihilistic potential to immobilize any attempts at action; a process which Lather (1991) conceptualizes brilliantly:

trying to absorb, reflect upon and codify the rapid changes that characterize contemporary cultural theory raises many issues in regard to doing critical and oppositional work. Given the postmodern tenet of how we are inscribed in that which we struggle against, how can I intervene in the production of knowledge at particular sites...Given the ways the text works against itself, how can I communicate my always-in-process ideas and practices in order to expand a sense of the possibilities of oppositional cultural work?...In an era of rampant reflexivity, just getting on with it may be the most radical action one can make. (p. 20)

The following discussion will examine how these concepts informed the research study and will illustrate how I attempt to navigate my work within the often-confusing construct of multiple theoretical perspectives.

Power and Empowerment

To say that power and empowerment are important concepts with multiple definitions is an understatement. When undertaking research studies, the idea of

power requires careful consideration, especially when one espouses projects of liberatory intent with potentially vulnerable populations, which, as in this study, could include youth. Previously I thought my grasp of the concept of power was relatively strong – some people had it others did not, but through an empowerment process, which included consciousness-raising and power sharing, this inequality could achieve a balance. When it came to applying these visions of power and empowerment in practice however, the process seemed significantly more elusive.

In my work as a nurse, my vision of empowerment included sharing my personal *power* with the people I cared for or worked with so that they could have more power. I had no recognition that these people might not want or need me to exercise *my* power because they had plenty of their own or alternatively that others might choose not to exercise power for a variety of reasons. A further difficulty in adopting this power-sharing definition of empowerment was the inability of it to inform how to work with situations where my own level of influence was lacking.

An introduction to critical social theory during my undergraduate studies links to this early understanding of empowerment. The emancipatory potential of critical social theory seemed tremendously appealing since it sought to unmask the power structures and hegemony inherent in organizations and hierarchical structures; theoretically, this unmasking would be the impetus for changing the status quo. Armed with this knowledge, I looked to my own life to examine how power and hegemony played out. While offering valuable insight into some ways that power operates, what critical social theory did not prepare me for was the realization that I could become self-empowered and raise my own consciousness along with perhaps that of others and yet, despite all this knowing and identification

of oppression, in many instances there was little I could do to change these situations. Cooper (1994) supports this point with the comment

power is an essentially contested concept. It can mean many things; thus, to deploy it in a way that still allows for radical change may be to play semantic games, whilst saying little about the way the world 'actually' operates. (p. 452)

In theory, empowerment sounds readily achievable. Once everybody looks at the situation *rationally* and with the power imbalances identified, the group can work toward shifting the power balance equitably. However, in reality, using an emancipatory process to shift the status quo is time-consuming, difficult, and requires vast amounts of energy to pick up and carry on each time one hits the hegemonic wall. Since multiple layers may create oppression, the process of developing different ways of working is challenging.

Shifting the status quo is not as simple as finding the one or two power imbalances that serve to oppress people; power is diffuse and contextually based. In other words, someone who seems powerful in one situation may have little influence in another. Young (1990b) endorses power as a relational process rather than a commodity. She describes that

while the exercise of power may sometimes depend on the possession of certain resources-money, military equipment, and so on - such resources should not be confused with power itself. The power consists in a relationship between the exerciser and others through which he or she communicates intentions and meets with their acquiescence. (p. 31).

Thus, as a nurse working in public health, I hold a position that is relatively autonomous and potentially powerful in contrast to that of the youth whom I work with in that I have the ability to make decisions that affect their lives in ways that may or may not be beneficial, such as deciding when, how, and whether youth should receive services. In this situation, youth will often accept this construction of how they must access services and do not resist this exercise of power. Depending on my stance in this situation, my work could either value or devalue the importance of youth as service users. In contrast to public health, working as a nurse in the hospital setting dominated by medical mainstream thinking, my level of influence diminishes significantly. Since I work in both these environments, it is possible for me to experience simultaneously the roles of the oppressor and the oppressed as well as the exerciser of power or the one who acquiesces.

When looking at power from an emancipatory stance, I was always looking to how power was wielded and against whom. My role in these situations was to identify the power relations inherent in these situations and create environments in which people would come to develop power through consciousness-raising that would in turn incite change against the status quo. Breton (1994) espouses that

one of the most salient effects of the consciousness raising process is that one discovers or realizes that one has a voice, that one has the right to speak up, the right to say and to 'have a say.' One no longer accepts to be without a voice and without a say. Empowerment, in the sense that involves consciousness-raising, is a process of liberation from voicelessness or from silence. (p. 26)

Breton puts forth some important points about having a right to 'have a say', but unfortunately she fails to acknowledge the complexity of processes with liberatory intent and assumes that just *speaking up or speaking out* automatically leads to liberation and empowerment. At times, speaking up or speaking out can be a marginalizing rather than an empowering experience.

Discourse theory provides an alternate view of power and looks at how language constitutes subjects. Mills (1997) describes the relatively recent turn to discourse theory commenting that

for many working with a vulgar Marxist model, ideology implied a simplistic and negative process whereby individuals were duped into using conceptual systems which were not in their own interests.

Discourse, because of its lack of alliance to a clear political agenda, offered a way of thinking about hegemony – people's compliance in their own oppression – without assuming that individuals are necessarily simply passive victims of systems of thought...Therefore, whilst political action can be accounted for theoretically within discourse theory, at the same time it is clear that one's actions may have several effects which do not match one's intentions. (p. 30)

Similar to power and empowerment, discourse has multiple meanings. Macdonnell (as cited in Mills, 1997) provides a helpful definition

A 'discourse' as a particular area of language use may be identified by the institutions to which it relates and by the positions from which it comes and which it marks out for the speaker. The position does not exist by itself, however. Indeed, it may be understood as a standpoint

taken up by the discourse through its relation to another, ultimately an opposing discourse. (p. 11)

Within this theoretical stance Richardson (1991) explains, "language is a constitutive force, creating a particular view of reality" (p. 174). In other words, discourses, through the language of what can or cannot be said in a given context at a given time, serve to constitute people in certain ways. Davies (1992) furthers this understanding, explaining that

the meaning of subject in poststructuralist writing takes its meaning in opposition to the liberal humanist idea of the subject. The various discourses in which one participates, or in terms of which one gains a voice or becomes a speaking subject, also are the means by which one is spoken into existence (even prior to one's birth) *as subject*. These discourses subject each person to the limitations, the ideologies, the subject positions made available within them. We become not what we have learned to call our true essential selves but that which the various discourses in which we participate define us or make us thinkable as a self, or a true self...Our selves and our human nature are not the causes of what we do but the products of the discourses through which we speak and are spoken into existence. (p. 64).

I am treading very cautiously through this aspect of the discussion because first, my level of understanding of discourse theory is neophyte and developing, and second, I do not want to leave the impression that oppression or other hurtful practices are merely non-existent constructions. What concerns me is the process of how we label

or construct others and ourselves into positions through descriptions and interpretations of experience.

For those wanting to bring about changes in the world, it is important to understand how as Wetherell, Taylor, and Yates (2001) describe, "language is constructive. It is constitutive of social life. Discourse builds objects, worlds, minds and social relations. It doesn't just reflect them... Words are about the world but they also form the world as they represent it" (p. 16). Thus, despite the helpful intent of these notions, as discourses, empowerment and power create subject positions constructing people as powerless or oppressed, whether or not the people involved accept this construction.

The language of achieving voice, becoming empowered, and changing the status quo construct the *right and proper ways* of addressing change and oppression in terms that potentially negate the value of other forms of resistance. Orner (1992), who develops an understanding of voice and resistance, comments on the need for "an analysis of whose interests are served when students speak is needed. What happens to students who refuse the solicitation of student voice?" (p. 87). This leads to the question of when the *empowered* begin to speak, in which situations, and in whose language and values must this occur for the *powerless* to achieve understanding and recognition. Moreover, who and in what context gets to judge when the state of empowerment has been achieved?

An additional and often-invisible problem of empowering practice reveals itself when Breton (1994) comments on the need for people undertaking empowerment work to adopt

'bottom-up' strategies whereby they learn from the oppressed, from those who, more or less effectively, deal first hand with the problems of racism, poverty, sexism, ageism, etc.; then, bringing the best of ...knowledge and expertise, collaborate with the oppressed to build more just societies. (p. 35)

Breton assumes that the *liberator* exists outside the experience of oppression. In situating empowerment as something one does "to' or 'for' someone" (Lather, 1991), Breton renders invisible how those seeking to liberate benefit from the exercise of power or the process of empowerment. As long as we label people with terms such as oppressed or powerless, without acknowledging our own behaviour and relationship within oppression, we place the *oppressed* or *those in need of empowerment* in the category of other (Gore, 1992). This problematic practice creates a discursive position of us, as better, more knowledgeable, and them, as deficient, in need of repair.

Liberation, Empowerment, and Practice

My initial attempts at empowerment-based practice occurred when my undergraduate curriculum set this forth as an appropriate method in nursing practice. However, it was a serendipitous event during a sexual health education class that led me to a deeper consideration of the complexity of power and empowerment. One day I walked into a classroom of sixty-six grade ten students. This was the first time I was to work with a group of grade ten students and the topic of the presentation was sexual health. Not having a formal background in classroom-based education, I had not considered the implications of sixty-six grade

ten students in a lecture theatre at one time without teacher support. As I looked up at what seemed like a sea of faces, it occurred to me that these young people were potentially a tremendously powerful group. At that moment, my understanding of empowerment changed drastically, these were not a group of disempowered people waiting for me to liberate them from their oppression, for if these students chose to exercise their *power* my responses would be limited. For instance if they all decided to sing throughout my presentation it would be challenging for me to stop them or if they all got up and left at the same time what effect could I have? If the students had chosen, throughout the session they had the opportunity to be disruptive or disinterested. Yet, for the most part the students participated in the session, moved into groups when I asked them to, and seemed to engage with the materials.

This seemingly small incident created a significant disjuncture in my understanding of the practice of empowerment that led me to further study liberatory educational and participatory praxis (Best & Kellner, 1991; Ellsworth, 1992; Gore, 1992; Greene, 1994; Lather, 1991, 1992; Orner, 1992; Peterson & Lupton, 1996; Young, 1990a, 1990b, 1994), which in turn had a profound effect on the way that I work with youth. In addition to helping me reconsider the intent of liberatory education as something teachers do for students by opening up space for them to find their voice, it became clear that schools and society, perhaps unintentionally, through processes that include, amongst others, reward, devaluing of knowing, and discipline, discursively construct youth into positions of seeming powerlessness. Through the practice of reward and discipline, we produce children and youth deemed good, respectful, and appropriate when they do what we tell them. For instance, we teach children to respect adults, often whether adults

deserve that respect or not. For example, when a child has difficulty with a teacher, the child's experience of the situation may be afforded less value than that of the adult.

As a parent, I see my own role in this process and as an adult, I have expectations that my child will behave in a certain way. While I work hard to value and support my child's independence and opportunities for decision-making, I have expectations that this will occur within boundaries that respect her desires and experiences, but at the same time provides some safety in how these are achieved. While I strive to include my child in decision-making, there are certain expectations, which I hold in my discourse of parenting that inform how I undertake this process. Simultaneously, it is important for me to value and respect my child's attempts to push the boundaries of this construction. These attempts at resisting parental discourses are an important part of development and should inform ongoing discussions between parents and child as to how their relationship proceeds; in other words, just because we are the parents should not *make it so*.

Thinking about how we constitute children and youth led me to consider the constitution of students - children, youth, and adults. Often, students learn to navigate and internalize educational discourses that support the teacher in the position of knower, a position that many educators also take up. Freire (2003) calls attention to this process

the teacher presents himself [sic] to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence...The *raison d'être* of libertarian education, on the other hand, lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin

with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students. (p. 72)

It would be naïve to deny the importance of the role of a teacher in the educational experience of children. This role may be simultaneously beneficial and impeding. My own experience in education is that many teachers work outside of the construction of the teacher as all knowing; however, there is an intricate balance between teaching to students and teaching with students. Yet, this statement uncovers my own assumption that teachers and students want to achieve this form of student-teacher relationship in the first place.

As a young student, I found myself sitting out in the hall on numerous occasions for laughing aloud during class. Consistently my report cards would contain a comment such as “socializes too much in class”. Now as I walk down the hallways of school and see students sitting in the hall, I feel a tug of empathy for them. It is hard to remember to behave and yet in toeing the line lay the rewards of remaining in class and not receiving comments about your *bad* behaviour on your report cards. Cooper (1994) tells us that she chose to

focus on power as the production, facilitation or maintenance of particular outcomes, processes, or social relations. In this way, power does not have inevitable negative connotations. Whether it operates in a progressive or reactionary way depends on its form, the terrains on which it operates, and on the nature of those exercising and subject to power within a given social and historical moment. (p. 452).

In other words, depending on your positioning, an experience could be multiple shades of good or bad. When I sat outside in the hallway, it provided the teacher with a beneficial opportunity to regain the attention of the class and to demonstrate displeasure with the behaviour perhaps allowing other students to internalize appropriate classroom behaviour. For me, sitting in the hall was likely a humiliating experience so I learned to try to keep my mouth shut so that I could get along with the teacher, thus having both positive and negative results. This is a rather simple look at this experience. As an adult, I stand back from this experience and imagine the options available to a teacher facing a classroom of thirty students in managing a talkative student. Perhaps as a student she too spent time in the hallway and could empathize with my experience. Yet, it is through this type of experience that students and others begin to internalize constructions of their subjectivity, accepting it as the way it is, which, in turn, leads to self-constituting regulation of behaviour.

Significantly, this type of disciplining occurs even during graduate studies. Early in my graduate studies, a professor, known for avowing the creation of classrooms based on feminist process and empowerment, walked into our first class and told us "I never give more than an A minus on assignments." While this incident perturbed many of us in the class, and, despite the declared *feminist process* intended to guide the class discussions so that difficulties or concerns were *open for discussion*, we waited for the safety of anonymous evaluations to *voice* our discontent. As Ellsworth (1992) explains

what they/we say, to whom, in what context, depending on the energy they/we have for the struggle on a particular day, is the result of the

conscious and unconscious assessments of the power relations and the safety of the situation. (p. 105)

The authority of this professor, who already disciplined us through her marking structure, served to channel our displeasure into a less visible form, which was potentially less vulnerable to further discipline. Ellsworth describes how "strategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact" (p. 98). This example serves as a reminder that at any given moment we experience the pull of multiple discourses. Working with others across difference and amongst multiple competing discourses necessitates the desire to try to step outside of ourselves and have a look around to see how what we espouse and what we do are at times contradictions and often beyond our control.

Theoretical Underpinnings

For this study, in which I used a critical participatory approach, it was important for me to consider the implications of the liberatory intent guiding the desire to find better ways to involve students in peer education in school communities. Particularly important was coming to understand why it is important for youth to contribute to this type of research and appropriate ways to support their participation. This requires an acknowledgement that youth participation, in this context of the development of sexuality education, is an important concept deserving of further study.

As the previous discussion demonstrates, multiple theoretical concepts underpin this research study and my nursing practice. Within this praxis, my desire

is to work in anti-oppressive, respectful, and tolerant environments that support communication. Creating these practice experiences is challenging. Schick (1994) reveals how this form of praxis is potentially problematic:

how will participants speak to each other across differences of gender, race, age, orientation, institutional authority, and many other distinct positions? Calls for a collective liberation or for resistance to oppression easily mask the particular experiences and backgrounds of participants. (p. 67)

Despite these hurdles, my belief in the importance of attempting to work together with and across difference persists. Additionally, there is tremendous value in youth having the opportunity to create knowledge about their experiences even when there is a complexity of motivations, desires, and needs that muddy the process. The words of Ellsworth (1992) temper this view, the tempering of which is in itself freeing since it does not tie me to the *one right way* of doing practice, research, or work with youth.

I have given up the utopian ideal that perfect praxis exists and instead now focus on how context and other influences, including personal, institutional, or structural, constrain or enhance the standpoints I adopt and govern what I choose or choose not to say. This gives me space to be in the moment and more reflexive while giving me permission to disengage from the drive toward something better.

Ellsworth (1992) espouses,

because all voices within the classroom [relational or research experiences] are not and cannot carry equal legitimacy, safety, and power in dialogue at this historical moment, there are times when the

inequalities must be named and addressed by constructing alternative ground rules for communication. (p. 108)

Within the calls for youth participation, which rarely name the contextual, societal, personal, or institutional impediments to youth involvement, the purpose of this research was to study the processes that youth and adult co-researchers undertake in the co-creation of knowledge and what they need for this process to be meaningful. The desire to enact a relationship with youth that values participation and explores adult and youth partnerships more fully led to the design of the study.

CHAPTER 4 - METHODOLOGY

Since I sought in this study to research how students undertake the co-creation of sexual health education, it was important that the methodology for the study to be participatory in nature. I wanted to avoid the non-inclusive process often used by adults in which they *do for* youth. Currently, research about children and youth tends to adopt a focus *about them* rather than *with them*. Hart (1992) tells us, "children are undoubtedly the most photographed and the least listened to members of society. There is a strong tendency on the part of adults to underestimate the competence of children while at the same time using them in some events to influence some cause; the effect is patronizing" (p. 8). Because of its participatory and experiential (learning through doing) nature, which would provide an opportunity for students and me to share in the exploration of youth participation in sexual health peer education, collaborative inquiry was the methodology chosen for the research. The following chapter will address the research phases and the methodological aspects of the study.

Getting to the Inquiry

Looking back on my previous work with youth there are many parallels to non-participatory approaches in which adults do for rather than with youth. As I considered thesis topics, an important influence was a desire to work differently with youth in ways that supported sharing and participation. Additionally, research in which adolescents co-develop programs such as sexual health education is relatively absent and as such offered an area that would benefit from further study. While developing the sexual health education program was an important aspect of

the research, the primary objective of the study was to examine the process of how an inquiry group composed of youth and an adult went about the development process.

Within collaborative inquiry, it was important for me to work as a group member rather than as someone who stood outside of the research looking in. The conception of my role as co-participant guided the development of the study proposal and led to the focus of the research question. I felt that if my intent were to focus on the outcome rather than the process, I would experience the need to drive the group toward that expected end, whereas I wanted to look at the way an adult and a group of students might design a journey without having a formalized notion about the destination. Removing the endpoint as my focus allowed me to relax into the mode of co-researcher thereby allowing the group to decide where we were going and how we were going to get there. When describing the study, it became important for me to clarify this position so that others agreeing to allow me to work with students in the study would understand that the primary intent was to study participation, with the secondary intent being the development of the sexual health education program.

Early in 2003, while I was in the midst of initial conversations with my public health team members, school counsellors and teachers, and the school board about the proposed research study, a serendipitous coincidence occurred. A student in a peer counselling class approached her teacher/counsellor about the potential of being involved in a peer education group for sexual health education. The counsellor, who supported the proposed study, put the two of us together. After my initial description emphasizing the intent of the study to co-research student participation in sexual health education program development, the student was excited about the overview and thought the idea would work well. She put forth her intent to be part

of the study. Since it was early in the process, and I had not yet completed any of the necessary meetings or submitted the proposal for the study, we also discussed that, if approved, the study would go ahead the following school year. Speaking with this student was tremendously helpful since it indicated that at least one student had an interest in the research.

Having gained the support of my colleagues within public health, the schools, and the school board administration, the study began its movement through the necessary phases of approval. Working with youth in research, with the added factor of sexual health education, requires several sets of approvals. In addition to receiving support from my thesis committee, the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Committee, and Duncan Public Health, the process for this particular study included obtaining formal support from the school board administration, and the education committee of the school district, along with teachers, counsellors, and principals of the two participating schools.

The process for obtaining these approvals was not difficult; however, it required appropriate time allotments to proceed from one approval to the next. Making contact with a school district administrator in the initial phases of planning was invaluable since it helped to streamline the approval course and provided an opportunity to understand the requirements of the school board and schools. As well, having the support of the school board and school board administration made it easier for teachers, counsellors, and principals to provide support and recommendations for the proposal. Additionally, receiving approval from the school district before addressing the university human ethics committee requirements was helpful since the school district provided written support for the study, which was included as an appendix to the ethics application.

Several recommendations, suggestions, and requests came from the teachers, principal, and counsellor participating in the proposal phase. First, although the students were in grade eleven and twelve and therefore considered by the human ethics committee capable of consenting to the study, the secondary school requested that the students involved have parental consent to participate in the research. Second, one teacher at the middle school mentioned his concern that researchers come up with programs, such as sexual health education, which are in place one minute and gone the next. In this situation, I explained how the study was looking at youth participation as a means to program development rather than focusing on the program itself. This also meant explaining that there was not a guarantee that a program would actually develop within the research, but if one did, I was hoping that the youth involved in the study would have the opportunity to present the program if that is what the group decided. The emergent nature of collaborative inquiry meant describing how my proposal was a sketch, which I hoped the group would change, erase, or build-on during the research. Overall, the proposal process ran smoothly. It was my experience that the groups and individuals I spoke with were appreciative of the proposed inquiry describing potential benefits such as presentational and research skill development for the youth who might decide to participate.

In hindsight, one change I would make in the approval phase is to complete the ethics and research proposal approvals in the school year before the study, which would then allow the study to get underway earlier in the school year. Because I found it helpful as a graduate student to see how others have gone about their research, a timeline is included to provide an outline of the steps taken during the planning stages (see appendix).

Inquiry Paradigm and Methodology

For several years, I have found methodologies in the genre of action research intriguing because of the intent to involve the people experiencing the problem in the development of a solution. Stringer (1996) defines action research

as a practical tool for solving problems experienced by people in their professional, community, or private lives. If an action research project does not *make a difference*, in a very specific way for practitioners and/or their clients, then it has failed to achieve its objectives. (p. 11)

This approach takes on relevance in allowing people the opportunity to consider and guide situations or challenges that affect their lives while developing solutions that stem from their experience of a particular situation. Morgan (1997) furthers this understanding, explaining that

action-learning approaches to research build on the idea that it is possible for the research process to have a dual objective in (a) trying to produce useful research knowledge while (b) using a process that can help the people involved in the research to gain a better understanding of their situations. As the term suggests, it seeks to combine action and learning, to create a situation whereby everyone involved in the research learns while doing. (p. 296)

One limitation of some forms of action research is the specificity of *solving* problems, managing change, or tackling challenges. This approach, which has tremendous value for groups undertaking organizational change, was an important informant of my early understanding of partnering in research. Yet, for this inquiry, I sought a methodology that was inclusive in the way of action research, but offered a greater

openness to discovery, and transformation, rather than solution. A search for this type of methodology led me to collaborative inquiry, an extension of cooperative inquiry developed by Heron, Reason, and Rowan (Heron, 1996; Reason, 1994; Reason & Rowan, 1981)

Research Paradigm

The participatory research tradition located in a critical paradigm (Lather, 2001) formed the research design for this study. While the intent of the study did not have the same attempt of many critical studies to radically disrupt the status quo through raising “consciousness about the possibility of positive and liberating social change” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 177), it did set out to interrupt how youth typically participate in sexual health education. Brooker and Macdonald (1999) support research that seeks to study student involvement in curriculum development, telling us, “whether students have an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to school curriculum is a question that deserves close study” (p. 83). In this light, the research critically sought to provide an opportunity for innovation and alteration in the ways that adults might work with youth in curriculum development.

Three other facets point to the critical aspects of the research paradigm. First, currently, youth do not generally participate in sexual health education development; shifting the program development to include students as contributors could improve the relevance of the curriculum for students. Second, the family-life component of the sexual health curriculum used provincially and within the school district is outdated, with a publication date of 1987. Although this study itself will

not alter the outdated nature of the larger curriculum, it may stimulate discussion at the local level, which could prompt recognition of needed changes in the larger context. Third, on a personal level, a critical intent to look reflexively at my own practices of working with youth within a research process was a further impetus for the study. Lincoln and Guba (2000) provide a helpful description of the reflexivity: "It is a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself" (p. 183). They go on to cite Alcott and Potter (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) and explain that

reflexivity forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with ourselves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting. (p. 183)

Whereas it is not possible to be fully conscious of one's actions, I have experienced the unease that exists when my actions and my intent are in discord and this leads me to wonder about the reasons for this break in meaning. In my work as a public health nurse and as an adult, an ongoing concern I have is to ensure that I attempt to reflect on the practices that I use, which simultaneously benefit and impede the ability of youth to collaborate with adults. As such, a further critical intent of this research was to put the notion of participation into action while studying the possibilities and challenges of such an approach.

A final critical notion that guided the study is a belief that student involvement as researchers is beneficial. In adolescence, sexuality is a significant concern for students as they experience rapid physical, emotional, and relational

changes. Being involved as co-researchers in sexual health program development provides an opportunity for youth to gain different perspectives about sexuality. Having an understanding of the complexity of the concept of sexuality is particularly important when youth take on the role of peer educators. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) espouse that

students as researchers relearn the ways they have come to view the world around them...student researchers begin to see schools as human creation with meanings and possibilities lurking beneath surface appearances. Their ability to grasp these understandings moves them to a new level of consciousness – a cognitive domain where knowledge intersects with moral imperatives resulting in previously unimagined activities. (p. 3)

In their role as co-researchers during the process of gathering information and preparing to teach sexual health education for younger students, students contributed their personal knowing, experiences and learning while additionally developing skills on multiple levels when putting this knowledge to work. Thus, a concept guiding the study, and in keeping with the critical nature of the approach, was that student involvement in research has multiple benefits.

The research was within the participatory research tradition because it sought to seek space and create interruptions in current ways that nurses and educators work with students during the processes of learning and knowledge building. In describing axiology or values, Lincoln and Guba (2000) explain that a participatory design sees that “practical knowing about how to flourish with a balance of autonomy, cooperation, and hierarchy in a culture is an end in itself, is

intrinsically valuable" (p. 172). Reason (2003) describes that "participative research is at its best a process that explicitly aims to educate those involved to develop their capacity for inquiry both individually and collectively" (p. 208). My intent at the outset in choosing a participatory approach was to provide a space for students who wanted to engage as co-participants and co-learners in the research process.

One challenge relevant to this study's claim to a participatory tradition is that the research would contribute to the development of my thesis. Morris and Muzychka (2002) describe

in true participatory research, research participants (called 'subjects' in traditional research) decide the research objectives, research question, methodology, are involved in data collection and analysis, reporting, and determining the uses of the research. They are not only the 'subjects' but also the researchers (p. 10)

While my intent was participatory, coming to the research with a pre-defined notion of the question and methodology was potentially problematic. Morris and Muzychka go on to say

although that is the ideal, a lot of research calls itself participatory even though it does not meet all these criteria. Often, the research is not initiated by the community but is conducted in partnership with the community and input from members of the same group as the research participants. Levels of participation and control can differ.
(p. 10)

As with any study structured within a graduate program, schools and universities have expectations that require addressing several components, such as the proposal,

ethics, and consent outlines before working with research participants. Designing a study with youth compounds the ethical requirements. It makes sense for new researchers like me to have mentorship and guidance during this process.

Additionally, since the youth participating in the research were also new to this type of inquiry it was helpful to have an outline to guide the start-up of the study that was open to alteration once the group was underway.

I sought to develop our roles as co-researchers by looking at the study as a two-fold inquiry. First, for my thesis, I placed my emphasis on studying the process of our group rather than the program development. At the outset when I spoke with potential participants, I emphasized that my intent was to try a different way of working with youth in program development that involved creating a partnership, but that I would benefit from the research and through their participation by completing my thesis. Second, I stressed the cooperative nature of the group in developing the sexual health education program. Additionally, although the inquiry group did not define the question or methodology for the writing of my thesis, they were co-designers in the experience of developing the sexual health education program. Thus, for the majority of the study, the youth and I had the opportunity to share in the co-design of the data collection methods, the data analysis, and making sense of the findings.

Research Methodology

Collaborative inquiry (CI) was the study methodology. "Collaborative inquiry is 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, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000, p 6). Collaborative inquiry finds its roots in the co-

operative inquiry approach of Peter Reason, John Rowan, and John Heron, (Heron, 1996; Reason, 1988, 1994; Reason & Rowan, 1981), which, in turn, is rooted in the earlier work of Kurt Lewin (as cited in Heron, 1996). As Heron (1996) explains,

Co-operative inquiry involves two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it. Each person is co-subject in the experience phases and co-researcher in the reflection phases. (p. 1)

Heron and Reason (2001) describe the difference between co-operative inquiry and research that they term traditional:

in traditional research on people, the roles of researcher and subject are mutually exclusive: the researcher only contributes the thinking that goes into the project, and the subjects only contribute the action to be studied. In co-operative inquiry these exclusive roles are replaced by a co-operative relationship, so that all those involved work together as co-researchers and co-subjects. Everyone is involved in the design and management of the inquiry; everyone gets into the experience and action that is being explored; everyone is involved with making sense and drawing conclusions; thus everyone involved can take initiative and exert influence on the process. (p. 179)

Bray et al describe collaborative inquiry as a methodology "closely aligned with Heron's vision of cooperative inquiry, but not necessarily synonymous with it" (p. 6). I appreciated the philosophical intent of Bray et al. who define the focus of collaborative inquiry as the process of co-researchers "understanding and

constructing meaning around experience – a focus that may involve learning for purposes of personal development, enhancement of some aspect of one’s practice, creating a new context for one’s practice, or problem solving” (p. 38). Bray et al. explain, “adopting the term *collaborative inquiry* provided us with more flexibility to develop our projects with those with whom we were collaboratively engaging in inquiry” (original emphasis, p. 5). The flexibility of collaborative inquiry that Bray et al. describe, which acknowledges and accepts the emergent quality of a study, was a helpful concept that stood out for me. However, Heron and Reason provide significantly greater clarity in outlining the theoretical underpinnings and practical aspects of cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2001; Reason, 2003).

In collaborative inquiry, the initiator of the group is the person more traditionally known as the researcher. The initiator has a question he or she would like to study further and brings it forward to a group. The intent within collaborative inquiry is for the research group to share collective leadership as “a group of peers in terms of answering the question” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 39). Bray et al. go on to say that

if the initiator is someone who has experience in CI and whose role is to help establish the group, the initiator is the person with the problematic role – a person who has to quickly concede authority as soon as possible during the inquiry. (p. 39)

As a nurse going into the school to work with this group who was *not a peer* of the participants, I was acutely aware of the potentially problematic nature of my position according to Bray et al.’s definition. For instance, I considered that despite my desire to move into a shared position within the group, the youth involved might

not be able to consider me a peer in any form and would feel uncomfortable about my assumption that in this situation we shared certain attributes. Because I lacked experience in co-developing sexual health programs with youth and was not aware of the intricacies of that process, it did not seem too far reaching to consider that our similarities positioned us as somewhat “equal relative to the inquiry question” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 82).

As a nurse teaching sexual health, I could easily have gone in and developed a program that the peer counsellors could learn to teach – this would clearly place me in a research for youth position. Yet, despite my desire to create shared relationships and being conscious of not allowing my adult position to place me automatically into a leadership role, as the study findings will discuss this was not always easy. In a similar manner to how adults might position youth as holding particular roles, youth may also construct adults as holding leadership and facilitator roles.

The problematic nature of requiring that participants consider themselves peers in an attempt to create democratic equality is underdeveloped in the collaborative inquiry literature. Likely, this occurs because the majority of studies using this methodology discuss adult participants where the designation of peer, when discussing adults as co-researchers, on the surface seems valid. However, when the dynamic relationship in the research involves adult and youth co-researchers, the complex power relations inherent in this situation require attention. Describing group members as peers also fails to acknowledge that at any given time, in any group situation, of any age distribution, some people will exercise more influence and will have their views accepted more readily as valid.

Conducting the Study

The study took place from February 2003 to November 2003. The inquiry group consisted of seven youth aged sixteen to eighteen years old and me. Except for weeks when there was a school holiday, we met weekly from February to June 2003 and had one final session in November 2003. This section of the methodology chapter will discuss the participants in the inquiry group and provide an overview of how, where, and when the research took place.

Research Participants

Several considerations guided the process of choosing participants for the study. The short timeframe of the study, the participatory nature of the inquiry, and the complexity of sexual health education together with the limited time for training and skill development led me to seek students with previous experience in working with other students.

The group size was limited to ten participants to create a group in which participants would have many opportunities to interact with others in the group. This group size was a large enough number of participants to include a variety of ways of knowing. In discussions with the school counsellor and the school principal, we agreed that senior peer counselling students would have some of the experiences needed to take on the role of co-researcher.

In December 2002, prior to receiving the final approval for the study, I met with students in the peer counselling class and we discussed the research idea.

Several students approached me following the session and expressed an interest in participating.

Final approval for the study occurred in January 2003 and applications for potential participants were distributed through the peer counselling class. Ten students filled out participant forms and I contacted each individual by telephone to set-up an initial information session where we could discuss the study further. Seven students came to the initial session and all continued through the remainder of the study. In total, we were a group of eight participants.

The participants came from diverse backgrounds, and social groups. While these social distinctions were not always readily apparent to me, they were noticeable to the youth. One participant wrote

when I first saw who was in this 'club' I was a little pessimistic. We all are from different 'groups' and I wasn't sure if we could all work together, but as soon as we shared ideas and opinions I don't think any of us wanted to leave.

Seven of the participants, six females and one male, were aged between fifteen to eighteen years old. I was thirty-nine years old.

Peer educators and peer counsellors within School District #79 are predominantly female; the research group was typical of this trend. One male student could not and should not have the responsibility of needing to speak as the *male* voice, but it was helpful to bring the perspective of a young male into the study. Additionally, having a male participant was potentially beneficial for the

grade eight students offering the younger students an opportunity to engage with older female and male students.

At the initial meeting, the inquiry group decided that meeting weekly within the school was the best choice of timing and location for the study.

Research Assumptions

There are several assumptions that underpinned this research study:

- ϕ Students have a desire to undertake sexual health education program development.
- ϕ Students need a supportive environment that allows for their participation in the creation of knowledge necessary to develop sexual health education programs.
- ϕ Students have experience, skills, and understandings that will assist them in developing sexual health education.
- ϕ Including students as co-researchers in program development offers an opportunity for the students and the adult inquirer to listen to each other and deepen understanding of how students and nurses/teachers/adults might learn from each other.

Ethics

In order to consider, as thoroughly as possible, the ethical implications for the students participating in the study, meetings were held to discuss consent and ethics issues with my thesis supervisor and committee members, the school district administration and education committee, and the school communities involved. These groups reviewed the outlined design of the study and accepted the proposed consent procedure and form. The school board and the school administration requested that parents co-sign the participant consent forms with the students.

Incorporating the feedback of the aforementioned groups, a formal research with human subjects application and consent form was accepted by the Office of the Vice-President Research at the University of Victoria.

In my work as a public health nurse I offer clinical reproductive health services at the school and the local Youth Health Clinic (YHC), so I needed to consider how my role as a co-participant with students might influence my work with them as a practitioner. I addressed this situation by speaking with the students about the choices they had if they were YHC clients and wanted to participate in the study. First, a co-participant who was also a client could choose to attend the Youth Health Clinic (YHC) at Duncan Public Health and see another nurse. I explained that sometimes students who work in our tobacco prevention program and then attend the clinic services prefer not to see me in a clinician role while on the other hand there are students who work with me in education programs that seek me out as a YHC nurse; either way I would be comfortable and understand their decision. Second, if preferred, they could continue to see me within the school clinic setting and I would concentrate on keeping the roles of clinic nurse and co-researcher as separate as possible.

During this discussion, I reviewed the confidential nature of the clinic setting as well as the inquiry setting. Finally, I discussed how their participation in the study was voluntary and as such, if they found the dual relationship was problematic, or for any other reason, they could withdraw from the study at anytime without explanation. In addition, I stressed that if they chose to withdraw from the study I would accept this without challenge and it would have no bearing on our relationship in the clinical setting.

As in any study, accounting for confidentiality was an important consideration. Three formalized processes took place at the initial meeting to address confidentiality and consent. First, I addressed the limitations of confidentiality explaining that if I knew that someone was the recipient or perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse or was in a position where she or he might hurt her/himself or others I would be in the position where legally and morally I would need to seek help for the person. Second, we addressed the issue of confidentiality within the group. I explained how I would keep our shared discussions confidential by not using names when discussing the data. We also discussed the importance of keeping information that we shared during the inquiry within the group. As peer counsellors, the youth were aware of appropriate ways to manage confidentiality. Third, we read the consent forms together and addressed questions. The youth took the forms home to have parents co-sign as requested by the school.

Two ethical situations arose during the study. First, the school counsellor asked for the names of the participants in the study. She made this request because the students could choose to have leadership credit for their participation in the study. I managed this situation by returning to the students and asking them how they wanted me to proceed because by releasing their names I would not be maintaining their confidentiality. Each student asked that I release his or her name to the school counsellor. The second ethical implication that arose concerned a request by the school counsellor who, because of the leadership credit the students were to receive, asked me to grade the students' participation out of five. During the various planning stages of the study the grading process was never mentioned. I

explained that it would be inappropriate and unethical for me to take on a grading relationship with the students. I returned to the students to discuss the situation. Neither the youth nor I were aware that grading might be a component of their participation. We came to the position that if grading was necessary for the students to receive leadership credit then they should all give themselves the highest point award possible. I spoke with the school counsellor, reiterated my concerns about the students receiving a grade for participation in a research process, and said that if it was necessary for them to have a mark in order to receive leadership credits then each should receive full marks. Fortunately, in both these situations, which could have strained our work within the study, the school counsellor readily agreed and was supportive of the approach I used in speaking with students to make the decisions as a group. In future school-based studies, I would sit down and discuss the details more fully about the requirements for students to receive leadership credits for their participation.

For researchers wanting to undertake studies with students, there are situations that arise that require consideration both of the participants' needs for confidentiality and the schools' need to maintain a safe environment. For instance, when I work with students and decide to take them off school-grounds the school administration needs to know where we are going and parents will need to give permission for the trip. In most inquiries, as in this study, these issues are surmountable, but it is easy to envision that the structured environment present in schools, which requires certain amounts of information sharing to ensure student safety, may not be suitable for all research studies.

Inquiry Location

The inquiry took place from February to November 2003 in School District #79. The majority of the weekly sessions took place at the home school of all the research participants. Two other sessions occurred outside of the secondary school location. First, a five-hour session took place on a professional day at a different secondary school in School District #79 where they kindly offered us a room, because our primary location was in use by groups of teachers attending development workshops. Second, toward the end of the study, we spent a full school day at a local middle school presenting the sexual health education session that the inquiry group developed for grade eight students.

It is important to mention the unique format of this secondary school because its program design was helpful in easing student participation in the inquiry. The school principal encapsulates the school's philosophy:

As a school we believe that all students:

- are capable of learning
- can learn to take responsibility for their learning, set and reach goals and manage time,
- can acquire skills and knowledge that will equip them to face the world beyond grade 12
- can become life-long learners
- are deserving of respect and can show respect for others irrespective of individual and cultural differences

We also believe that open communication between home and school is essential.

The most unique feature of our school is the curriculum delivery model. Self-paced or self-directed (the preferred term) allows for the individual rate of learning and requires that students take far more responsibility.

While many schools share a similar philosophy of learning and would encourage students to undertake this type of inquiry, the unique self-directed format of the school builds in student opportunities, which allow for participation in this type of extra-curricular activity during the school day.

For the study, students were able to attend our planned sessions during a block set aside in the school timetable for different educational pursuits. This allowed students the chance to participate in the inquiry without missing classes, having to arrange special transportation to a location outside of the school, or having to stay after school and once again require transportation arrangements. For youth, these aspects can limit who is able to participate. Although the study could have proceeded outside of this context, it would have required extra planning within the group to arrange for transportation, meeting times, and location.

During this research study, the link with the school was appropriate and supported the inquiry. For example, this particular group made the decision that the best way to remember the meeting times was to announce a reminder over the public address (PA) system and to put an announcement in the school newsletter. While these announcements did not name the students participating in the inquiry, it would make it easier for others to identify who was attending the sessions so another group might have concerns about anonymity. However, despite the need to recognize the potential limitations a school setting might have on inquiries, the context for this study was highly conducive to youth participation.

Data Collection

Four methods of data collection occurred during the study. First, we brainstormed and discussed ideas using the whiteboard or poster boards to capture

our ideas. Second, we audiotaped our inquiry group sessions, which I then transcribed. Third, I took field notes and kept a reflexive journal. Fourth, we decided to do a mini-evaluation of the "411 For Everyone" presentation session to look at our teaching experience and to allow input from the grade eight students in the form of evaluating our work.

We decided as a group what forms of data collection we would use. I suggested some methods to collect data that seemed appropriate for our group and for our research goals. I had originally thought that the students might want to keep journals about the process, something I found helpful, but they related this form of data collection to schoolwork. Audiotaping our sessions freed me to participate in our discussions without needing to take detailed notes.

Another aspect I thought might become part of our data collection was working with the grade eight students to explore their expectations around what peer educators might contribute to the sexual health education program. However, the inquiry group chose to seek input from the grade eight students for the educational presentation through question boxes.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis created an interesting dynamic during the study. Bray et al. (2000), describe that within collaborative inquiries, "constructing new meaning through exploration, research, and individual and group change is the prime concern" (p. 88). Reason (2003) espouses that "the purpose of cooperative inquiry is to generate information and understanding that is capable of transforming action" (p. 219). Theoretically, constructing meaning within a

collaborative inquiry group commences immediately and occurs through cycles of reflection and action and "involves interpretation, analysis, reflection, and contemplation" (Bray et al, p. 88).

In setting out, I expected that as co-participants we would work through the co-creation of meaning from the data of our experiences in a process of joint engagement. However, in practice this was more challenging than I had considered. This occurred for a few reasons. First, this was my first foray into a collaborative inquiry, and although I held a mental map of how the various cycles of action and reflection would unfold, in practice, the process was less distinct than I had previously imagined. Second, while we moved easily into doing the work of the inquiry, reflecting on that experience in a more formal way was challenging. For instance, during our discussions, my suggestions to look at what we had discovered to date met with long silences; on the other hand, our discussions about the sexual health program and issues around this context were animated and lively. The tangibility of the sexual health program allowed the group to move easily into action and reflection cycles. It was in front of us and clear and visible, yet, the essence of participation in program development was harder to pin down. Third, and perhaps most importantly, I lacked an appreciation of the depth of application I was expecting the students to apply to their process.

When entering the study, I did not fully consider how several years of undergraduate and graduate study guided my thoughts about the research process. In focusing my concentration on trying to ensure that the youth and I were co-participants, I did not realistically consider how the different research skills we brought to the experience would influence the inquiry. When the realization

eventually struck, that the youth might not share my understanding of data analysis (somehow I assumed that they would attain this through some process like osmosis). I began to search for ways that we could translate the concept of analysis into a practice that would suit our group.

Bray et al. (2000) provide a helpful description of how co-creating meaning leads to “enriched insights as participants share their experiences and provide diverse interpretations of what they hear from others” (p. 89), however, they do not provide enough practical detail in how to carry out data analysis. Heron (1996) offers a more detailed description:

What the co-researchers are sharing here are their experientially generated data on some aspect or aspects of the inquiry topic. When they have collated and made further sense of the data, this may lead them to modify, extend or radically reframe their original account of the aspect or aspects. Then, in the light of these changes, they can review the overall launching statement of the inquiry, the one that embraces all its aspects, and likewise modify, extend or reframe it. (p. 87)

So although as a group, we readily engaged in action and reflection cycles, developing a process for collating and translating these experiences was not as easily forthcoming and required some creativity to coax its emergence. Reason (2003) describes how involvement may vary in cooperative inquiry groups:

Some group members will not find it easy to enter this inquiry cycle. They may enjoy the group interaction, enter fully into the discussions about the inquiry, but be unwilling to commit themselves in practice.

Others may rush off into new activity without giving sufficient attention to the reflective side of the inquiry. The inquiry facilitator has a crucial role to play here in initiating people into the iteration of action and reflection, and helping people understand the power of the research cycle. (p. 222)

Perhaps to many it seems obvious, but given my own naïveté, I would add to Reason's comments and suggest that when working with youth in a collaborative inquiry that building in time to study about research methodology needs more than a cursory glance.

In attempting to work through a mutually beneficial process in which we could share and generate meaning, I began to consider the challenges of how we could accomplish analyzing the data. I turned to Heron (1996) for some guidance and found the following:

A co-operative inquiry group that is busy with transforming practice within a profession [a school], is a local culture of competence that has two tiers. As a group of practitioners [peer educators] within a given field [school], there is a shared ethos in knowing how to value the newly acquired skills. And as a group of collaborating researchers, there is a shared ethos in knowing how to value the inquiry skills involved in acquiring the new professional skills. (p. 113).

Heron's thoughts were immensely helpful. He acknowledged the complexity we were experiencing in developing skills within research, peer education and program development while simultaneously researching the process. This understanding

helped me to appreciate that this process was challenging, needed support, and was intrinsically valuable.

Eventually as the inquiry group gained experiential knowing, we had more to talk about, felt more comfortable with each other, and the data analysis emerged more easily. The group worked best when we tackled an experience or thought together as a brainstorming/discussion. During these interactions in using the whiteboard or poster boards to discuss a topic or experience, the group shared their ideas with greater ease. For an additional facet of our data analysis, I transcribed the tapes, reviewed my field notes, and brought aspects of these forward for the group to discuss.

We were finally able to move into data analysis by simplifying the process. Given the abstract nature of data analysis, putting it into a format that provided a more tangible structure was helpful. For instance, instead of focusing on answering questions about *process* we began to ask questions such as:

1. Why are we doing it this way?
2. Why is this different from other ways?
3. How could we do this differently?
4. What do we need to know, or know about, to work this way?
5. How is your experience different and similar to mine?
6. How did you experience/what was your experience of _____?

We then translated our knowledge of these experiences into ideas that we could share with ourselves and others. I came to realize that data analysis did not have to

involve complex language or methods to create meaning. Toward the end of the study, the group became more skilled at working through an experience to create meaning. It took this practice time for us to become comfortable with the process of analyzing the data, but our ability to create meaning improved as we gained the skills needed to translate our experiences into meaning.

CHAPTER FIVE - FINDINGS

The data analysis for this study took place throughout the course of the study; through action, dialogue, and reflection, as a group we developed ideas to help us examine the question "what is the process that youth in a school community undertake when participating in the development of a sexual health education program?" Given the process orientation of collaborative inquiry the majority of our analysis focused on the *doing* of our research.

Creating a Text

Pulling the details of the research project into a textual form has proven challenging. I am acutely aware of my stance in this process of constructing and describing the experience of our group. While we worked together as a group to describe our experience thematically through discussions and mind-mapping, writing a thesis becomes my way of telling our story. In writing this story, I am conscious of the words of Heron (1996) who warns, "to generate knowledge about persons without their full participation in deciding how to generate it, is to misrepresent their personhood and to abuse by neglect their capacity for autonomous intentionality. It is fundamentally unethical." (p. 21-22). His thoughts guided the process of constructing meaning for the study. As such, in describing my experience of the research study, I do not claim to speak for my co-researchers.

Creating Meaning from Experience

Cooperative inquiry constructs meaning and adds to the process of making sense of an experience by designating four forms of interdependent knowing (Heron, 1996; Reason, 2003). . These forms of knowing include experiential knowing, propositional knowing, presentational knowing, and practical knowing.

Forms of Knowing & Outcomes

Experiential knowing occurs during an encounter with people, places, or things and involves perception, empathy, and resonance. Propositional knowing is knowing about something through ideas and theories. Presentational knowing develops from experiential knowing and draws on expressive forms as a method of presenting meaning. Practical knowing is about knowing how to do something and may take the form of a skill or competence. Heron and Reason (2001) describe that "practical knowing consummates the other three forms of knowing and brings them to their fullness" (p. 183).

The four types of knowing also relate to four forms of inquiry outcomes that may result from a study. Heron (1996) describes these outcomes as:

- ◆ transformations of personal being through engagement with the focus and process of the inquiry
- ◆ presentations of insight about the focus of the inquiry through expressive forms
- ◆ propositional reports that describe, explain, or are informative about the inquiry domain or method of inquiry
- ◆ practical skills related to transformative action within the inquiry domain or involve skills related to types of participative knowing and collaboration used within the inquiry process. (p. 37)

The discussion in this chapter will use the four forms of knowing and inquiry outcomes as a method of categorizing the meaning and knowing that emerged during the inquiry.

Cycles of Experience

Action and reflection cycles formed the process of this collaborative inquiry. Figure 1 outlines the five action and reflection cycles of the study. Action and reflection cycles are the processes through which group members "deepen their engagement with the inquiry, open themselves to more subtle understandings, engage with previously unsuspected aspects of the inquiry task, and so on" (Reason, 2003, p. 220). Learning cycles is an overall term that would accurately describe our combined action and reflection cycles.

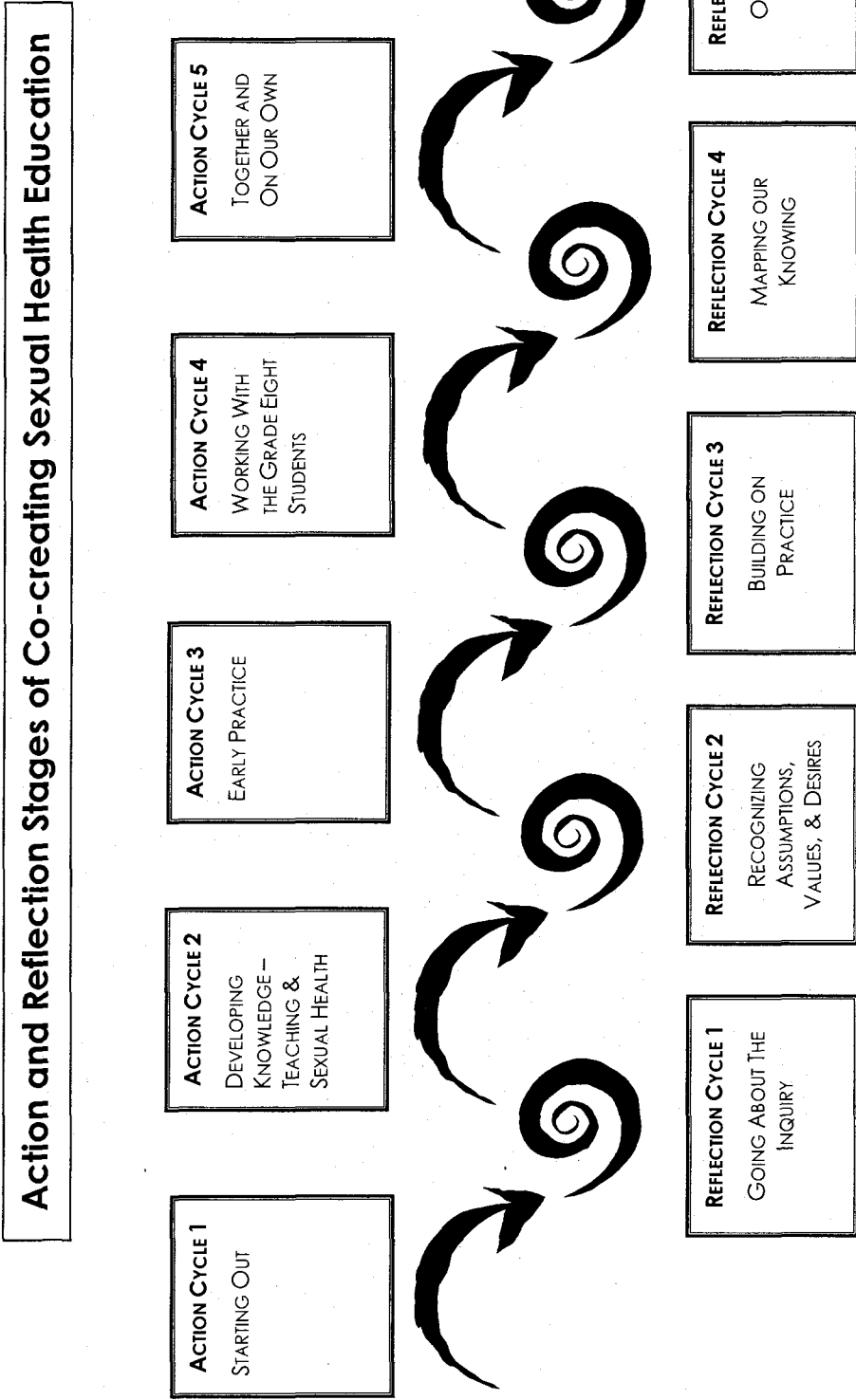


Figure 1 - Action and Reflection Cycles

Dialogue as a Guide to Assist Learning

An essential notion that supported both our reflection and action processes was using dialogue as a way of guiding our work. In this context, pulling from work by Bohm (1996), I relayed my understandings of dialogue to the group as a way that we might work together. My co-researchers agreed and we worked with dialogue as a philosophical understanding as well as a method to help us listen and learn from each other.

On sharing meaning Bohm asks, "How can you share if you are sure you have truth and the other fellow is sure he has truth, and the truths don't agree? How can you share?" (1996, p. 37). Bohm goes on to explain, "you have to watch out for the notion of truth. Dialogue may not be concerned directly with truth - it may arrive at truth, but it is concerned with meaning" (p. 37). If truth must be used as a descriptor it would be better to use it as a verb to help elucidate the flux and chaos inherent in truth; one need only consider the concept of the world being flat to understand the danger of using truth as a noun. Understanding the limitations and potential conflicts inherent in arriving at a *truth*, our group embraced the complexity of multiple understandings and chose to find the meaning that best suited our needs and described our experience rather than seeking the *one and only* resolution.

Outline of Our Cycles

Action cycle one took place over two one-hour sessions and involved the group coming together to decide on how to begin working together as a group. During the reflection component of this cycle, participants considered how and when the group

would work together. Action and reflection cycles two were the longest cycles occurring over five weeks with a one-hour session occurring weekly. Action cycle three took place on a teachers' development day when the participants had the day off from school and involved spending six hours putting together, practicing, and refining the sexual health education session that the inquiry group prepared for the grade eight students at the middle school. Reflection cycle three provided an opportunity for participants to continue working individually on the development of their presentation skills.

Action cycle four was the presentation of the sexual health education program for the grade eight students by the research participants. The reflection cycle following this action cycle took place over three one-hour sessions and was a three-fold process. First, we discussed the presentations and reviewed the peer educators' personal evaluations to debrief the session and to describe learning gained from the experience. Second, we reviewed the student evaluations of the grade eight students to see what they thought about the session. Third, we spent a session mapping our group journey. Through a dialogic process that involved comparing, contrasting and exploring our experiences, we examined our learning during the study. We also reflected on what we might do again or differently, and what we might recommend to others who wanted to co-create sexual health education in a group.

Originally, we had a closing of the inquiry group at our final session in June 2003, where we met to celebrate our work. However, we ended up moving into a fifth action and reflection cycle when a friend of mine, who is an instructor at the University of Victoria, asked me to give a presentation on participatory action research and to describe our collaborative inquiry to a group of nursing students.

This provided a great opportunity for two of my co-participants and me to talk about our study with the university class. The students involved with the inquiry group also continued with our work in individual ways such as providing class presentations of their work with the study to their classroom peers or with other peer helping related activities

Five months after our *closing*, I asked the group if we could meet for a final reflection cycle to have an opportunity to reflect on what I was going to write about our experience in my thesis and to see if my thoughts, as much as possible, reflected their interpretations as well. This originally unplanned final reflection proved helpful since it gave us the chance for a last closing. Our final session demonstrated that the students' work with the study had opened opportunities for them to participate in other projects as well.

Starting Out and Planning - Cycle One

During the first action cycle, the group had an initial information and planning session to discuss how the group could work together to study youth participation in sexual health education development. In coming to know about each other, building our group, and starting our initial explorations of the topic of sexuality, experiential knowing marked the first action cycle.

Developing Our Inquiry

At the first meeting, we planned when our next session would happen. A tremendous benefit to the study was that the self-directed nature of the school's timetable allows students to build extra programs into their schedules. We had a regular block time and use of the same classroom for the duration of the study,

which made ongoing scheduling relatively easy. When working with youth, having a consistent time and location to meet helps with planning and scheduling. A regular meeting time and place assists students with planning their other activities. As one co-researcher noted "students are really busy and we do not always have extra time". The youth participants left the initial session with the consent forms they would need to have their parent sign to allow their participation in the study.

Early on in this action cycle, an event occurred that made me wonder if the inquiry would continue and in turn reinforced my perception that remaining flexible is essential when working with youth. A *Winter Activities Day* was planned for our next meeting day and I had thought it best to postpone our next session until the following week. However, the youth decided that they would prefer to attend a session for the inquiry group instead of other activities so we planned to go ahead.

I arrived on our scheduled day to find only one student at the session. We waited for fifteen minutes and no one else appeared. My field notes from that day express the doubts that began to surface for me:

*Although I know that working with students requires
flexibility – something I can easily adapt to – I am worried
now that the students might not want to be part of the inquiry.
I will have to hang tough until the next session to find out
(Field Notes, February 12, 2003)*

While I waited for the next session to arrive, I pondered the options of where I would go if the students were no longer interested in participating in the study.

Finally, the day of our next session arrived. It was helpful to have scheduled several sessions in advance so that students knew when we would meet. The

students had asked to have an announcement placed in the newsletter to remind them about the meeting; I also placed an announcement on the day of the meeting over the public address (PA) system as an extra reminder. My field notes reflect the tension I experienced as I waited to see if any students would arrive for our session:

My relief was physically palpable today. When I walked into the portable only one student was there, but one is better than none I thought to myself. While I said hi to CR #1 a clamour occurred on the steps and 3 more students arrived – a few minutes later 2 more came along. Having spent several sleepless nights this week wondering about where I would go from here it was an amazing relief for me to see that they really want to be part of the group. (Field Notes February 19, 2003)

For this session, all but one of the co-researchers (CR) returned their consent forms to participate. Since we were still in the group planning phases and I did not want to alienate the CR without a consent form, I requested that she bring it to the next session, which she did.

Working Together

As part of this third session, I suggested that we consider how the group would work together. It seemed straightforward to make this suggestion since I am used to beginning group situations with some *group guidelines* that help to outline the expectations of how the group will work together. My experience is that this is helpful in establishing ways of working together so everyone has the opportunity to take part in discussions and to structure respectful ways for managing situations of

conflict or disagreement. However, the youth did not feel comfortable addressing this task so early in the process. The following transcript demonstrates the initial reticence of the group members to share during our early discussions:

#8 – I've brought several things that we could look at today including a game, working on our name, and anything you might want to look at.

#5 – Let's work on the name

#8 – Okay, who wants to use the felt pens?

#4 – I've got really messy writing it might be hard too see.

#5 – Me too.

#8 – Okay it doesn't have to look funky, does anyone feel comfortable printing the alphabet?

#4 – I can print the alphabet, but it won't be pretty

#8 – It doesn't have to be pretty.

- 20 second discussion about where to put the paper

#8 – So

#1 – Are we brainstorming?

#8 – We're brainstorming. What do you want to call this group?

#6 – The Sexperts

group laughter

#8 - Write it down

#1 – Okay, we're about giving information right? So how bout 411 for everyone?

#8 – hmm, that's interesting pause 411 so it's about information

long pause

laughter

#8 – I think if we're going to get return engagements and be asked back again Sexperts might be a little frightening

#4 – (Laughs) Yeah

#8 - and the teachers might be a little concerned. 411 for Everyone is a little, a little less intimidating

group laughter

#8 – Any other ideas?

group laughter

pause

#8 – Well that's a start we can add to it or we can keep 411 for Everyone.

30 second pause

#8 – So, now, would you like to come up with some guidelines for the group? Often when we work with groups, with the people I work with at the University, we establish the guidelines for the group so that people feel that they're heard. So that people have an outlet if they feel that their opinions aren't listened to or to help the group listen to others. So would you like to set-up something like that?

#1 – I think we should keep that for later, because right now I think some of us are pretty shy since we're just starting out.

multiple yeahs from group

#8 – So where would you like to go from here. Do you want to play a game or work through some materials?

several people at once agree to play a game

(Transcript excerpt February 19, 2003)

While some groups might jump readily into discussion such as group guidelines, our group found that it was necessary to have time to overcome shyness before moving into activities that required the potential vulnerability of offering personal opinions.

Over time the readiness to participate increased significantly and soon there was no challenge in finding someone willing to write for the group.

Too Much Like Homework

This phase ended with a reflection cycle in which our group members took away material about sexual health education to look at during their spare time. We quickly learned however that youth, like adults, are busy with school and other activities leaving them little spare time. Thus, taking away materials to read or review presented a time challenge. Thus, for this group, it worked better to have minimal outside *homework* and to allow as much time as possible during the sessions for us to accomplish group related work. The group preferred working through new learning together rather than apart.

Developing Knowledge – Research, Teaching, and Sexual Health – Cycle Two

The next action and reflection cycle took place over four weeks and involved a significant amount of group building and knowledge development. As the co-researchers came to know more about each other and experienced greater ease in expressing their opinions and understandings to others, the group turned to developing the knowledge necessary to proceed with the development of the grade eight presentations. The learning experienced and the knowledge created during this time centred in the experiential and propositional areas.

Building Knowledge

The inquiry group agreed that increasing knowledge in three areas was important. First, we decided to learn more about sexual health education and how

best to fit our educational session into the existing grade eight curriculum. Second, using mind-mapping and dialogue we explored the relationship of how personal values and assumptions intersect and influence ways of knowing and teaching about sexual health education. Third, we needed a crash course in sexual health.

Overcoming Assumptions of Knowledge

I assumed that their experience and extra training as peer counsellors would have provided my co-researchers with a broader understanding of sexual health than students at a similar grade level who were not peer counsellors. However, during our discussions it became apparent that the students needed more knowledge before they could move into a teaching role. As a group we discussed where to concentrate our efforts. I would have preferred the youth involved taking an area of sexual health, researching it, and then presenting it to the group for discussion and learning, however, initially the youth were not comfortable with taking on this role. As such, when the group requested my help and given a time crunch, I took on a lead role in developing the group's learning needs around sexual health; in hindsight I would have included more time for the group to work together to develop knowledge about the content area. Yet, the school-year naturally limited our time together and because the youth needed to have a background understanding about sexual health I felt it was advisable for me to help in this area.

Adult Roles

This action phase brought out a consideration that remained in my mind for the remainder of the inquiry. Throughout the study, I was particularly conscious and often uncomfortable during the times when I would take on particularly *adult*

roles. Early on my expectation was that my co-researchers and I would share in all aspects of the study. What I did not account for was the experience that I brought to the study in areas such as sexual health education. And despite the neophyte level of my research experience, it was significantly more in-depth than that of my co-researchers. My field notes from two phases of the study demonstrate the ongoing dilemma I experienced of balancing my adult designation and personal experience with the experience and knowledge of the youth inquirers.

I've come to realize that I actually need to talk about how to sort out some of my concerns, instead of just keeping them to myself. I'm really aware of my interactions and how I don't want to interfere or that they need to let me know, or ways that they can let me know if they feel overpowered by my participation. (field notes February 27, 2003)

It is a challenge for me to overcome where I expect the students "should be at" with where they actually are. I am looking for them to have a level of expertise that they have not yet attained. I need to return to thinking about the process rather than the outcome. (Field Notes May 2, 2003).

The students were keenly interested in participation and in developing the sexual health education component, but during the early action and reflection cycles when we would discuss the research aspects or meaning, long pauses and little contribution from the students marked the conversation. For some reason, my expectation was that they would hold an understanding of research that was similar to mine just as I had expected that peer counsellors would have an advanced

understanding of sexual health education. It took some time for me to recognize that it is important to acknowledge differences in experience as valuable as well as at times problematic.

The difference between youth and adults becomes particularly problematic when group members assume that adults, by way of age or experience, should automatically take on certain roles. As this transcript excerpt shows, adults wanting to work with youth in partnerships need to be aware of how to balance their adult role while simultaneously taking on the role of co-researcher.

#1 – You were cool about it. Like if we had an opinion like you weren't such a teacher about it. Like you let us be comfortable with who we were. Like we were fully able to voice our opinion without it being frowned upon. But it wasn't like this wasn't like a student sit down and teach. It was more like friends sitting together and teaching and that was more comfortable.

#8 – so having that chance to sort of share.

#5 – I thought the same. You were pretty in there with us. Like you didn't treat us like I'm an adult and you're an adolescent.

#6 – You didn't treat it as if there was a big age difference.

One way our group adjusted for experience and adult-youth roles was through discussions. Within our group, it was not taken-for-granted that a role would automatically become mine because I was the adult researcher. Instead, we talked as a group about what we needed to accomplish and how we would get there. This did not mean that I could easily move out of my adult role and there were times when I was very decisive about moving into that role.

Learning While Guiding

One area where I would sometimes choose to move into a more facilitative or guiding role was during our discussions of deciding how to work with the grade eight students. Whereas I brought assumptions that inflated the knowledge attainment of my co-inquirers, the youth often deflated the knowledge held by the grade eight students about sexual health. When this happened I would try to broaden the discussion by bringing in my experience so that our group could reflect on some of the challenges of teaching sexual health education.

One component of the education session that the youth wanted to include was anonymous questions. The conversation around this issue brought forth two important insights. First, the youth began to consider what types of questions grade eight students might have and how they would work as a group to answer the questions. In considering the questions that the grade eight students might ask, the youth members of the co-inquiry group came to realize that they were underestimating what the younger students might know. Second, the youth came up with a vision of how to manage the situation that escaped my construction of working with student questions.

This transcript excerpt is valuable since it demonstrates how the group worked to explore a difficult topic, examined some of their own assumptions, brought out many of the nuances inherent in tackling the difficult value-laden components of sexual health education, and came up with a resolution that worked for all of us involved.

#1 – And about the question thing, like I remember in grade five we had like the school nurse come in, but before we did our teacher got all of us to just write a question. It's

confidential and then just put into a big box and then we could open it up cause nobody knew, nobody knew who said it.

#7 – you don't have to embarrass yourself and be afraid to ask.

#3 – yeah

#8 – You get some confidential questions. So how do you feel about answering questions?

#7 – I'm fine with it.

#1 – Yeah, I'm fine – laughing

#3 – (Mocking answering questions) 'what is an ovary?' Ah mm I'll have to get back to you on that.

Laughter from group.

#8 – Now I've had some questions that are um because you are going to get questions that are going to put you on the spot. For instance, I get questions like 'what is a blow job?' So how would you answer what is a blow job?

pauses, ums, embarrassed short laughs

#1 – Licking someone

#8 – this is grade 8

#1 – oh

laughter from group

#1 – something they are not allowed to know

#3 – be like I'm sorry we can't discuss that, it's too bad ask your dad.

multiple voices at once

#3 – who asked this? who asked this? Okay we are going to put you into a paper bag until you're grade 11.

? – or you could just say it's an inappropriate question.

multiple voices at once

#8 – Is it actually inappropriate that question?

#1 – Well, it's sex related and we're more of like the general information. We're there how do you get your period and what causes it like that.

#3 – But sex like, they're still going to be curious about it so...

#1 – Well if they're like can a blowjob get you pregnant well we could answer that,

#4 – I don't know

#1 – but if they asked what is a blow job

#3 – What is a blow job I don't know that is kind of a tough question like

#1 – not really,

#3 – well not to answer, but just value wise

#1 – exactly

#3 – like I mean I got a brother who's in grade eight and

#5 – me too

#3 – he better not know what a blow job is

#5 – I think my brother does

#8 – well some students will know, but others hear these things and do not know so it might be an honest question that is not meant to put you on the spot.

#6 – yeah

#8 – so that's where the values come in and that's where, so all I'm saying is look at all the activities that you want to do, we can certainly do questions in a box, but then you have to be prepared for how you are going to answer some questions that might be difficult.

#6 – like what we do in peer counselling. One week before we go to the grade eights to talk about coming to school we go there and they ask the questions about the school and then the next day we will go and answer them.

#8 – so you mean ahead of time.

#1 – yeah that's what I'm saying.

#8 – okay so we have to do ours on the spot in class so I misunderstood what you were saying.

#1 – oh

#8 – we do it at the same time when we're there

#1 – no I was saying like talk to the teachers and then before we come in there's like a huge thing of questions for us.

#3 – yeah

other yeahs

#8 - okay so that would be a great idea, cause then you could save time because you'll have your questions done ahead of time and then you won't have to worry about those kinds of questions.

#1 – yeah exactly,

#8 – great so that's a good way of doing that

#1 – Ooh! I've got one for blowjob, it's showing your affection to a person by

#5 – using oral sex

#1 – exactly there you go, you can quote it

#3 – then bring in oral sex

#5 – look in the dictionary

laughter from the group

This particular reflection allowed the group to consider multiple facets of a situation and demonstrated the capacity of the group to work toward appropriate solutions. It was also particularly helpful for me. While I was tempted because of my discomfort with the unpredictability of the co-researchers answering questions to guide the discussion away from using a question box as a method of teaching, given my

assumption of on-the-spot question answering, by allowing us to work through a challenging discussion as a group we became closer and were able to develop a resolution together. Additionally, my co-inquirers taught me another method for answering questions in a classroom situation.

Although this was a transformational moment in our group discussions, I was tremendously uncomfortable at discussing the topic of blowjobs with my co-researchers and given my adult role in the group I wondered whether I should be talking to the group about the topic at all. My discomfort in discussing the topic of how to manage a question written about what is a blowjob was intriguing. I relate my unease to the use of the term blow job, rather than the discussion of oral sex. Despite my supposed *peeriness* with this group, I found that there were times when my own personal boundaries interfered with attaining this role. It is not easy to move beyond the discourses of being a nurse, teacher, mother, because all these facets of my life *effect* my ways of being and use of language that I consider appropriate in my interactions with youth. During this discussion I worked to address my discomfort so that the group might have the opportunity to speak with each other with greater ease about sexuality throughout the study.

By the close of the second action and reflection cycle, the inquiry group had outlined a plan for the education session and agreed upon naming the group *411 For Everyone*. The name did prove *catchy* and others in the school often asked us, 'what is 411 For Everyone?'

Learning and Knowing - Building Practice in Sexual Health Education – Cycle Three

In contrast to learning cycles one and two in which the knowing tended to emerge from propositional and experiential knowing, action and reflection cycle three built on this early learning into presentational and practical forms. This cycle focused on taking our experiences in the earlier cycles and putting the lesson plan we had developed for the educational session into action.

Putting It Together

For this action cycle we planned a three-hour session that took place on a Professional Development Day (Pro-D Day) for teachers. We met at a different secondary school for this session because our usual location was in use for the Pro-D Day sessions. As a group, we had decided it would be helpful to have someone outside the group assist with commenting on our presentation. We decided to ask Jillian, a nurse whom I work with closely, to help; she readily agreed and attended the working session. During our reflection cycle the group made a further decision to ask Jillian to attend the sessions with the grade eight students as well because her input was insightful and valuable to our work. It was particularly helpful to have a new pair of eyes to look at what we were planning to teach and to help review what we were trying to accomplish with our presentation.

One aspect of this action cycle that was particularly interesting was the way in which the group came together. The following field note expresses my perception

It was fascinating to watch how the group has come together...Researchers that would not have normally worked together outside of the classroom made plans to see each other

outside of the regularly arranged time to discuss preparations for developing a pamphlet. The comfort within the group was also apparent during the lunch break when they sat together and conversed and laughed about activities completely unrelated to the groups' inquiry.

The CRs broke into groups to discuss how they wanted the presentations to work. I was impressed with the cooperative way they worked through the details and their ability to bring forth their own thoughts. (Field Notes May 2, 2003)

One co-researcher described how it became more comfortable over time to talk about her opinions with others in the group

#2 - at first I felt inexperienced and uncomfortable and sometimes you just don't know what to say.

#8 - did that change for you over the course of the study

#2 - sometimes you'd worry about saying the wrong thing, but as you got used to the group you'd think so what if they don't agree with me it's just my opinion.

#8 - so you felt more comfortable with expressing your thoughts after you got to know the group?

#2 - yeah, I didn't worry anymore about whether they would agree with me or not.

Building on our increasing levels of trust and comfort with each other, during this action phase, the inquiry group designed the look of the presentation and finalized the overall details.

An important part of this session was practicing the presentation. Deciding how much to practice was a divergent aspect of the inquiry group. My desire was to have the group polished and confident in their presentation. However, the youth

went through the presentation several times and felt that was sufficient. As we reflected on the amount of practice required, the group decided that we would meet one further time before the presentation to go through the material before the presentation.

Engaging with Other Students and Mapping Our Knowing – Cycle Four

My field notes from the morning of our presentation day foreshadow some of the experiential knowing that was to come of our interactions with the grade eight students

Interesting to me is my lack of sleep over the last two weeks wondering what I've gotten this group into compared with their total lack of anxiety about giving the presentation. It is tremendously difficult to hold back and not take on the role of planning down to the minute details as I would normally. Yet, this seems to be a significant part of my learning piece, not to jump in and fix, but to let others learn from experience. Perhaps my concerns are unfounded... (Field Notes, May 12, 2003)

For me this was a fascinating part of the inquiry because I felt the group was under-practiced to give the presentations. Normally when working with a group of youth educators I would have adopted an *adult role* and insisted on more polish before we carried on. In the inquiry group however my role was different. When mentioning my concern about perhaps needing more practice, the group responded unanimously that they felt ready, and did not require further practice before

presenting to the grade eights; as such, we went forward. For everyone in the group this would prove to be a terrific learning experience.

Putting Our Work Into Practice

For the grade eight sessions the group identified presenting the information in a fun format as the main priority. Having spent action cycle two developing knowledge and searching through a variety of games, the group decided on three games: STI in a Cup, the Values Game, and Sex Ed Jeopardy. Interspersed with the games was an interactive discussion about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) to increase knowing in the area. The group chose the games after playing a large number and deciding which ones best suited an approach that would offer information about STIs and values clarification. The chosen games were thought to increase knowledge and stimulate discussion around sexuality in a non-threatening and engaging way.

The five presentation sessions took place in forty minute long classes. We adopted the classroom timetable of the school and worked around this format. The short timeframe of the classes meant that each presentation would consist of playing two of the three games. Each class would play STI in a Cup and then one of either the Values Game or Sex Ed Jeopardy. The inquiry group was divided into two groups of youth peer educator presenters (PE) - one group of four and one group of three. In order to sustain the peer education format, the group decided that Jillian and I would remain at the back of the room as a support and I would participate directly only if needed during the session. We helped with handing out supplies and game materials. As well, during the sessions, we watched, observed, and took notes for evaluation purposes.

To elicit feedback, the grade eight students were asked to complete a brief one page evaluation following the presentation. In addition to requesting feedback from the grade eight students, we also completed individual evaluations and debriefed as a group immediately following the sessions and then again one wlater. During the sessions, after introducing the group as a whole, the non-presenting group of youth stood at the back of the room where they observed and wrote comments about the presentations.

Challenges in Presentational Learning

Overall the presentations went exceptionally well. At first the PE spoke quietly making it difficult to hear them at the back of the room. As well, they struggled with classroom management, transitioning from one topic to the next, and organizing the flow of the games. The time constraint of having only forty minutes for each session was also a challenge for the PE as they attempted to present a significant amount of information in a short time frame.

Some of these challenges were apparent when we discussed what was difficult or needed to be changed in the session evaluations:

"the most challenging part was getting the attention of the class we were teaching"

"to get the students to pay better attention somehow, I noticed a lot were busy talking to their friends and not paying attention"

"only thing challenging was time, we sort of had to hurry through everything without deep discussion"

"I wish we had more time - even an extra 45 minutes"

"our voice control - we needed to be more louder"

It was interesting for me to note the difference in the PE interpretation, compared with mine, of the grade eight students' interactions. From my perspective, although the PE were quiet, I found that the grade eight students were quite attentive and the talking they did amongst themselves at times was because of their engagement with the topic rather than because they were being inattentive. My field notes describe this interpretation:

The initial presentations were too quiet, and the students came to realize that they were not as prepared as they needed to be. I guess this is something that anyone who teaches needs to experience firsthand before realizing the importance of knowing your topic inside and out.

Although the first presentation was difficult to hear, the manner of the PE with the grade eight students was very good. At times, they were frustrated by the level of the noise that arose from the grade eight students when a point or comment was made that stimulated discussion in the class room group. At this point, the PE are not yet skilled in differentiating between attentive chatter resulting from a stimulating point with distraction. Also some of the PE are not as skilled in redirecting discussion. Those PE with prior classroom teaching experience stood-out in their abilities to guide the grade eight students back to the presentation. (Field Notes May12, 2003)

As the day went on, the PE quickly adapted to the grade eight students and became more fluid in their presentations.

The PE worked well together and readily adapted their groups to suit the strengths of the presenters. The PE noted that several aspects worked well:

"how we managed to fit everything together, work as teams, and still felt as if we got through to the kids"

"the interaction of the classes, and when we moved them closer to the front of the class, all students could hear and when they could hear the instructions, they had more fun"

"we fed off each other; if someone was unable to finish what they were saying another would help out"

Levels of Abstraction

One area that the PE struggled with during the sessions occurred during times when they needed to provide greater depth or clarity to a subject area. Since their knowledge about sexuality and teaching was developing, at times the PE would be stumped for an appropriate explanation when a grade eight student question was outside of their level of knowledge. For instance, when playing the values game in which the grade eight students respond to a series of questions requiring responses that included agreeing, disagreeing, or remaining neutral, the PE found it difficult to move the discussion into a greater level of abstraction. For example, one question asked the grade eight students to either agree, disagree, or remain neutral on the question "a couple who has been dating for over a year are probably having sex or they would not still be going out". During the practice sessions in which the PE were working together to prepare for the sessions this question was not difficult for the group to discuss and to evaluate amongst themselves. However, when the PE

needed to facilitate the learning of the grade eight students they had difficulty taking the discussion to a deeper level.

Within the session evaluations, the grade eight students rated how much they liked the values game on a scale of one (not at all) to five (a lot). The majority of respondents rated the game with a value of four. When answering the question

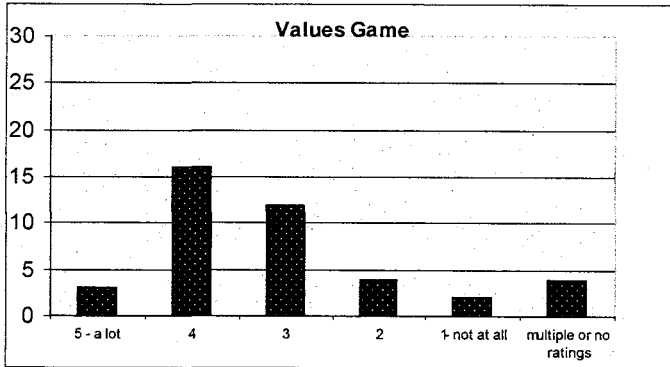


Table 1 - Grade Eight Response to the Values Game

probably the most important thing that I learned from this session is one grade eight student responded "that my value is sometimes different from everyone" while another responded "about the values thing". The PE, on the other hand, found this game difficult.

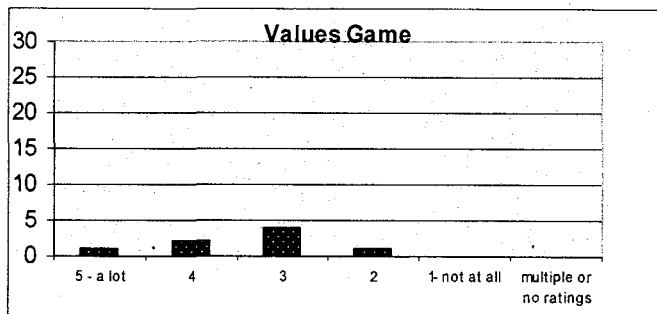


Table 2 - Peer Educators Response to the Values Game

Using the same five-point scale, the PE rated how much they liked the Values Game. On average they rated the game lower than the grade eight students did. The PE evaluations included responses such as "the student's didn't seem to

understand", "I thought it was good, but the kids didn't - too much thinking, maybe for grade nines?", "didn't quite get it", and "too much to think about for grade eights". The contrast in the PE perspective compared with the grade eight responses is remarkable.

From my perspective, the problem was that it was difficult for the PE to draw out the depth of discussion rather than because the topic was too difficult for the grade eight students. As one of the CR described during our debriefing, "we know what we mean, but they don't, we need better explanations". As a group we decided that for future presentations the PE would work with their peer counselling class to gain some experience in eliciting a greater depth in responses. In other words, helping the PE to draw out why a grade eight student would agree or disagree with a particular values statement.

It Does Not Always Go As Planned

During the sessions we had one incident that created an awkward moment for everyone in the group, but which in turn provided an opportunity for discussion and growth. As the sessions were moving along rather smoothly, during a Values Game discussion one of the grade eight students asked about the meaning of the values statement "*being worried that the other person will leave the relationship is an acceptable reason for having sex with that person*". One of the PE took on the question and gave her explanation as follows:

"imagine that someone said to you if you don't have wild kinky monkey sex while hanging from a chandelier then we can't go out anymore"

At that moment I think you could have pulled my mouth up from the bottom of the floor I'm sure it dropped that far. The wide-eyed faces of three peer educators, the classroom teacher, a parent, and Jillian all turned to me at that moment. My thoughts at that particular moment were many - the most distinct that I remember is *we get letters* and this is going to be a difficult one to explain to the school board. It is at moments like this during this type of partnership that the challenge of peerness as an adult working with a group of youth gains further clarity. Now I can find humour in the experience, but in the moment humour was distant from my experience. Fortunately, the PE recovered herself well and continued with a better explanation. As well, the grade eight students were seemingly un-phased since none of their evaluations reflected on her comments and there were no phone calls. I followed up individually with the PE after the particular session and she said, "I just said it before I thought about what I was saying".

This situation was a brilliant learning experience on several fronts. When we met together at the group debriefing situation it became a topic of discussion. I was concerned about isolating the PE involved and had not planned to bring up the incident for further discussion. Yet, during our debriefing she brought it up herself. When we were discussing how the sessions went she described how her statement came out before she had a chance to think. The group was tremendously supportive and helped to lighten the situation. One PE described her experience of the statement and stated "I heard it coming, but it was too late to stop you, I just looked at Liz and I think my mouth dropped". Another student smiled and said "you just need a new catch phrase".

Presentation Debriefing

During our debriefing, we spoke about some of the challenges of teaching and one PE commented, "teaching and trying to get through to the kids, it is more difficult than I thought". The learning that the PE gained from the experience was apparent in their discussions and in the suggestions that they had for future presentations. An important piece of learning that I gained from this discussion was around the concept of preparation. It seems that to gain an understanding of the importance of knowing your topic and practicing your presentation needs to come from presentational and experiential knowing. After the session three PE commented on the need for more practice. One stated, "we should have some more practice" while another commented "practice it more and know what you are going to say before presenting it". The third co-researcher wrote, "PRACTICE UNTIL IT IS ALL YOU CAN THINK OF" (original emphasis). As I reflected on my own teaching experience I recall those times when I was under-prepared and how that sensation leads to a lack of confidence and sense of discomfort, or even complete and total panic. This seems to be a sensation best experienced first hand to gain the beneficial knowing of the need to be prepared before attempting to take on a teaching role with others.

Together and On Our Own

Several months after our final closing, wanting to talk with our group about how I was going to present our learning within my thesis, I asked the group to meet for a final session. As we spoke I was impressed with the variety of ways that the

youth involved in the inquiry had applied their knowing and disseminated our experience.

Several of the youth had given presentations in their peer counselling class about our inquiry, describing our process and the experience of working with the grade eight students. Two other co-researchers moved into employment situations and related that their experience with the inquiry had helped them to acquire the positions. One co-researcher described how her employer was impressed with her ability to speak in front of other students about sexual health "he said that he didn't think that he could have done that". Two of the co-researchers went on to participate in other peer helping projects. My own field notes sum-up my experience as follows

My belief in the importance of involving youth in program planning was reaffirmed. That I learned a great deal about uncovering levels of ability, knowledge, & experience and using these to guide program development. That it is okay for adults to take a facilitative role & still call it collaboration – it is not all or none. (Field Notes May 14, 2003)

Summing Up the Analysis

When it came time to assigning meaning and significance, I looked forward to the writing believing it would be straight forward and would move ahead at a steady pace. No one could have told me that assigning meaning and significance to the study would be such a challenging undertaking. Writing about my interpretations is relatively simple, if I make a mistake or change my mind so be it, but translating

the experience of my co-participants into text is entirely another matter. What compounds this difficulty is the difference in our developmental, experiential, and conceptual understanding of this process.

While I may have some understandings of the implications of attempting to write about this experience, the youth who collaborated with me often referred to my thesis work as "helping you with your homework". They would tease me when we took time out to discuss interpretations of process as "are we helping you with your homework again?" Although we spent several of our reflection phases analyzing our process and discussed what I would write and while I attempted to create an interest in data analysis, the groups' interest lay in the process and outcome of the inquiry rather than in its analysis. To work through this I took on the role of bringing back to the group some of the meanings that I was interpreting from our experience for further reflection.

Expecting the youth co-researchers to want to participate in co-analyzing all aspects of the research proved over ambitious for the time-frame of the research and their level of knowing about research. Interestingly, it was at the end of the inquiry that the group seemed to *catch on* to what I was attempting to achieve with our analysis and during our final session we accomplished a significant amount of work at uncovering our experience with a minimum of participation on my part. It was also toward the end of the study where I began to develop a better understanding of creating meaning within a collaborative inquiry.

As we worked through the intricacies of learning about research, data analysis, and co-creating meaning, the words of John Heron (1996) often came to mind

And if it is literally the case that the design expertise is too esoteric for subjects to grasp, too complicated to honour their right to participate in decisions being made for gathering knowledge about them, then the fault lies with the alienated and alienating design. (p. 32)

Collaborative inquiry offers the ability to work with the current level of expertise of participants. My own level of comfort with this methodology and creating meaning within this research paradigm has grown significantly by doing it. Again the four domains of learning take on further meaning. It is appropriate to learn through reading, but to have a fuller grasp of a process wading into the experience is the best way to gain an understanding of how it works in reality. In other words practical knowing is taken to a new level through propositional, experiential, and presentational learning. This speaks to an appreciation I gained during this study: to begin to understand a particular research process you need to jump in, and in the words of one of my co-researchers, "practice, practice, practice".

CHAPTER SIX - DISCUSSION

As I begin this summation chapter, the words of Halcom (as cited in Patton, 2002), come to mind:

The moment you cease observing, pack your bags, and leave the field, you will get a remarkably clear insight about that one critical activity you should have observed but didn't....Analysis makes clear what would have been the most important to study, if only we had known beforehand. (p. 431)

Now that I know more about what I am doing, I would like to begin again. At the outset of the study, I had some ideas about working with youth, participation, and sexual health education. I could not have imagined how well these would come together and conversely did not understand the challenges that accompany the process of participation. The level of dedication, energy, enthusiasm, and desire to participate that my co-researchers demonstrated was particularly amazing. In most cases, they took-up the challenge of co-researching and ran with it.

In pulling together the study analysis and representing our work I found myself at times exhilarated and towards the end sometimes exhausted wondering if any of it made sense to anyone else except me. What helped me to realize that the study was important, beyond the intrinsic value for those of us who participated, is the way that *411 For Everyone* has become part of the school community.

Students and counsellors at the school recognize the worth of having a program for peer sexual health education, but more importantly they appreciate that youth and adult collaboration is central to the philosophy of *411 For Everyone*.

This year the legacy of our work continued and a group of students, counsellors, and public health nurses worked together to plan and present a peer education for a sexual health conference for November 2004; the name *411 for Everyone: Sexual Health For Youth* was unanimously adopted as the name for the conference.

One area that I underestimated in outlining the study was the educational needs of the group and the time requirements of working in partnerships. I made assumptions about the level of knowledge the youth researchers would have about sexual health and about research in general. As a novice researcher, I found it difficult to translate collaborative inquiry into age and experience appropriate terms while personally trying to figure out the intricacies of this research methodology. Yet, an important concept for novice researchers to acknowledge is that to become a (better) researcher one needs to go through the process of researching. The study developed my understanding of how to tackle cooperative inquiries in the future. With some wiggling and adjustments, to work with the differences of group members, and to adopt age-appropriate research methods, this methodology is particularly well-suited for adult and youth research partnerships.

Participation

When I began the study, I envisioned that the youth co-researchers would readily move into full researcher roles, what I experienced originally as resistance or reticence was actually part of the developmental process. As the youth gained skills and knowledge they moved from an adult-led process to a shared direction. In other words, at first I facilitated the majority of the group's interaction and guided the process more than I had hoped to; the element of youth taking on broader roles takes time and mentoring to nurture. During the study it became apparent that Hart's

(1992) analogy of youth participation as a ladder is tremendously helpful for considering different ways in which children and youth could participate. As Hart explains, the ladder is "useful for helping one think about the design of children's participation, but should not be considered a simple measuring stick of the quality of any programme" (p. 12). Within any group at any given time, multiple levels and different levels of desire to participate exist. Hart continues, "different children at different times might prefer to perform with varying degrees of involvement or responsibility" (p. 12). This concept refers to the notion that participation does not exist in only one way. Hart's statement relating to levels and degrees of participation is relative not only to children, but to youth and adults as well. In other words, having a pre-defined concept of what entails the right amount of participation may not be helpful in designing a study. Instead, it is more helpful to have a philosophy that supports that different levels of participation will develop depending on multiple factors such as individual ability, desire for involvement, as well as group development and capacity.

Within groups, of any age, there are different intensities of participation. Heron's (1996) work was helpful in moving away from the restrictive structure of some collaborative inquiry writing that calls for complete and total participation from all co-researchers. Heron cautions that co-researchers should mutually decide their level of participation and tells us

if the researcher then says that many people are just too busy with their various enterprises to be able or willing to participate in designing a study themselves, the answer can only be that that is for them to decide. Moreover, a great deal depends on how they are asked. (p. 30)

The findings of this study support the understanding that youth need the choice to participate within the levels they choose. People's levels of desire, energy, ability, and need vary from day to day and thus elude generalization into a simple definition of appropriate participation. Sharing a philosophical understanding of participation at the outset of a study or project, which serves as a guide for the group that will respect and nurture diversity in the co-researchers' abilities to participate, is an important component of defining collaboration within the study.

Given that each person involved participates for different reasons and that at any moment in our lives a multitude of activities and demands occur, it becomes important to experience the ebb and flow of participation as a natural part of collaborative inquiries. This is particularly true of working with youth who are new to this form of research work and who require support throughout the study as they learn about method and methodology. Embracing the notion that participation levels are fluid rather than static enhances openness within the group, which in turn supports learning.

An additional component of participation that adults working with youth should consider, before undertaking projects, is the level of participation that they are able to support within available time constraints, finances, and contextual influences, so that everyone involved has the opportunity to see where he or she might fit within the process. Having an understanding of these parameters allows adults to be clear about their own roles and provides greater definition of the level of participation available within the constraints and allowances of the study structure. Additionally, taking time to analyze how collaboration suits a particular inquiry allows adults to acknowledge and accept or interrupt the structural influences that

may constrain the type and level of participation that is available for youth partnerships.

In describing how agencies work together in community based collaboration, Mullett, Jung, and Hills (2004) describe the facilitators and constraining influences of collaboration within this context that are applicable to schools as well:

the community exerts both a facilitating and constraining influence over how the agency operates. Facilitators are features of the sector that constitute components such as social conditions and needs, general community support and social awareness of the issue. Constraining influences on the other hand are factors such as available resources, political climate and political priorities, and economic restraints. (p. 162)

It is particularly relevant to have knowledge about the influences of collaboration in schools so that researchers have an idea of the groundwork that may be needed to ease the process of youth participation.

Do You Know If You Are An Adolescent Yet?

When I was beginning to write, one of my thesis committee members suggested that it would be appropriate to discuss adolescent development. I made a mental note to myself and went on to search for writing about adolescent development. At the time, I did not have an appreciation of the important place that adolescent development holds within peer helping programs. This stems, in part, from the lack of writing about adolescent development by authors within the peer education literature.

As I watched the youth working with the grade eight students, I had an epiphany of the relationship between adolescent cognitive development, co-researching with youth, and peer education. The youth struggled with helping the grade eight students think about abstract concepts such as value choices. As I considered why this was occurring, I realized that as older adolescents, their development in this area was also in process. While we could talk about these abstract concepts in our inquiry group, often my questions would draw out deeper analysis and allow the group to develop further questions. If I had worked with the same group of grade eight students, given my broader experience and knowledge of their development, I would have readily drawn forward discussion that the youth could not yet navigate.

Watching the youth attempting to pull out information, "we know what we mean, but they don't" (PE), was fascinating and the ways in which peer education and adolescent development interact took on new meaning. As I looked through the literature on development, I had difficulty finding a theory that could explain adolescent development in enough detail to satisfy the experience I had in working with adolescents. While Inhelder and Piaget (1958) relate adolescent development as depending partly on "the social milieu" (p. 337), they seemingly confine adolescent development in a way that does not reflect my knowledge of adolescents:

after a phase of development (11-12 to 13-14 years) the preadolescent comes to handle certain formal operations (implication, exclusion, etc.) successfully, but he is not able to set up an exhaustive method of proof. But the 14-15 -year-old adolescent does succeed in setting up proofs...But, as we have often seen, this structuring of the tools of experimental verification is a direct consequence of the development of

formal thought and propositional logic. Since the adolescent acquires the capacity to use both deduction and experimental induction at the same time, why does he use the first so effectively, and why is he so late in making use of the second in a productive and continuous task (for it is one thing to react experimentally to an apparatus prepared in advance and another to organize a research project by oneself)?

Furthermore, the problem is not only ontogenetic but also historical.

The same question can be asked in trying to understand why the Greeks were limited (with some exceptions) to pure deductive thought....We have seen that the principal intellectual characteristics of adolescent stem directly or indirectly from the development of formal structures. Thus the latter is the most important event in the thinking found in this period. (p. 347).

Inhelder and Piaget offer only a piece of the picture of cognitive development.

Furthermore, when referring to the limitations of Greeks to pure deductive thought, Inhelder and Piaget uncover an important point that deserves attention. It seems likely that there were social factors that influenced how the Greeks chronicled their work. If deductive thought was historically valued in Greek society, as it seems it was, this concept begins to be passed on to community members.

And while Inhelder and Piaget (1958) describe the development of formal structures as the cornerstone of adolescent development, their theory does not account for my experience of how dialogue and learning create immense transformations in the knowing and abilities of adolescents; it makes little sense that adolescents individually develop formal structures simultaneously. In other words, why is it that a group of adolescents who are working together on a project

will develop critical ways of thinking about the subject just by participating in dialogue that creates the opportunity for thinking differently about the topic?

As demonstrated, given the appropriate guidance and an environment that facilitates learning (Hedegaard, M. 1990; Moll, L. C. & Greenberg, J. B. 1990), preadolescent children have the ability to create and organize research projects by themselves that are age appropriate. This strongly points to development resulting because of influences beyond formal structure development, into the social, cultural, and historical realms.

As I considered adolescent cognitive development as resulting in part from social mediation and as a potential outcome of participation, I searched for research that would support this idea. Rather serendipitously I came across the educational psychology work of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky's work in the area of cognitive development espouses that "cognitive skills and patterns of thinking are not primarily determined by innate factors, but are the products of activities practiced in the social institutions of the culture in which the individual grows up" (Schutz, 2004, p. 3). Vygotsky's (1978) theory elaborates how the process of cognitive development occurs when children and youth collaborate with peers or adults. He describes the area, in which development occurs, that is the difference between what the child knows on his or her own and what he or she can do in collaboration with others, as the zone of proximal development (zpd):

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (original emphasis, p 86)

Knowing takes place in a variety of formats, but working with others who can help pull our learning along through questioning, discussion, or skill acquisition is an important aspect of cognitive development.

Wink and Putney (2002) explain "it is only through continual guidance within the zone of proximal development that learners grasp understanding that is more complex and move on to being able to know something well enough to share it with others" (p. 87). A first hand example of our group moving into the zone of proximal development occurred when we were attempting to move into data analysis.

Although I had some knowledge about how we might analyze the data, translating it into terms that were appropriate took several attempts before we found the right approach. Once I stumbled across the questions that finally drew out the information in a language and format that the youth could relate to, we were able to create a model of data analysis that worked for our group. As Vygotsky describes, we found an approach to data analysis that was appropriate to this particular group of adolescents' developmental level and challenged them to move to a new level of understanding within their own zones of proximal development.

Turner and Shepherd (1999) are critical of the lack of theoretical justification for peer education programs: "whilst most theories had something to offer towards an explanation for why peer education might be effective, most theories were limited to particular claims, and with regard to such claims, limited empirical evidence is available" (p. 245). Yet, the evidence of transformation that occurs for participants engaged in the challenge of learning about topics and developing programs is readily apparent to those working in collaborative research and peer education programs. This concept could be a central facet to peer education programs that seems to be absent from current writing. Potentially, Vygotsky offers a compelling theoretical

basis to explain how cognitive development links to collaboration and peer education.

Vygotsky's theory speaks to the value of cooperative inquiry as a methodology that suits youth and adult research collaborations. Hedegaard (1990) espouses "teaching that promotes children's theoretical learning must occur on a basis of profound teacher knowledge of the central concepts of the subject area" (p. 367). Although it seems that profound knowledge might not always be attainable, such as in situations where adults are embarking on their own learning journeys, and in conjunction with youth, Hedegaard's notion provides greater clarity for the role of the adult in these inquiries. This acknowledges that in addition to achieving their own learning transformations through participation, adults have a role to play in finding age appropriate ways for the research group or peer educators to develop individual and group learning as well as analyzing their findings. Adults bring a level of research knowledge and have the opportunity to support youth development cognitively and through the four ways of knowing that will support and extend their current and future endeavours. Students involved with peer education and collaborative inquiries gain critical thinking, dialogue, and participation skills that broaden their perspectives on working within diverse situations and with others who may have differing views. This experience provides participants with a foundation that may assist in their ongoing interactions with others.

Peer education and collaborative inquiries offer tremendous opportunities for discovering zones of proximal development and creating methods within them that transform thinking. This helps to answer the question: if an adult can teach sexual health education at least as effectively as youth (Dunn, Ross, Caines, & Howorth, 1998), and in less time, then why bother with peer education programs? The answer

lies in applying theory to the experience of people who work within youth partnerships and who already intuitively know the benefits of this participation. Zones of proximal development offer the flexibility of working with students in a cultural context that supports diverse learning needs. As a conceptual model, it is possible that zones of proximal development provide an opportunity for supporting both youth and adults as learners and co-contributors. Zones of proximal development support reciprocity and transformation for all participants and within this setting, adults and youth both have roles to play in facilitation, mediation, and participation. The use of Vygotsky's theory of educational psychology and its relation to peer helping programs is an area of inquiry that warrants further study.

Vive le Difference

In this particular study, my foremost concern was not primarily the development of a program, but the development of a collaborative inquiry group. I sought to have an underlying philosophy that allowed participation and respect to develop within the group. For me, the study was about a journey. Yet, I now recognize that I focused more on the sights along the way. In contrast, the interests of my co-researchers lay less in the actual research process and more in the destination. In other words, they enjoyed the participative nature of the study and saw this as vital to the success of our inquiry, but the youth would have preferred more time to work on the sexual health education presentations. Our journey reminds me of the adage *are we there yet?*

Although the gap between journey and destination may seem divisive, it has the potential, if recognized, of opening up tremendous possibilities for adults and youth to work together. In our particular group, I could concentrate on some of the

essentials of the journey - making sure we got to our destination in a safe and timely manner, ensuring that we had the necessary supplies, and offering mentoring that would allow the youth involved to choose ways to get to our destination. As a group we defined which way our journey would go and the path it would take to get there. This allowed us to share simultaneously the proverbial driver's seat at times. Together we decided what our destination would be; yet, the journey allowed us to refine the details of our end-point along the way.

Having experienced a personally fulfilling collaborative inquiry with youth, I agree shared decision-making is a cornerstone of this form of study. However, in this form of inquiry I would no longer concern myself with defining the group as peers through age, experience, or other categorizations. Of greater concern would be deciding early on, how the group will work together to recognize, value, and address divergent experiences and notice the power relations that each person brings to the group; and perhaps more importantly, how will the group manage the exercise of power and address situations when they cannot transcend divergent issues. In as much as possible, if the group works to envision themselves and act as "persons in reciprocal relation using the full range of their sensibilities to inquire together into any aspect of the human condition with which the transparent body-mind can engage" (Heron, 1996, p.1) this will have greater importance to an inquiry than an arbitrary designation of peers. What becomes important is how the group will work within the challenge of institutional, personal, and experiential differences and constraints. Recognizing and addressing commonalities as well as potential differences and issues is an essential aspect of this form of inquiry.

Although minimal studies about youth as co-researchers exist, the participatory nature of cooperative inquiry is readily adaptable to researching with youth. Myles Horton believes that

students and teachers should be collaborators in inquiry into the obstacles that block the achievement of their goals and dreams. Teachers who facilitate the delicate task of engaging students as researchers must possess a well informed and sophisticated sense of how to involve students in an analysis and clarification of their goals...The important concepts at work in such a context involve both the teacher's effort to help students formulate a purpose for their research and education in general and the student's right to reject such a formulation. (as cited in Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 2)

This definition is helpful, and offers a guide to a whereby students [youth], and nurses or teachers [adults] could work together in the creation of the formulation of a study theoretically improving the chance of creating partnerships in which sharing might occur.

Whereas I tended to put greater focus on the way we made the decisions, the youth seemed to expect that our decisions, given the philosophy of our study, would be created collaboratively. In other words, it was their expectation that they would be involved with any decisions and as such, they placed greater focus on the details of the decision. These processes complemented each other well. By the close of the study, each of us developed skills that would allow us to broaden our understanding of participation and the various group members built upon the knowing they acquired during our inquiry.

Leaving Your Adult Behind?

Members of a group moving into a cooperative inquiry need to spend time developing appropriate ways of addressing and navigating the differences in power, philosophy, and experience that *each* member brings to the group. At the outset, I thought that becoming a *peer* with the youth would be simple - I did not realize that I could not easily leave my *adulthood* behind. Initially I thought there might be ways to overcome or compensate for my adult role and that if I was unable to transcend this positioning it would affect the group's ability to be a collaborative inquiry group. Now, when forming a collaborative inquiry group with youth, I would worry less about fitting into a pre-defined notion of *peerhood* and concentrate instead on acknowledging the diversity of the various experiences that every group member, regardless of his or her age, brings to the study.

A common comment that the youth made when I asked how adults could improve the process of working with youth was "don't be all like an adult, like all I know what's best". Another co-researcher commented about the role of an adult "don't take over. There wasn't anytime when you took over. You basically let us talk and didn't say like no, no, no that's not right". Adults initiating research in partnership with youth need to acknowledge the co-subjectivity that each member shares. This understanding potentially allows the group to trust that despite coming to the inquiry with perhaps vast differences, the possibility exists to create an environment that respects and acknowledges the value in these differences. One co-researcher voiced the benefits of this interaction and describes her growth:

I feel a lot more comfortable now speaking about my concerns
and offering my opinions to a group. I feel no worries about

being respected. When we first began working together I was nervous and worried about what others would think - what if I screw-up? Will I get respect? You always need different kinds of people to relate to, the more personality differences, the better.

By working through dialogue and interaction to listen, appreciate, and value differences in opinion the group gains important growth and learning.

The majority of cooperative inquiries have involved adult co-researchers and there is little guidance in current collaborative inquiry writing about youth and adults collaborating within this methodology. As such, I turned to writing about youth participation for some guidelines and ways of adapting a collaborative inquiry to meet the needs of our group. It seemed appropriate for our work to embrace innovation within a collaborative inquiry methodology particularly since age, experience, and context may or may not meet the particular *requirements* of research methodologies.

From Here to Where?

As I consider the implications of this research and potential for extension of the study, three areas come to mind. Increasing the length of the study, looking further into the gendered nature of participation, and uncovering why some schools have greater success in developing and sustaining youth and adult partnerships.

First, ongoing research could include developing a longer term study, which would discover group development over a greater time. In this particular group, toward the end of the study it was apparent that they were beginning to grasp the idea of research and the methodology more fully. Extending the length of the study

would provide the opportunity for inquirers to broaden their research skills and would additionally allow participants to take on greater depth in working with the grade eight students.

Second, it would be interesting to study further why there are such significant gender lines within peer helping programs at the secondary school level in this school district and whether this distinction exists in other school districts. Participants in peer approaches within this school district are predominantly female students. Further research could seek to discover why this occurs and how to broaden participation by male students. Hart (1992) describes

most commonly...the degree of opportunity for a child to collaborate in the everyday management of family, schools, neighbourhood, and community groups is a reflection of the participatory opportunities for adults in that culture. The two are inevitably intertwined and so one must speak of encouraging participation by all, including children.

Intervening to improve children's participation is one means of improving the whole society. (p. 5)

If the ability of children to participate reflects the opportunities for participation in the greater society, what are the implications of so few male students choosing to belong to peer approaches? The benefits of being involved in this form of research are enhanced teaching skills, public speaking skills, research skills, and confidence. As the following co-researcher excerpts attest

I did expect this idea to turn out the way it did, but I didn't expect it to turn out so rewarding! I had so much fun and looked forward to class every week! (CR some final thoughts)

I am a lot more comfortable saying what's on my mind. At first I was nervous with everyone but once I got comfortable, I was ok. Unfortunately, I was also a bit scattered at times, and quite possibly annoying, but I felt that this was a very respectful group...I enjoyed my experience a lot, and the final product was similar to my expectations, but the process was way harder and different than I expected. (CR some final thoughts)

Given the experience of the study participants, it seems that there may be potential benefits of participation in the research and peer education that male students are not accessing. This leaves the question how do we improve involvement of male students within peer approaches, or alternatively, what programs are currently experiencing male participation, for example drama, sports, and would these offer better approaches for male participation?

Finally, certain schools within this school district have greater success in developing youth and adult partnerships. Links to this success appear to include building in time within the school curriculum, a philosophical understanding of the importance of youth and adult partnerships, along with a valuing of the concept of participation. Fielding (2001) notes that students seek a curriculum that accounts for the standpoints of others; he explains that students "whilst recognizing the necessity of teacher perspectives and priorities informing the programme they nonetheless urged the school to acknowledge and incorporate their perspectives as students; a negotiated curriculum and a negotiated pedagogy seemed to them to make more sense" (p. 128). As such, further research could examine the benefits, challenges, and implications of these partnerships in developing negotiated

pedagogy and in investigating the question: how do schools create environments that support or discourage participatory approaches?

Do You Have a Policy for That?

You would think that as one came to the end of a graduate degree in *policy and practice* that one might be able to whiz through this part of the conclusion. But, I'm pretty sure I might have missed the class(es) on policy. Perhaps a section on policy in a thesis should address a larger context. Given its relatively focused scope, what does this study have to offer policy? That is an important question given Rist's (1998) assertion that

the policy maker now confronts a veritable glut of differing (if not conflicting) research information.

A sobering but provocative counterintuitive logic is at work here: Increased personnel, greater allocation of resources, and growing sophistication of methods have not had the anticipated or demonstrated effect of greater clarity and understanding of policy issues. (p. 401)

Within the complicated influences that surround policy formulation, there are a few thoughts that come to mind when I consider how this research might influence policy. If one purpose of a policy is to guide practice, then this study offers several important points that would guide nurses or others wanting to work in partnership with youth. One aspect is to acknowledge that youth and adult partnerships require time. Developing the relationships that allow partnerships to succeed requires a commitment to allow an appropriate amount of time for group development and attention to process. If this knowledge is forefront then it will be considered an

element rather than a constraint of collaboration. In this same light, each group of participants is different and while some philosophical concepts can provide an overview of a model of collaboration, how each group adopts this will look different. Additionally, acknowledging and respecting the fluidity of each group is an important aspect. Similarly, the abilities of each group will differ as well. Working within the zone of proximal development of each group becomes an appropriate facet of designing collaborative inquiries and youth and adult partnerships.

Tidbits

These are some pieces of knowledge that I have learned about working with schools. Some might need to find it out through direct experience, but just in case someone might benefit from my experience, here are some thoughts about creating school-based projects:

- start your planning early - way before you could possibly imagine you need to - if working with schools start at minimum the year before you want to begin.
- figure out early on who your partners and stakeholders are
- talk to people about your research
- schools are busy places - go with the flow and plan for delays
- find out about the philosophies of the school board and schools
- learn about the school culture
- BRING FOOD - granola bars are "really boring" - wraps, juice, fruit, carrot sticks, and chocolate cake are great
- create and model respect
- be on time
- plan meeting times well ahead - as a group set aside your room and dates well ahead of time - find ways to remind others of meetings

Rules of the Game

A facet of participation worth mentioning here relates to *changing the rules*. For instance, youth, adults, and schools have been working in historically and contextually bound ways, with certain rules, that each internalizes and embodies. When one player wants to change the rules (e.g. discourses relating to youth, rethinking collaboration) it is important to let the other players know your intentions because they have been playing the game this way for a long time and may not share the same perceptions or hold the same understanding about what your work will entail.

In other words, do not assume that your goal of *empowerment*, changing the status quo, and creating inclusive environments are joint values shared by all the *players*. That is not to say that these intentions are without value, but rather that uncovering assumptions and negotiation are essential elements of developing collaborative processes. Some people may not share your thoughts and prefer to continue with current methods and patterns.

Influencing Peer Education

At the outset, when considering how work might influence policy it is important to acknowledge what programs can and cannot accomplish. In an era of outcomes and logic models, we need to rethink the ways of presenting the value of the process of peer education. So while there are potentially tremendous benefits for those working with peer education especially for the adults choosing to work in this area and the students participating in the program development and application,

Frankham (1998) offers an important criticism about actual participation by youth in program development:

The question is, does peer education genuinely put young people in control of both the content and processes of learning or are young people being 'facilitated' only to ape the adults who are really still in charge? (p. 191)

As such, when we construct our programs and frame our outcome objectives, when developing and evaluating youth and adult partnerships, and preparing sexual health education with youth, we need to acknowledge contradictions present in the difficult task of identifying achievable goals.

Although a goal of presenting sexual health for youth by youth may be to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STI) and unwanted pregnancies (UNESCO Bangkok, 2003), these outcomes are hard to link to an intervention and are likely an effect beyond the ability of a single-event program to accomplish. However, perhaps an alternative and equally valid outcome is that students and adults, peer educators and others alike, come to know whom to ask for help and seek assistance sooner rather than later when they have questions or concerns about their sexuality. Additionally, a further outcome could be to open communication around issues of sexuality, which is a readily apparent influence in our lives that is too often an inaccessible topic of discussion.

When describing the use of peer education as a method of instruction, Frankham (1998) offers a valuable caution that also requires careful consideration, given that peer educators are constructed and try to construct themselves as 'experts', there will be occasions on which they are

sought out as sources of advice on subjects that they cannot, with the best will in the world, be qualified to address. (p. 190)

Developing innovative outcomes that account for the boundaries of peer education, that is, what might or might not be accomplished by such programs, could serve to remove the pressure of placing the designation of *expert* onto peer educators, a designation that I did not experience any member of our research group hoping to attain. I would counter Frankham's assertion that the same critique exists for adults who on occasion "are sought out as sources of advice on subjects that they cannot, with the best will in the world, be qualified to address" (1998, p. 190).

There is however language in the literature and *facts* about peer education that requires some deconstruction. UNESCO Bangkok (2003) describes it as follows: "peer education, in its broadest sense, refers to a programme designed to train select members of any group of *equals*, (school, office, factory, etc.), to effect change among members of that same group" (emphasis added, p. 11). This language is problematic for peer approaches on several fronts. First, to claim the ability to effect change in another puts undue strain on adolescents wanting to participate in programs and sets up programs with a tremendously difficult, if not impossible task to achieve and measure. Second, while influence is always a possibility, change should not be the primary outcome of a program. Instead, the benefits of peer education are more likely to exist in the learning experiences of the participants and to provide an innovative alternative method of instruction. These outcomes are much easier to articulate within policy contexts.

Shifting Sexual Health Education

A final area of policy that requires shifting is the current state of sexual health education materials and programs available for educators in British Columbia. As one co-researcher aptly commented,

just looking at the curriculum guide, it was developed in 1987...I was born in 1987 and in 1987 we lived in a different world...there's options that exist that weren't there in 1987. There's questions that kids are going to ask that *nobody* in 1987 would have asked. There's gonna be answers that are gonna be different, but that's probably not outlined in the curriculum when kid A asks you this, answer *this*. But like there's gonna be more questions that might not fall into the bounds of the boundaries of like definitions, like about sexuality, about birth control options. (Co-researcher #3 - February 27, 2003).

In Central Vancouver Island, twenty-four percent of students in grades seven to twelve have had sexual intercourse ((McCreary Centre Society, 2004). Additionally "the likelihood of being sexually active increases with age, with 9% of youth 14 years and under, 29% of those 15 and 16 years old and 53% of students 17 and older having had sex" (McCreary Centre Society, 2004, p. 17). As such, it is important that adequate access to information is available for youth to help them make decisions that they deem appropriate for their own health. Furthermore, children, youth, families, and educators need opportunities to explore sexuality within the changing contexts that influence their lives. Within schools and health authorities,

it is imperative that policy approaches occur that acknowledge the vast array of influences that people experience while simultaneously providing opportunities to challenge the current lack of appropriate educational materials and programs within our province.

Conclusion

In my enthusiastic call for student participation, I want to acknowledge one critique of critical pedagogy. Orner (1992) tells us:

Feminist post-structuralist theories offer powerful tools for analyzing the mechanism of power locally and the possibilities for change. In education, the call for voice has most often been directed at students. Where are the multiple contradictory voices of teachers, writers, researchers, and administrators? The time has come to listen to those who have been asking others to speak. (p. 89)

Youth and adult partnerships offer a synergistic potential to assist a variety of people from differing backgrounds, value systems, and age groups to find different ways of addressing difficult challenges. It is true that in some contexts moving into a participatory approach cannot or will not occur, nor is a partnership always the most appropriate method of achieving a desired outcome. Levels of participation should transpire not as a requirement of participants, but rather as a possibility in which people may choose their own level of involvement. This would acknowledge joint ventures where participants acknowledge the diversity that each person brings to the relationship. Attempting to understand where and how power and resistance operate within this relationship is an essential process. It is not perfect, but it is worthwhile.

Partnerships are not a panacea; yet, many situations, including sexual health peer education, suit these relationships well. From personal experience I can attest to the learning, knowing, understanding, and fuller decision-making that results from stepping back from one's position to look at another's point of view. It seems appropriate to close this chapter with these words

young people can design and manage complex projects together if they feel some sense of ownership in them. If young people do not at least partially design the goals of the project themselves, they are unlikely to demonstrate the great competence they possess. Involvement fosters motivation, which fosters competence, which in turn fosters motivation for further projects. (Hart, 1992, p. 5)

Participatory approaches need not be a process of *empowerment* where the educator comes to liberate the lowly students. Instead collaboration offers an opportunity for each participant to gain from the experience. Involvement within a participatory inquiry creates a transformative experience of learning and development for the co-researchers in the study.

Literature Cited

- Badura, A. S., Millard, M., Peluso, E. A., & Ortman, N. (2000). Effects of peer education training on peer educators: Leadership, self-esteem, health knowledge, and health behaviours. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41(5), 471-478.
- Best, S., & Kellner, D. (1991). *Postmodern theory: Critical interrogations*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Brackett-Milburn, K. and Wilson, S. (2000). *Using peer education: Insights from a process evaluation*. *Health Education Research*. 15(1): 35-96.
- Bray, J. N., Lee, J., Smith, L. L., & Yorks, L. (2000). *Collaborative inquiry in practice: Action, reflection, and making meaning*. London: Sage Publications Inc.
- Breton, M. (1994). On the meaning of empowerment and empowerment-oriented social work practice. *Social work with groups*, 17(3), 5-21.
- Brooker, R. and Macdonald, D. (1999). "Did we hear you?" Issues of student voice in a curriculum innovation. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 31(1): 83-97.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (1987). *Curriculum guide 7-12: Family life education 7-12*. Victoria: Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Education Curriculum Development Branch.
- Cooper, D. (1994). Productive, relational, and everywhere? Conceptualising power and resistance within Foucauldian feminism. *Sociology*, 28(2), 435-454.
- Cowie, H. (1999). Peers helping peers: interventions, initiatives and insights. *Journal of Adolescence*, 22(433-436).
- Davies, B. (1992). Women's subjectivity and feminist stories. In C. Ellis & M. G. Flaherty (Eds.), *Investigating subjectivity: Research on lived experience* (pp. 256). London: Sage Publications.
- de Rosenroll, D. A. (1986). Peer helping program implementation, maintenance, and research issues. In *Peer programs for out-of-the-mainstream youth resources and training materials* (pp. 76). Victoria: Peer Resources.
- de Rosenroll, D. A. (1994). *Toward an operational definition of peer helping*. Retrieved June 20, 2002, from www.islandnet.com/~rcarr/peer.html
- Dunn, L., Ross, B., Caines, T., & Howorth, P. (1998). A School-based HIV/AIDS prevention education program: Outcomes of peer-led versus community health nurse-led interventions. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 7(4), 339-346.

- Ellsworth, E. (1992). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp. 90-119). New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.
- Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health (2000). The opportunity of adolescence: The health sector contribution. Ottawa, Health Canada: 55.
- Fielding, M. (2001). "Students as radical agents of change." *Journal of Educational Change* 2: 123-141.
- Freire, P. (2003). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th ed.). New York: Continuum International.
- Frankham, J. (1998). Peer education: the unauthorized version. *British Educational Research Journal*, 24(2), 179-193.
- Gore, J. (1992). What we can do for you! What can "we" do for "you"? Struggling over empowerment in critical and feminist pedagogy. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp. 54-73). New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.
- Gourlay, P. (1996). 'Sexuality education: fact, fiction & fallopian tubes'. In L. Laskey & C. Beavis (Eds.), *Schooling & Sexualities* (pp. 37-51). Geelong: Deakin Centre for Education and Change.
- Greene, M. (1994). Postmodernism and the crisis of representation. *English Education*, 4, 206-219.
- Hadley, A. (1998). *Getting real improving teenage sexual health* (No. Discussion Paper 43). London: The Fabian Society.
- Hart, R. A. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*: Unicef United Nations Children's Fund.
- Health Canada. (1994). *Canadian guidelines for sexual health education*. Ottawa: Laboratory Centre for Disease Control.
- Hedgpeath, E., & Helmich, J. (1996). *Principles and methods for effective education: Teaching about sexuality and HIV*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hedegaard, M. (1990). The zone of proximal development as basis for instruction. In L. C. Moll (Ed.), *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology* (pp. 439). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (2001). The practice of co-operative inquiry: Research 'with' rather than 'on' people. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research: Participant inquiry and practice* (pp. 512). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Inhelder, B, & Piaget, J. (1958). *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*. New York: Basic Books, 1958.
- Kincheloe, J. L. and S. R. Steinberg (1998). Students as researchers: Critical visions, emancipatory insights. *Students as researchers*. London, Falmer Press: 2-19.
- Kirby, D. (1992). School-based programs to reduce sexual risk-taking behaviors. *Journal of School Health*, 62(7), 280-287.
- Kirby, S., & McKenna, K. (1989). *Experience research social change: Methods from the margins*. Toronto: Garamond Press.
- Krensky, B. (2001). Going beyond zebra: A middle school and community-based arts organization collaborate for change. *Education and Urban Society* 33(4): 427-444.
- Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.
- Lather, P. (1992). Post-critical pedagogies: A feminist reading. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy* (pp. 120-137). New York: Routledge.
- Lather, P. (2001). Critical frames in educational research: Feminist and post-structural perspectives. *Theory Into Practice*. 31(2)(87-99
- Lupton, D. and J. Tulloch (1996). "All red in the face": Student's views on school-based HIV/AIDS and sexuality education." *The Editorial Board of the Sociological Review*: 252-271.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (second ed., pp. 163-187). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Macleod, A. (no date). *Message from the Principal*. Retrieved December 2003, from <http://www.fkss.ca/community/principal.html>
- McCreary Centre Society. (2004). *Healthy youth development Central Vancouver Island Region: Regional results from the 2003 adolescent survey III*. Burnaby: The McCreary Centre Society.

- Mills, S. (1997). *Discourse*. New York: Routledge.
- Moll, L. C., & Greenberg, J. B. (1990). The zone of proximal development as basis for instruction. In L. C. Moll (Ed.), *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology* (pp. 439). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Morgan, G. (1997). *Imaginization: New mind sets for seeing, organizing, and managing* (Paperback ed.). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Morris, M., & Muzychka, M. (2002). *Participatory research and action: A guide to becoming a researcher for social change*. Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.
- Mullett, J., Jung, K., & Hills, M. (2004). Being, becoming, and belonging. *Action Research*, 2(2), 145-165.
- Orner, M. (1992). Interrupting the calls. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy* (pp. 74-89). New York: Routledge.
- Peterson, A., & Lupton, D. (1996). *The New Public Health*. London: Sage Publications.
- Pipher, M. (1994). *Reviving Ophelia*. Toronto: Random House.
- Reason, P. (2003). Cooperative inquiry. In J. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Reason, P. (Ed.). (1994). *Participation in Human Inquiry*. London: Sage.
- Reason, P., & Rowan, J. (Eds.). (1981). *Human Inquiry: A sourcebook of new paradigm research*. Bath, Great Britain: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Richardson, L. (1991). Postmodern social theory: Representational practices. *Sociological Theory*, 9(2), 1991.
- Rist, R. C. (1998). Influencing the policy process with qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. London: Sage.
- Sawyer, R. G., & Pinciario, P. (1997). How peer education changed peer sexuality educators' self-esteem, personal development, and sexual behaviour. *Journal of American College Health*, 45(5), 211-218.
- Schick, C. (1994). The university as (con)text. In *The university as text* (pp. 63-84). Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

- Schutz, R. (2004). *Vygotsky & language acquisition*. Retrieved January, 2005, from <http://www.english.sk.com.br/sk-vygot.html>
- Shandler, S. (1999). *Ophelia Speaks*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Shiner, M. (1999). Defining peer education. *Journal of Adolescence*, 22, 555-566.
- Steinberg, S. R., & Kincheloe, J. L. (Eds.). (1998). *Students as researchers*. London: Falmer Press.
- Stringer, E. T. (1996). *Action research: A handbook for practitioners*. London: Sage Publications.
- Turner, G., & Shepherd, J. (1999). A method in search of a theory: peer education and health promotion. *Health Education Research*, 14(2), 235-247.
- UNESCO Bangkok. (2003). *Peer approaches in adolescent reproductive health education: Some lessons learned*. Bangkok: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Bangkok (Thailand).
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Walker, S. A. and Avis, M. (1999). *Common reasons why peer education fails*. Journal of Adolescence. 22: 573-577.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. J. (2001). *Discourse theory and practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Wink, J., & Putney, L. (2002). *A vision of Vygotsky*. Toronto: Allyn and Bacon.
- Valaitis, R. (2002). "They don't trust us; we're just kids." Views about community from predominantly female inner city youth. *Health care for women international*, 23, 248-266.
- Young, I. M. (1990a). The ideal of community and the politics of difference. In L. J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (pp. 300-323). New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc.
- Young, I. M. (1990b). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Young, I. M. (1994). Punishment, treatment, empowerment: Three approaches to policy for pregnant addicts. *Feminist Studies*, 20(1), 33-57.

Appendix

DATE	PURPOSE AND OUTCOME OF MEETING
February 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Duncan Public Health school-team discussions about potential research project ◆ Initial discussions with counsellor at Secondary School to see if study was potentially viable
May 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Met with student at the Secondary School interested in peer education in sexual health – offers support for researching the students as co-creators of sexual health education.
August 28, 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Duncan Public Health discussions about proposed research ◆ Pre-proposal outlining study developed ◆ Initial meeting with school board administration
September 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Met with thesis committee to discuss proposed study ◆ Met with secondary school contacts – counsellor and principal ◆ Met with middle school contacts – counsellor and teacher ◆ spoke with principal at middle school about the study
October 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Sample consent form developed for school board education committee ◆ Wrote initial draft of Application for Ethical Review of Human Research ◆ Met with SD #79 education committee re: proposed research titled “Youth As Researchers: Co-creating Sexual Health Education” - agreed in principle with proposed research and the education committee took the proposal to the next school board meeting
November 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Formalizing of proposal
December 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Received approval from the School District #79 for the research ◆ Thesis committee approved ethics application ◆ Met again with contacts at the secondary and middle schools ◆ Submitted Application for Ethical Review of Human Research to the University of Victoria Office of the Vice-President, Research. ◆ Met with peer counselling class at Secondary School to provide information about proposed research and to determine if interest in study exists. Approached by several students who thought they might be interested in participating.
January 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Research proposal accepted by thesis committee members ◆ Application for Ethical Review of Human Research approved ◆ Participant application forms distributed to peer counsellors – school requested this format for eliciting participants.
February 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ February 5- Initial overview and consent meeting with interested applicants & consent ◆ February 12 – Research Study commences

Appendix - Research Study Planning Outline