Talk in Blended-Space Speech Communities: An Exploration of Discursive Practices of a Professional Development Group

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TALK IN BLENDED-SPACE SPEECH COMMUNITIES:

AN EXPLORATION OF DISCURSIVE PRACTICES

OF A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GROUP

by

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B.S., Western Montana College, 1995

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Talk in Blended-Space Speech Communities:

An Exploration of Discursive Practices of a Professional Development Group

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May 26, 2011

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Talk in Blended-Space Speech Communities: An Exploration of Discursive Practices in a Professional Development Group

Thesis directed by Professors Daniel Liston and Anne DiPardo

This study is an exploration of alternative teacher professional development. While using symbolic interactionism for a research lens, it characterizes the discursive practices commonly found in formal, informal, and blended-space speech communities based on the talk within a leadership-development program comprised of five female, church-based small group leaders. The author designed, facilitated, and researched the discourse accounting for the formal professional development design and informal discursive practices which comprised this blended-space speech community. The author provides an overview of the leadership-development program design along with the sociolinguistic research methods. The analysis describes both above-the-sentence and turn-by-turn discursive practices for the group’s talk. This includes above-the-sentence discursive practices of managing the conversational floor, enacting discursive power, offering representations of reality, and maintaining appropriate relationships, as well as turn-by-turn practices of responding to questions, utilizing repetition, offering minimal responses, and overlapping turns. The author concludes that blended-space professional development, employing appropriate levels of formal and informal discursive practices, will support both professional and relational goals for teachers. Furthermore, the author suggests implications for designing, facilitating, and examining discourse for conversation-based professional development.
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CHAPTER 1 – THE PROBLEM

Imagine teaching a group of students without talking. It’s hard to envision such a thing. Teaching nearly always involves conveying concepts with words. But the talk that occurs in formal classrooms is often characterized by one person having a dominant role in the talking: the teacher (Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long 2003). As talk is such a crucial aspect of the teaching process, it is absolutely necessary for teachers to understand and skillfully utilize discursive practices that enhance student learning (Clark, 2001; Craig & Deretchin, 2009). Professional development that recognizes the importance and value of learning through talk is the focus of this study. This dissertation explores the potential of conversation-based teacher professional development by examining teacher talk within an alternative educational professional development program.

Researcher’s Perspective

Even as a child, I was interested in the role of the teacher in both traditional and alternative educational settings. As I became a volunteer teacher at my church and later obtained my teaching degree, I continued to focus on how to enhance learning by focusing on the teacher. I involved myself in professional organizations for educators, presented my experiences and ideas at conferences, and networked with likeminded teachers. These experiences represented the traditional professional options available within the school context and helped me clarify my research interests.

I have been involved in many programs intended to assist teachers. During my Masters program, I conducted a pre- and post- survey of teachers at one high school in order to evaluate if the teachers’ perceptions of school community changed throughout the course of the year. The high school teachers participated in monthly faculty meetings that included a professional development component. Although the survey was informative, it lacked insight into how, or if, the monthly professional development affected the teachers’ perceptions of community. I was left with many questions regarding the process and effectiveness of that year of professional development.
As a novice teacher, I had encountered issues that were not addressed neither my preservice education program, nor through the school-based professional development. To seek solutions, I sought to learn from the experiences of teachers I befriended. I found it fascinating to listen to these experienced teachers share stories of both positive and negative experiences with teaching and with students. At least once a week, a group of female teachers would casually gather in a classroom. Inevitably, the conversation turned to sharing challenges and successes they were facing with teaching. The "Fabulous Five," as we were sarcastically dubbed by others who worked in the building, developed both personal and professional relationships with each other. These women and I assumed responsibility for our professional development by engaging in conversation in order to use each other as resources to address challenges with students, teaching, and in the school. I thoroughly enjoyed learning with the Fabulous Five. From this experience, I gained an appreciation and attraction to friendship groups that have rich, generative conversation.

In another instance while teaching at this same high school, a group of teachers opted to form a reading group. The group was voluntary and self-organized. Each month the coordinator would select a journal article regarding some aspect of teaching. Group attendees were asked to read the article and come prepared for discussion. The intention of the group was to engage in teacher professional learning through discussion. The reading group only met for a few months before it disbanded due to lack of participation. Primarily, three teachers were involved: a librarian (me), a physics teacher, and a Spanish teacher. The coordinator of the group faced a huge challenge in selecting a professional journal article that would be meaningful or pertinent to this diverse group of teachers. From this experience, I learned that having some commonality of disciplinary content or other common ground should not be overlooked as an important component of sustainable teacher professional development groups.

During my doctoral program, I once again became a part of a conversation-based learning group. Our study group was comprised of six female first-year doctoral education students. We had
three courses in common as well as discomfort with our graduate school experience. We met in a home, ate dinner, and then sat around the kitchen table exploring ideas we did not understand from course readings or assignments. We also reviewed each other's writings, using the ideas presented in our individual papers to enhance our learning. For me, the conversations of this group were rich, generative, and meaningful, much like the experiences I had with the Fabulous Five. In this group, I felt safe to share my weaknesses and confusion. I was drawn to the collaborative nature of the learning that occurred in the weekly study group.

Orland-Barak (2009) refers to some of the graduate school class discussions she researched as closed and professional learning groups outside of the school as open. In closed groups, the participants have little or no control over the conversation. In open groups, the participants “freely raise any dilemmas and stories from the field as a starting point for the conversations” (Orland-Barak, 2009, p. 32). Our study group exemplified the more open, collaborative style of conversations. Participating in the study group further focused my interest in exploring the viability of a conversation-based group for ongoing teacher professional development.

I also experienced conversation-based learning groups outside of the traditional school structure by volunteering as a small-group leader at my local church. In the weekly small group, I selected a book to read and discuss chapter by chapter. Participation in the group was completely voluntary drawing people based on their interest in the book or the other people in the group. I have so enjoyed these small groups and the opportunity to explore ideas with friends that I have continued to lead small groups ever since. Due to my educational background, experience, and interest in small groups, I was appointed as director over the small-group ministry at our church. In one year, we went from eight small groups to over thirty with nearly 60 leaders and around 300 group members. Very quickly, I realized that leading a small group was a challenging endeavor for many of the leaders as most lacked formal training in teaching. I found myself consoling group leaders who had conversational challenges in their groups.
including conflict, silence, and domination. I needed to find some solutions to help these leaders learn to manage conversation within their small groups.

These various professional development and small group experiences also honed my interest in the role of conversation and the challenging task of managing conversation. At times, group conversations seemed to flow smoothly. The synergy of the group including sharing multiple perspectives and experiences often resulted in fresh ideas and awareness of learning. At other times, conversations could go horribly awry, with individuals feeling hurt or silenced. From both the positive and negative group conversational experiences, I learned about my colleagues and myself.

Most importantly, I became intrigued with the combination of groups and conversation and the potential for conversation-based teacher professional development. From my experiences and interactions with other teachers and small-group leaders, I knew that whether in schools or in alternative education settings there was an ongoing need for both professional development and for conversations with colleagues. Conversation-based professional development in which individuals could self-select groups and participate in an open format seemed a reasonable solution to address this need. As the director for a small-group program, I found an alternative education setting to be a good opportunity to explore conversation-based professional development characterized by openness, common ground, and voluntary participation.

To explore this problem in more depth, I will present information on church-based small groups, the realities and inadequacies of traditional inservice education, and the prospects and challenges of conversation-based professional development groups. Specifically, I will highlight the role of conversation in these three speech communities. The final section of the chapter presents an overview of the proposed research.
Church-Based Small Groups

Church-based small groups, or in short, small groups, as the term is used for this dissertation, represent a consistent group of individuals who gather voluntarily, have a regular schedule, meet on an ongoing basis, and are intended to foster social interaction. These small groups represent more informal speech communities. Paese (2009) advocates for the use of small groups as they “lend themselves to addressing a wide variety of approaches more thoroughly and at a greater depth than in other settings, resulting in a higher quality of learning for all” (p. xi). Some groups meet solely for social purposes such as building friendships while eating a meal, playing a game, or engaging in a hobby. These groups are held together by their focus on interpersonal relationships. Other groups may meet based on a common purpose such as reading a book or finding support through a challenging experience. Small groups can be formed organically as individuals find relationship and commonality and begin to meet routinely for a shared purpose. Small groups are also formed by larger organizations such as churches which organize, develop, and initiate group gatherings (Wuthnow, 1994).

Many places of worship, both Christian and Jewish, are utilizing small groups for spiritual education (Wuthnow, 1994). Indeed, the majority of formal small groups in America can be found within churches (Wuthnow, 1994b). Wuthnow (1994a, 1994b) uses the phrase “small-group movement” to underscore the pervasiveness of small groups within churches, both in America and around the world. Wuthnow (1994a) completed a national study of church-based and non-church small groups and ethnographic research on fourteen different small groups that were for Christian education. The national survey presented compelling evidence that within American society 40% of the population reported that they are involved in a small-group undertaking of some kind. Of those, 57% reported that their group “is part of the regular activities of a church or synagogue” (p. 92). In the last two decades a myriad of resources can be found in the religious section of book stores providing tips on small-group models, instructional guides, and other resources for churches and small-group leaders.
Church-based small groups all have one thing in common: purposeful, conversation-based interaction. Since conversation is the commonality, it is prudent for small-group leadership to understand better the role of conversation and how conversation is managed in these groups. Within small-group meetings, most leaders use discussion as the chief instructional method (Wuthnow, 1994b). In a national survey in which people were asked to describe groups in which they participate, 60% used the term “discussion group” (Wuthnow, 1994b, p. 65). While this study describes the types and prevalence of small groups, little data were provided on the conversation traits or patterns that may have been common in the formal groups. Understanding how groups engage in conversation in formal small groups is an area that warrants further exploration.

I met individually with several of my church’s small-group leaders to invite them to participate in a leadership development program that would be based on a conversation-based professional development model designed to enhance their understanding of the role of conversation within small groups. I had four women small-group leaders volunteer to be a part of the professional development program.

Knowing I would have an all-female group, I explored group conversational practices for women. The role of conversation and conversation management of all-female friendship groups was the research focus for Jennifer Coates (1996). She identified conversational practices common to all-female friendship groups regardless of the women’s ages or purpose for their group. Analysis of group conversations revealed common characteristics for how women manage conversation, tell stories, and constructed and maintain their friendships. Coates’ research provides detailed description of conversation patterns within informal, small groups of friends. From Coates’ research, insight is provided into informal group conversation, but it will be necessary to understand what is known about the role of conversation and conversation management within more formal small groups.
Donahue and Robinson (2002) advised that a small-group ministry must include a strong leadership team. Ill-equipped leaders and a lack of leadership development are the most frequently expressed reasons for problems and failures of small-group ministries (Donahue & Robinson, 2002; George, 1997; Gorman, 2002; Wuthnow, 1994a). The small-group leaders I directed had many responsibilities: they had to gather a group and form relationships, be responsible for fostering individual learning, and lead the group in community service endeavors. Although the small-group leaders had multiple responsibilities, for many, the role of teacher was their primary function. The small-group leaders I oversaw were all volunteers, most of whom have no formal teacher preparation. Of the nearly sixty group leaders, only three were professional teachers, myself included. As these small-group leaders carried a large responsibility for the education of the church, it was evident that more leadership development was needed.

Since my intention was to explore alternative, conversation-based models of teacher professional development, it was also important for me to focus on small-group leaders with teaching responsibilities. The women who volunteered to be part of the study all enacted a teacher role as the groups they led utilized a text-based curriculum rather than serving purely social functions. Unlike school education settings with paid, professionally trained teachers, church-based small-group leadership may be clergy, but most are volunteers (Wuthnow, 1994). Many times in churches, volunteers are solicited into service and given little or no development prior to becoming a small group leader (Everist, 2002). As volunteers, small-group leaders most likely have very diverse knowledge and skills from a wide array of industries. It is unlikely that the small-group leaders will have formal teacher education.

Because of my background in education, I know that the teacher holds a very important role in the classroom. The teacher influences the learning environment, selects what is taught and studied, and determines the process through which teaching transpires. If the teacher is vital in a school classroom,
then I contend that small-group leaders enacting the teaching role are also vital to the small group. Just like teachers, what the volunteer leaders do is of vital importance in shaping the small group; therefore, it is necessary for leaders to engage in some form of professional development to become more proficient and successful at utilizing teaching practices that will foster learning experiences. An examination of the field of teacher professional development will be presented next to understand possible best practices for ongoing, conversation-based teacher professional development that may support the teaching role of small-group leaders.

**Traditional Teacher Professional Development**

Traditional professional development offerings are often designed to help teachers become better practitioners. If a teacher needed to improve lesson planning, inservice workshops were devised to deliver the “tips and tricks” of more effective lesson planning. By simply attending these workshops and hearing the information, teachers were expected to transform the quality of their teaching. Traditional teacher professional development can be characterized as more formal speech communities in which an authority-figure closely controls the interaction.

Professional development for teachers has come under criticism the past several decades (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Craig & Deretchin, 2009; Lord, 1994; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Wilson & Berne, 1999). The one-day workshop context of professional development has been unable to transform teaching practices as effectively as contemporary professional development models that center on building community, sustaining conversations, and situating the learning around teachers’ own practice (Kooy, 2009). Yet workshops are still a staple of continuing professional development for teachers (Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). Kooy (2009) states “although exemplary and highly effective models of teacher learning exist, the ‘one-shot’ workshop remains the mainstay of most professional ‘learning’ for teachers—in spite of a history of its ineffectiveness in translating the knowledge transmitted into school practice” (p.
In my experience at church, Sunday school teachers and small-group leaders are subjected to the same type of workshops with similar lack of results.

One of the primary reasons these workshops are inadequate in transforming teaching is because they are often disconnected from individual teachers’ practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Clark, 2001). The one-shot workshops I have attended over the years, as a public school teacher and a small-group leader within the church, were no different. These workshops were often a “one-size-fits-all approach” (Clark, 2001, p. 5); the information did not pertain to a specific age, gender, culture, or content area. This generalized approach was a result of the widely diverse teacher population comprising the audience and the speaker’s lecture-based approach. Sometimes the speaker was entertaining, delivering tidbits of techniques for “managing” students. Often, the techniques were not applicable to everyone in the audience. After many workshops of this nature, I thought: “That was interesting. Wonder if I will ever use any of it?”

Ball and Cohen (1999) dubbed these one-shot, decontextualized workshops the “professional equivalent of yo-yo dieting” (p. 4). If teachers are deemed lacking in an area, a workshop is devised to “fix what is wrong with teachers” (Clark, 2001, p. 5). All you need to do is show up to become a better teacher. Just like in yo-yo dieting, once a teacher is removed from the workshop she quickly returns to past practices, completely untransformed. Understanding the role of talk in traditional inservice education may shed light on participants’ lack of satisfaction and therefore engagement. The talk in traditional professional development appears to be one-sided. The expert guest speaker lectures while the attending teachers listen. There is limited, if any, opportunity to ask questions, engage in dialogue, or share experiences. The guest lecturer is considered the authority, holder, and dispenser of knowledge. The guest lecturer maintains complete control over who talks, when talking occurs, and for how long; in fact the workshops in this model are considered non-dialogue (Fiszer, 2004). This model of
talk within the formal professional development workshop is nearly opposite of the collaborative talk described by Coates’ informal friendship groups.

**Alternative Teacher Professional Development**

There is little argument that traditional professional development is in need of reform. Consequently, along with criticisms of traditional professional development, new visions of reform-based professional development have been proposed (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Clark, 2001; Craig & Deretchin, 2009; Putnam & Borko, 1997, 2000; Wilson & Berne, 1999). While most agree that teachers need professional development, there has only been limited evidentiary knowledge about how teachers should learn, what teachers should learn, and if the professional development has any significant impact on improving the quality of teaching (Wilson & Berne, 1999).

Through the work of educational researchers in the arena of professional development, the knowledgebase and understanding of effective professional development is growing. Wilson and Berne (1999) detailed several professional development programs that were considered effective and were focused on researching teacher learning. Wilson and Berne (1999) determined that successful models of professional development utilize discourse among teachers as a vital learning activity. Additionally, Ball and Cohen (1999) advocate for a “practice-based theory of professional education” (p. 3) in which “continuing thoughtful discussion among learners and teachers is an essential element of any serious education, because it is the chief vehicle for analysis, criticism, and communication of ideas, practices and values” (p. 13). Orland-Barak (2009) advocates for “programs that identify with constructivist, collaborative approaches [that] emphasize the development of the teacher as professional” (p. 25). Teacher small groups have formed in response to the need for alternative professional development that is conversationally-based (Clark 2001; Craig & Deretchin, 2009).

Teacher study groups have been defined as "voluntary groups of teachers who meet regularly to pose and pursue teaching problems together and to provide intellectual and moral support to one
another” (Clark, 2001, p. 6). In the past decade, a group of researchers has examined the efficacy of teacher study groups as an alternative model of conversation-based professional development (Clark, 2001). In an edited volume, Clark presents research on variations of teacher study groups and constructs a theory that teachers learn through conversations with colleagues. Clark’s compiled research presents evidence that conversation-based teacher groups were a viable means for advancing teacher learning. Clark demonstrates that teacher study groups create a context in which teacher learning occurs, therefore establishing that these groups are a viable form of teacher professional development. The research describes features of various groups, topics of conversation, composition of participants, the role of the group facilitator, and how the groups were connected with the broader school context. The speech community of a teacher study group may represent a blended space in which both formal and informal practices occur.

Craig & Deretchin (2009) compiled research on teacher study groups used within inservice education and preservice education to reveal “how teachers experience professional development in book clubs, critical friends groups, and teacher research groups” (p. xiv). This edited volume focused on the role of community and the perceived value of the small-group conversation-based professional development for the teachers.

Unfortunately, the studies were very limited in their examination of conversational management and patterns. With the talk of informal, friendship groups at one end of the spectrum and formal, lecture-style traditional inservice education at the other end, the talk of teacher study groups logically should fall somewhere in the middle. The characteristics of talk in this blended space needs to be delineated and understood in order to more effectively design and participate in conversation-based teacher professional development groups. Teacher study groups, while deemed effective alternative professional development, are difficult to find as a common, ongoing part of the public school system (Clark, 2001). From what I’ve observed and read, most teacher study groups are coordinated by
academic researchers as a part of preservice teacher education or graduate courses. Due to the scarcity of teacher study groups within the formal school context, I looked to the alternative education context of church-based small groups to explore the nature of talk within a blended space.

**Focal Group**

In my path toward obtaining a PhD in Educational Psychology, I had a great opportunity to examine professional development conversation in a blended space: church-based small groups. Within churches there exists a rich context for examining how people use conversation to learn within small discussion groups. As presented in the previous section, small groups are not a new phenomenon within churches; in fact, they have been a part of Christian practice since early biblical times (Icenogle, 1994). Although small groups are purported to be a part of Christianity from its beginnings, the small-group movement experienced a resurgence during the mid-twentieth century: “Congregations independent and mainline, charismatic and liturgical, Catholic and Protestant began to embrace groups” (Arnold, 2004, p. 10). At my local church, I was invited to become a part of the leadership for a Christian education program utilizing small groups. Through this experience, I quickly realized that most of the small-group leaders were struggling with how to achieve consistently good conversations in their groups. I also realized that this would be an excellent context in which to explore an alternative professional development context in which conversation-based small groups were common practice.

The proposed focal group was developed as a pilot project to meet the leadership development needs. This leadership development program small group occurred within an alternative educational context, but focused on professional development to equip leaders with knowledge of teaching in a small group. I used this context to examine the characteristics of talk in the apparent blended space between informal friendship groups and the more formal traditional inservice education.

In brief, four women, rural small-group leaders and I (researcher/facilitator), formed the group that is the focal of this study in the Fall of 2006. We met for a series of eight times over four months for
two-hour sessions focusing on learning how to personally engage in deliberation as well as how to use conversation within small groups. There were five design concepts I utilized for the focal group: 1) building community (Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2001), 2) fostering conversation as the chief vehicle for learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Clark, 2001; Grossman et al. 2001; Wilson & Berne, 1999), 3) establishing some common ground (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Clark, 2001), 4) allowing voluntary participation (Clark, 2001), and 5) maintaining small group size (Clark, 2001). These five features derived from other successful formal professional development programs provided a framework for the design, curriculum, and pedagogy of the leadership development program and will be explained in detail in Chapter 3.

As the group facilitator, I both participated in the group and researched members’ conversational patterns. Throughout the study group meetings, the leaders participated in several activities designed to explore the use of conversation and deliberation within small groups. Initially, the focal group activities centered on building a community of learners (Grossman et al., 2001) by sharing personal information about becoming a small-group leader, current small-group leadership experiences, and trust-building exercises. Other activities allowed the participants to explore a variety of discussion formats that can be used with small groups.

The importance of interpersonal communications rested at the heart of both the design and the analysis of the focal group. Conversation not only served as the method of instruction within the study group but it also served as part of the content of the instruction. The focal group discussions or, more plainly, their talk, comprised the basis for the analysis. The design of this dissertation represents a synthesis of my research of literature related to interaction and talk (detailed in Chapter 2), features of effective professional development programs (detailed in Chapter 3), and a need to provide leadership development opportunities specifically for small-group leaders with teaching responsibilities.

The journey with the participating small-group leaders was very exciting. Each one of us brought to the group specific knowledge about leading small groups, knowledge of our specific small-group
contexts and students, and knowledge of who we were as small-group leaders. As we engaged in community-building and conversation-based activities, we were exposed to multiple perspectives and alternative ways of teaching which Wilson and Berne (1999) indicate are vital to helping teachers develop as professionals. The small-group movement hosted in America’s churches provided a rich context for exploring the characteristics of talk in the blended space of alternative professional development groups. In the next chapter, I present the concepts which provide the theoretical foundation for looking at talk within formal and informal speech communities.
CHAPTER 2 – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As I have navigated the world of graduate school, exploring different courses related to education psychology, I continued to examine the use of talk within groups of teachers. I became more and more interested in the social interaction of teachers and consequently found myself dabbling in the area of social psychology as presented in the graduate courses I completed in my campus’s sociology department. It was within the realm of social psychology that I truly found a theoretical home for my understanding of the world. More specifically, it was within the world of social psychology that I found a theoretical basis for examining teachers’ talk in the blended space identified in Chapter 1.

I used the lens of social psychology, and specifically a vein of social psychology called symbolic interactionism, to explore the nature of talk within the blended space that served as the context for the focal group. Symbolic interactionism (SI) became a means by which twentieth-century American intellectuals attempted to “conceptualize group life in the making,” specifically, “people not only engage in the world in enacted, purposive, or meaningful ways, but in terms that achieve meaning because of the symbolic or linguistic communities in which particular groups of humans are embedded” (Prus, 2003, pp. 31-32). These roots are primarily based on the work of George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. House (1977) summarized the view of SI: “To understand social life is to understand the processes through which individuals interpret situations and construct their actions with respect to one another.” In order to understand humans in social situations, five areas need to be attended to: 1) actors, 2) interaction, 3) object, 4) activity, and 5) consideration. In other words, according to SI, to understand the world, researchers need to examine how humans form meaning within specific social situations by indicating their meaning-making to one another. This meaning-making is mostly accomplished through conversation.

1 This conceptual framework and research questions were developed after the leadership development program and data collection period concluded.
SI has divided traditions with researchers enacting positivist research practices as well as interpretivist research practices. Blumer, a student of Mead, strengthened the interpretivist tradition which has come to focus on nine primary concepts as summarized by the editors of the *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism* (2009): 1) mind, 2) self, 3) society, 4) symbols, objects, and meanings, 5) interaction, 6) motives, 7) identity, 8) role, and 9) social organization. Any one of these topics would be an expansive undertaking to examine for a social group. I have chosen to focus on the fifth category, “interaction,” for this research endeavor. McCall (2003) describes interaction as “at least two agents acting upon one another” (p. 327). The focus of SI studies on interaction is dedicated to understanding “who are we and what are we doing” (p. 329). To most effectively do this style of research, the researcher must become a participant in the group, a part of the “we.” To this end, participant observation is a key methodology of SI studies. The methods will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Additionally, SI researchers also made prolific use of interdisciplinary research methods that examined means of human communication such as sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, interviewing, and life histories (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003). Because language is the primary means by which humans communicate their interpretations, motivations, and sense of the situation, it is essential to examine language in use (Maynard & Clayman, 2003).

The use of language within social situations or discourse analysis (DA) is another expansive research arena. Gee, Michaels, & O’Connor (1992) articulate DA as any study that “may be concerned with any part of the human experience touched on or constituted by discourse” (p. 228). Discourse analysis may be used by various disciplines, but one feature is consistent: “it is important to present a view of discourse in which the social contexts are centrally integrated” (p. 234). Based on this premise, discourse analysis is a good fit with symbolic interactionism, which is interested in examining the social interaction as it is achieved by the use of discourse (talk).
In this chapter, I will present the key concepts that will serve as boundaries in which to situate my research. I will offer concepts regarding symbolic interactionism and talk. It is vital that both the social context (speech community) and the language-in-use (discursive practices) are addressed.

**Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic Interactionism is a theoretical lens used to examine the interactions of people within specific social situations. For this study, the specific social situation is the women who comprise the focal group and the structured leadership development program. To outline the SI approach, I will first present some of the key terminology of SI. *Actor* is the term Blumer (1969) used to identify the individuals engaged in interaction within a specific social situation. Symbolic interactionism is based on a premise that individuals are engaged in an interpretive process whenever a person interacts with others. Essentially, “the actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meaning in light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action” (Blumer, 1969, p. 5). Because of this viewpoint, it is necessary to examine the actors, more commonly known in educational research as *participants*, and their interactions. It is only through an examination of their interactions that an understanding can be gleaned regarding the knowledge and experiences through which a participant is filtering her interpretations. For example, imagine two people sitting at a table in a restaurant. At this point, we know little about the individuals. Are they mother and daughter meeting for lunch? Or a novice teacher and experienced teacher? The following exchange is then heard:

Older woman: This is a copy of your title paperwork. Did you have a chance to look through it? Are there any questions?
Younger woman: I’ve marked a few things I have questions about. What does...

Once we are able to hear the conversation, it becomes evident that one is a realtor and the other is a homebuyer. Through the substance of their conversation we learn that the older woman is knowledgeable and experienced enough with the paperwork to address questions from the younger woman. The younger woman reveals that she recognizes the older woman’s expertise. Through their
interaction, they come to a shared meaning of the situation and of particular points within the paperwork being discussed.

For my study, the actors, which I refer to as participants, are the small-group leaders and I. I enact four separate roles within this group: a small-group leader, group facilitator, leadership professional development designer, and researcher. Symbolic interactionism encourages researchers to not only engage in participant observation, but to put oneself in the role of those being studied (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003). These roles and the other participants will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters.

The second key term of SI is interaction. Interaction is an exchange between at least two people. According to this theory, the exchange is accomplished through symbols. Symbols are primarily language use and gesture (visible action). When a facilitator tells a group “give me your attention,” the others in the room also respond through either words or gesture. Some may sit down, quit talking, and focus their eyes on the facilitator. Others may continue in their conversations seemingly ignoring the request. From observing this interaction, we can learn several things about those involved and how they are interpreting the situation.

McCall (2003) distinguishes two categories of interaction that are noteworthy: gathering-based interaction and organization-based interaction. Gathering-based interaction occurs anytime a group of people engage in discourse within a social activity; these gatherings can occur as a subset of a larger organization. Organization-based interactions reveal enduring and possibly institutional social systems. My study will focus on gathering-based interaction, one that is a subset of a larger organization. My research is interested in the nature of talk within the blended space of a professional development program for small group leaders from one educational organization.

Gathering-based interaction has several distinctive features as outlined by McCall (2003) that are pertinent to describing the focal group: 1) face-to-face modes of communication; 2) direct, person-
to-person communication; 3) single focus of attention in which all participants are engaged; 4) interactions reflect emergent rather than routine patterns; and 5) interaction is directed so that “the entire process of assigning meaning becomes organized in relation to some purpose or aim of one or more participants” (p. 332). Additionally, McCall distinguishes levels of interaction: person, dyad, group, organization, community, and social movement. The research of the focal group examined the interaction (talk) at the group level. I examined the discourse (talk) of the group as it is the primary lens of interaction.

The primary interaction of the focal group is face-to-face conversation. The professional development group was designed to encourage face-to-face conversation about professional matters as well as encourage the women to share life experiences and areas of knowledge related to teaching in small groups. To this end, an analysis of the turn-by-turn conversation is crucial to understanding the nature of talk in the blended space of the focal group. The means of analysis will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter on methodology.

Object is another area SI attends to: defined as “anything that can be indicated, anything that is pointed to or referred to” (Blumer, 1969, p. 10). Symbolic interactionism maintains a premise that the world is composed of objects that groups of people indicate to and instill meaning in. Objects can be classified into three categories: physical objects, social objects, and abstract objects. Physical objects refer to items such as computers, books, or flowers. Social objects refer to people’s social roles such as student, teacher, mother, daughter, pastor, or friend. Abstract objects refer to ideas or principles such as compassion, community, morals, values, doctrine, or religion. Understanding the nature of objects within a group interaction is essential. As participants interact they reveal meanings they have for indicated objects. “This meaning sets the way in which he sees the object, the way in which he is prepared to act toward it, and the way in which he is ready to talk about it” (Blumer, 1969, p. 11). As groups engage in discussion they reveal the meaning they have for certain objects. They also reveal if
they have mutual meanings for objects. The mutuality of meanings is revealed through examining group discourse. For the focal group, conversation was used to jointly construct meaning for several concepts including characteristics of good and bad conversation in small groups, definition and role of community within a small group, and the use of deliberation within small groups. Identifying these objects will assist in establishing the context within which the group is interacting. These objects are described as a part of the professional development program in Chapter 3.

Symbolic interactionism is also based on the premise that “human groups or society exists in action and must be seen in terms of action” (Blumer, 1969, p. 6). Activity is action to which a group of people are engaged. Activities are the outcome of joint action by a group of people. It is necessary to recognize the nature of the social action within which individuals and groups of people are engaged. Actors, interaction, and objects all occur within social activities. The meaning actors give to an activity and the ways in which they interact may be shaped by the activity. By examining these features, SI is able to reveal the process by which people act toward themselves, others, and situations.

The primary activity for the focal study group was an eight-session professional development series that I developed based on a teacher study group model (Clark, 2001). One cannot understand the nature of the talk for the focal group without attending to key features of their primary activity: conversation-based professional development. The activity of the focal group was based on voluntary participation, an expectation that the participants would engage in discussions, and an expectation that the group would be small, only including five participants. The professional development program is detailed in Chapter 3 to establish the context in which the group’s conversation occurred.

The final key term of SI is consideration. Consideration refers to “human being interaction with one another have to take account of what each other is doing or is about to do: they are forced to direct their own conduct or handle their situation in terms of what they take into account” (Blumer, 1969, p. 8). All meaning is created through social situations, as a person takes into consideration her own
knowledge, experiences, and emotions, and well as those of others. Those others may be directly involved in the interaction. In these cases, as a person acts she communicates her intentions, understandings, and interpretations of the objects or concepts at hand. Mills (2003) examines considerations with her book *Gender and Politeness*. She contends that “it is only participants in specific communities of practice who are competent to judge whether a language item or phrase is polite for them or not” (p. 2). Examining politeness within a group would fall within the concept of considerations. Through examining the face-to-face talk of the focal group, I address their consideration and how it characterizes the nature of the group’s talk within a blended space.

Symbolic interactionism is premised on a belief that individuals take into account others when engaging in social interaction. These considerations are an unknown quality of a group, unlike the other features discussed above. The activities can be planned. The participants can be selected and their roles defined. The objects to be studied can be predetermined. Face-to-face conversation-based interaction can be encouraged. Yet, with all the perfect planning in place, in designing a professional development, or any other group, it would be impossible for anyone to predetermine how a group of individuals will interact with respect to one another. This is the unknown nature of interaction within teacher study groups and what I am calling the blended space. By examining how the participants in the focal group show their consideration to one another, a better understanding of the nature of their talk will become evident. Through their considerations and interactions, revealed in their talk, we can explore how they make meaning of their professional work and personal lives within blended spaces that exist between formal professional development and informal friendship groups.

Teacher study groups, as described in the previous chapter, have become an effective alternative form of professional development (Clark, 2001). These study groups are conversation-based, involve a specific group of teachers, and often occur outside the mandated professional development programs of schools (Clark, 2001). There is much that is unclear about the nature of talk within teacher
study groups. Through this research, I endeavored to understand the nature of the talk of one group utilizing a teacher study group professional development model. Through a SI framework, I examined the discourse of the group in hopes of better understanding the nature of talk within the blended space of conversation-based teacher professional development. SI provides an underlying framework for what to examine and how to examine a group’s interaction including talk. SI necessitates understanding the talk of a group, as talk is the primary means of interaction. In the next section, I present the theoretical underpinnings for analyzing talk of groups.

**Talk**

The previous section detailed the key influences I gleaned from research in social sociology. This section will detail the key influences from my exposure to the field of communications. To follow my interest regarding talk in teacher study groups, I was greatly influenced by graduate courses I took in my campus’s communication department. Communication is a broad academic field, so I will limit this section to relevant literature that helped me characterize the nature of talk along the continuum between formal and informal groups.

Due to my interest in the language used in interaction found within teacher study groups, I focused on face-to-face spoken discourse, hereafter referred to as “talk.” As I have chosen to examine the talk of the group, discourse analysis is an appropriate avenue for the examination of spoken discourse as DA is intended “to make explicit what normally gets taken for granted; it is also to show what talking accomplishes in people’s lives” (Cameron, 2001, p. 7). Discourse analysts attend not only to what people say, but also to how they say it. As DA is such a broad term, it will be necessary for me to refine which aspects of discourse I examined and the methodologies used. The methodology for my examination of the talk of the focal group is presented in Chapter 4.

Many researchers of spoken discourse employ the following premise: “All talk is shaped by the context in which it is produced” (Cameron, 2001, p. 20). I have chosen to identify the context based on a
continuum of formality of the speech community. Within various types and contexts of groups “individuals acquire beliefs about appropriate ways to speak and interpret” (p. 35); Tracy (2002, following Hymes, 1972) defines groups as speech communities which can be “professional, school, work, or recreational groups” (p. 35). These speech communities can be characterized based on their discursive practices.

In designing my study, I examined Jenifer Coates’ work titled Women Talk (1996), as her focal groups were also comprised of women. Coates uses sociolinguistic approaches to study the talk of informal groups and how they enact friendship. Coates’ work drew my attention to the field and methodologies of sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistic researchers examine the detailed nuances of spoken language as it occurs within the interaction of specific social situations. The context Coates examines is all-female, informal, friendship groups. Coates uses her analysis of the women’s talk to define the concept of friendship, but also to make explicit conversational moves that were commonly used within her groups. Deborah Tannen (2005, 2007) is also a sociolinguist who studies informal friendship groups; however, her groups are mixed-gender and the focus of her research is to understand individual conversational style that occurs within friendly conversation. Both of these sociolinguists detail conversational strategies or moves that were identified as they examined the talk of their informal groups. The label of friendship used by both of these researchers implies that the participants are acting with positive regard or cordiality with considerate interactions.

Regardless of the formality or friendliness of the group, there will be ways in which a group’s talk makes use of specific conversational strategies, moves, or patterns. Tracy (2002) refers to these conversational patterns as discursive practices: “discursive practices are talk activities that people do” (p. 21). Discursive practices can refer to taking turns; asking questions and receiving responses; how people are addressed; and the structure, content and style of narratives (Tracy, 2002). The concept of discursive practices is based on the central assumption that “ordinary talk is a highly organized, ordered
phenomenon” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 13). As groups engage in conversation they work to keep the talk organized and orderly. Deviations from the conversational rules, norms, or expectations often result in disruptions that require conversational repairs. Repairs will be discussed in a later section. In the sections that follow I will present literature that examines the discursive practices found in formal and informal speech communities.

**Speech Communities**

Speech communities (Tracy, 2002), also called communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and the speech situation (Cameron, 2001), is a concept used to identify the context in which people interact. Tracy (2002) theorizes that it is important to recognize the speech community and the associated discursive practices because “[communicators] talk to specific others on particular occasions for specific purposes” (p. 27). In this manner, “they are choice-making, planning agents, tailoring their communication for particular settings” (Tracy, 2002, p. 27). The setting is a describable aspect that shapes the talk. Those who are able to adeptly follow the rules of communication for a particular speech community are deemed to have communicative competence (Cameron, 2001). People not only need to develop discursive practices but also need to know within which speech communities those discursive practices are regarded as appropriate.

I have chosen to explore the speech community of an alternative professional development leadership group. It is unclear what the acceptable discursive practices may be; however, outlining discursive practices based on the degree of communicative structure will help to frame the parameters of the research and provide a basis upon which to describe the blended space that developed through the design of the focal group.

In the two sections that follow, I present generalized discursive practices of formal and informal speech communities that occur in what Cameron (2001) describes as “above the sentence” (p. 11) and turn-by-turn discursive practices. Formal speech communities have more structured communications.
Institutions, such as churches, schools, and hospitals, and courtrooms each represent formal speech communities. Informal speech communities have less or little planned structure for their communications. A group of friends meeting for coffee or dinner represent informal speech communities.

Above-the-sentence practices refer to “patterns in units which are larger, more extended, than one sentence” (Cameron, 2001, p. 11). These practices are alluded to by examining individual turns, however, a larger unit of talk must be examined to discover, understand, and theorize regarding the discursive practices. For this dissertation, I have chosen to focus on four above-the-sentence discursive practices: 1) managing the conversational floor, 2) enacting discursive power, 3) offering representations of realities, and 4) extending consideration. Turn-by-turn discursive practices can be seen by examining turns in sequence. I will also present as a part of this chapter, turn-by-turn discursive practices as they are commonly defined within formal and informal speech communities including 1) responding to questions, 2) utilizing repetition, 3) offering minimal responses, and 4) overlapping turns.

**Above-the-sentence practices.**

The table below summarizes the key features of the above-the-sentence practices for formal and informal speech communities. Relevant research will be presented to conceptualize each above-the-sentence practices. The table will serve as a means of framing an understanding of the discursive practices and characterization of the blended space enacted by the focal group. I devised the table from a synthesis of the literature. While most of the terms are derived from literature, I added terminology to bring consistency to the formality continuum for the forth category of Maintaining Appropriate Relationship. The description of the focal group’s nature of talk and speech communities discursive practices will be presented in the analysis in Chapters 5 and 6.
Table 2.1

*Above-the-sentence Discursive Practices as Continuum of Formality*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managing the Conversational Floor</th>
<th>Formal: “Institutional” Courtroom, Classroom</th>
<th>Blended Space: Focal Group</th>
<th>Informal: “Friendship” Dinner party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singular:</strong> Only one person at a time has the right/obligation to the conversational space</td>
<td><strong>Collaborative:</strong> All speakers have simultaneous and equal access to the conversational space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asymmetrical Talk:</strong> One person/position has designated &amp; legitimized responsibility &amp; obligation over talk to determine who can talk, when, and on what topics</td>
<td><strong>Symmetrical Talk:</strong> Speakers are regarded as equals and will avoid playing the expert in order to maintain the equality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competing:</strong> Speakers use persuasion to convince listeners of their reality as well as attempt to discredit speakers voicing an alternative account</td>
<td><strong>Co-Constructed:</strong> Reality is co-constructed through the dynamic interaction of the speakers and listeners and can result in contradictory statements, yet be accepted by all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relational Aloofness:</strong> Talk maintains roles by using technical language; being task-oriented takes highest priority</td>
<td><strong>Relational Solidarity:</strong> Talk maintains solidarity through consideration, and sensitivity; maintaining relationships takes highest priority</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first above-the-sentence discursive practice is the concept of managing the conversational floor. “Controlling the conversational floor—the place and space for talk—in an appropriate manner is a task everybody must manage” (Tracy, 2002, p. 113). Managing the conversational floor can be viewed within the formality continuum, going from a singular floor on the far left to a collaborative floor on the far right. When only one person has the authority, responsibility and obligation to speak, researchers refer to it as a singular floor. When “the floor is thought of as being open to all participants simultaneously” it is called a collaborative floor (Coates, 1996, p. 134).
The speech communities characterized by a singular conversational floor tend to be present in formal situations, such as a courtroom, classroom, or church service. People learn the appropriate discursive practices for speaking in these singular floor situations. From young ages, people develop singular floor communicative competence. Mothers tell their children to wait your turn when they want to talk. Once in school, students are told to raise their hands to be granted permission to speak.

Most institutional talk has “formal turn-taking rules that restrict who may speak, when, and on what topic” (Tracy, 2002, p. 119-120). The singular floor is readily evident in a courtroom, as only one person is permitted to speak at a time and who speaks is strictly controlled by courtroom protocol. An attorney may only speak at certain times. Witnesses can only respond to the question specifically asked. The judge is obligated to maintain the law and order of institutional talk within the courtroom (Tracy, 2002). Any deviations to the conversational norms result in swift action by the chief authority.

In contrast to the singular floor is a collaborative floor. Coates (1996) presents interactional characteristics of a collaborative floor from an analysis of talk in informal groups enacting friendship. A collaborative floor tends to be present in informal talk between equals. “Collaborative floors, in Edelsky’s account, typically involve shorter turns than single floors, much more overlapping speech, more repetition, and more joking and teasing” (Coates, 1996, p. 134). In a collaborative floor, a speaker may also use one speech-turn to finish one point and introduce another. While multiple conversations may seem to be happening simultaneously, the speakers demonstrate that they are alert to all the talk as all the utterances relate in some way, and particular points tend to be jointly developed. In this manner, it becomes difficult to separate one speaker’s utterance from another’s (Coates, 1996). Coates found that in a collaborative floor the speakers are able to “incorporate each other’s contributions into the general stream of talk” (1996, p. 141). While this may seem rather chaotic, researchers have found that these informal speech communities with a more collaborative floor also have acceptable and observable discursive practices (Coates, 1996; Tannen, 2005; Tracy 2002).
The focal group in my study was a structured group with a facilitator, specific content to study, and schedule. These structural elements indicate a more formal speech community. However, the group was also designed to encourage all the participants to share their thoughts and ideas. In this manner, the focal group has elements that indicate a more collaborative floor is a possibility. Examining the management of the conversational floor will be one aspect used to describe the discursive practices of the focal study group and develop a portrait of a blended-space speech community that contains aspects of formality and informality.

Institutional talk has also been found to be governed by an asymmetrical division of discursive power (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). Enacting discursive power represents the degree to which an individual has the responsibility to speak, opportunity to speak, and the right to introduce topics of conversation; in other words, speaking rights and obligations (Cameron, 2001; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). Common experience leads us to understand that in a courtroom, the discursive power resides with those who know the discursive practices and have gained access to positions permitting speech. The judge seemingly has the most discursive power. The judge lets an attorney know when s/he can speak, directs unresponsive witnesses to answer questions, and silences those who speak out of turn (Tracy, 2002); yet even the judge is constrained to some degree regarding when s/he can speak and on the topic. The court system stipulates a proper order for the presentation of a case. Conversely, defendants have limited access to discursive power because they “are obliged to answer questions but prohibited from asking them” (Cameron, 2001, p. 161). The speech participants all acquiesce to this mechanism governing institutional talk. Ultimately, by analyzing the talk within institutional settings Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) conclude that “one participant is often in a more powerful position discursively to constrain the actions of his or her co-participant” (p. 170).

Another common experience of asymmetrical discursive power enacted in institutional talk is the classroom (Cameron, 2001). Teachers are given the prerogative of asking questions, selecting the
topic, and determining what is an acceptable answer. Teachers may encourage the students to participate in conversation, respond to questions, and interact to a high degree, yet Nystrand, et al. (2003) documented that recitation is still the primary discourse for classrooms. Mehan (1979) offers categories for turn-taking in the asymmetrical discursive powered classroom discourse as IRE: teacher initiation (question), student response, and teacher evaluation. Nystrand, et al., (2003) found that roughly 90% of classroom interaction they examined followed the IRE structure. In both courtrooms and classrooms, the asymmetrical discursive power structure serves a key function in the organization and orderliness of institutional talk.

Enacting discursive power in an informal group is considered symmetrical as all the speakers are regarded as equals and work to maintain power equity. Each group has local management of their talk: “its patterns and structures result from what people do as they go along rather than from their being compelled to follow a course of action that has been determined in advance (Cameron, 2001, p. 90). Mills (2003) echoes this idea by advocating that meaning and power relations are co-constructed in context. Within friendship groups, everyone may have equal access to the conversational floor, yet individual contributions are not equally distributed nor recognized. Tannen (2005) asked her dinner guests to recall their Thanksgiving dinner conversation. Some guests in the mixed gender group were identified as being quiet, while others were identified as dominating the conversation. Some talked a lot, but said little, while others were mostly quiet, but when they spoke contributed greatly to the conversation. Coates (1996) discovered that within her friendship group that the women avoided exerting their expertise. For this group, by avoiding playing the expert, they maintained and enacted a more equal distribution of discursive power so that all could contribute to any topic of conversation. In both of these groups, there was not a designated leader or person in charge, instead the discursive power was equally accessible to all speakers.
The focal group also has elements of formalized discursive power with a designated facilitator and opportunity for informal negotiation of who gets to talk, when, and about what topic due to the conversation-based nature of the activities. The analysis of the group’s talk will explore individual contributions to the conversation, number of turns, and types of contributions as a means of understanding how the group locally enacted their discursive power through their talk within a blended-space speech community.

Whenever a group of people is engaged in conversation competing realities may be offered. When personal experiences are recounted within institutional talk it often results in talk as competing realities (Cameron, 2001). Typically in a court case, the prosecutor and defense council both ask questions of a witness. However, if the witness is for the prosecution, the questions will lend credibility to the witness’s account. Yet, when the same witness is questioned by the defense, the goal of the questions is to discredit the witness’s account. Throughout the court case, competing realities of an event are crafted (Cameron, 2001).

This competitive discursive practice is common within institutional talk (Hutchby & Woofitt, 1998). The winning speaker is the one identified as being the most persuasive (Hutchby & Woofitt, 1998). The goal of sharing within institutional talk is often to arrive at truth or literal meaning. The judge and jury determine truth for the courtroom. Teachers determine truth for the classroom. Within institutional talk, the one who determines the truth is often the one who also enacts the most discursive power.

Enacting discursive power and offering representations of reality seem to be related within institutional talk. Within informal speech communities enacting discursive power and offering representations of reality are also correlated factors, but with different discursive practices. As the discursive power is more equally distributed amongst the speakers within a collaborative floor, the sharing of their experiences tends to be co-constructed (Coates, 1996). Coates (1996) determined that
for the female friendship groups she analyzed, representations of reality were about individual personal experiences or of someone close to them. When two of the women both had first-hand accounts of a given experience, they tended to jointly-construct the telling so that their individual voices blended into one. Coates’ (1996) analysis reveal that the women’s comments and questions directed to a speaker became incorporated into the representation of the event. Additionally, the women’s experiences often contained contradictions of overarching ideas. For example, in one case the speaker voiced that “they were ghastly children,” but contradicted the statement by sharing how “mothers take pride in their children’s achievements” (Coates, 1996, p. 242). The multiple representations were accepted by the group as a normal feature of their discursive practices.

For the focal group, I will need to examine how the group offers personal information and experiences along with the discursive practices associated with offering representations of reality. As a blended space, it is difficult to postulate whether reality will be absolute, co-constructed, contain contradictions, or have contradictions accepted. Through this research, the discursive practices associated with offering representations of reality will be explored and described for the focal group.

Above-the-sentence discursive practices relate to how the various speech-community participants attend to one another’s contributions. The previous section on social psychology reviewed the principle that as people interact, they respond to one another’s preceding contributions; thereby conveying mutual consideration. These patterns can be seen at the turn-level, but also in the larger context above-the-sentence. As the discursive practices are shaped by the speech community, I present information on the discursive practice of maintaining appropriate relationships including politeness practices and the use of hedges.

Formal speech communities, with a singular conversation floor, asymmetrical discursive power, and competing representations of reality help to distinguish speakers holding authority to talk as well as the respective role as a designated speaker. Individuals within formal speech communities can be
classified into separate roles of speakers and listeners. The listeners may only speak when granted permission by a person authorized to speak. These roles are maintained through patterns of aloofness. The aloofness is maintained and understood as speakers use technical language to reinforce those in authority (Cameron, 2001). Formals speech communities also tend to focus on the task-at-hand rather than the social or more relational aspects. Through a process of minimizing relational-work, the respective roles and relationships are maintained. This can be seen with discursive practices related to politeness.

Politeness is commonly understood as showing or possessing good manners or common courtesy. Through responses to what others say, a person reveals if s/he is responding with courtesy. Mills (2003) presents a comprehensive linguistic study of gender and politeness. She asserts that “it is only participants in specific communities of practice who are competent to judge whether a language item or phrase is polite for them or not” (p. 2). Mills examines the political institution of the House of Commons. Within this institutional talk, the discursive patterns of politeness allow that “dominant community members may use insults without being considered to be impolite” (p. 128). Likewise, within classrooms, teachers’ “domineering linguistic behavior may not be considered impolite for pupils, although [pupils] might not like the way they are talked to” (p. 128). It is often easier to evaluate politeness within institutional talk because “institutions tend to constrain what can be counted as a legitimate contribution” (Mills, 2003, p. 125). Mills concludes that whatever the class, gender, or cultural composition of the group tends to dominate the community is the one determining what is considered polite or not. While this appears to perpetuate stereotypes, it is nonetheless evident through her research. For example, whenever white, middle-class, Western, male stereotype tends to dominate a community, politeness is often lacking courtesy words such as thank you, please, and you’re welcome and talk is highly direct (Mills, 2003). Through the politeness practices the speakers respective roles and relationships are maintained at appropriate social distances for the particular formal speech community.
When examining the talk of informal groups, gender seems to be a significant factor in evaluating acceptable discursive practices of maintaining appropriate relationships. As the focal group is an all-female group, I will focus on female, friendship groups, and their politeness discursive practices. Coates (1996) found that informal female-friendship groups use hedges as a key politeness strategy. By using hedges effectively, women are able to signal sensitivity to one another, even when disagreeing; as Coates explains “in talk, where we need to be sensitive to the needs of others, where we engage in the struggle for the right words, where we want to avoid taking up hard and fast positions and want to facilitate open discussion, where we want to maintain a collaborative floor, then hedges are a vital component of talk” (1996, pp. 172-3). Within informal groups, politeness strategies help to maintain a sense of solidarity in interpersonal relationships (Coates, 1996; Mills, 2003; Tannen, 2005).

Cameron (2001) believes hesitations can serve as another politeness strategy when used appropriately within a speech community. Showing interest, claiming common ground, seeking agreement, showing sympathy, offering indirect responses, begging forgiveness, giving deference, and minimizing impositions have also been suggested as politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, Brown and Levinson do not indicate within which speech communities these practices are more prevalent or acceptable. For the focal group, I will need to examine the responses and describe if and how the group determined the appropriate relationship for their group by employing politeness strategies and using hedges.

Above-the-sentence discursive practices are different depending on the formalized structure of a speech community. In this literature review, I have presented examples from two formal institutions: courtrooms and classrooms. The above-the-sentence discursive practices for institutions can be described as having a singular floor in which only one person at a time has the right and/or obligation to the conversational space. The singular floor is supported by asymmetrical discursive power; only one person or position has the designated and legitimized responsibility and recognition to determine who
can talk, when, and on what topics. Additionally, institutional talk tends to be focused on ensuring accurate accounts of reality are presented. Speakers will use persuasion to convince listeners of their reality as well as attempt to discredit speakers voicing an alternative account. Institutional talk also maintains proper relationships whether the group is task-oriented or relationally-driven.

While informal speech communities demonstrate similar categories of discursive practices, the patterns are different from formal institutional talk. I have primarily presented information on female-friendship groups, described as having a collaborative floor in which all the speakers have simultaneous and equal access to the conversational space. In support of the collaborative floor, the enacted discursive power is symmetrical in which all the speakers are regarded as equals; so that often times the speakers will avoid playing the expert in order to maintain the equality. Additionally, participants’ representations of reality are co-constructed through the dynamic interaction of the group. From my synthesis of literature, I have determined that informal groups strive to establish and maintain relational solidarity. To this end, the group may enact politeness strategies of hedges, apologies, and courtesy words in order to demonstrate sensitivity and consideration to the solidarity of the group.

My research on the focal group will explore these above-the-sentence discursive practices to describe the blended space of this specific speech community. The focal group contained elements of structure, such as having a facilitator, schedule, and established content to study. However, the facilitation methods used invited group discussion in a similar fashion to informal-friendship groups. A sociolinguistic analysis of the discourse of the focal group will help allow for an exploration into the above-the-sentence discursive practices of the blended space. The above-the-sentence discursive practices provide a starting framework for analyzing the group’s discourse. The next section explains the turn-by-turn discursive practices as they pertain to formal and informal speech communities.
**Turn-by-turn practices.**

“Conversation requires speakers to take turns, and this requirement is managed in a particular way” (Cameron, 2001). Turn-by-turn discursive practices reveal who speaks, when, for how long, and about what. Most commonly, turn-by-turn practices examine the basic structure of adjacency pairs: an initiating speaker’s turn followed by a responding speaker’s turn (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Tracy, 2002). By examining the sequence of turns, an understanding of how a speech community is locally managing conversation can be ascertained. I will provide an overview of turn-taking discursive practices that have been identified in literature and characterize formal and informal speech communities. I have noted in the previous section that courtrooms have very specific rules governing who can talk, when, about what, and for how long and within classrooms, the teacher is the primary decision-maker on turn-taking practices. Regardless of whether the talk is tightly controlled by one person or negotiated as the group goes along, there are three options for determining which speaker gets the next turn: “1) current speaker selects the next speaker, 2) next speaker self-selects, and 3) current speaker may (but does not have to) continue” (Cameron, 2001, p. 91). While this turn-allocation mechanism may indicate who will speak next, it does not give any indication as to what form of discursive practice the responding speaker will use.

Table 2.2 below captures an overview of the concepts that will be presented in this section on turn-by-turn discursive practices including 1) responding to questions, 2) utilizing repetition, 3) offering minimal responses, and 4) overlapping turns. Once again, the formal or institutional speech communities are described based on discursive practices from courtrooms and traditional classrooms, while the informal speech community characterization of discursive practices is derived from research on friendship groups. A description of the discursive practices as they pertain to a blended space is not provided here; instead the blended space will be characterized for the focal group within the chapters that provide the analysis of the focal group’s talk.
Table 2.2

*Turn-by-Turn Discursive Practices as Continuum of Formality*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responding to Questions</th>
<th>Formal: “Institutional” Courtroom, classroom</th>
<th>Blended Space</th>
<th>Informal: “Friendship” Friendship groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Required Responses:</strong></td>
<td>Question asked requires an answer to that question; answers must conform to acceptable response norms</td>
<td><strong>Optional Responses:</strong> Questions are asked for myriad and complex purposes; questions do not require answers so that respondents are free to answer or deflect questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Superfluous:</strong> Use of repetition by a speaker is viewed as redundancy or insecurity</td>
<td><strong>Fundamental:</strong> Repetition used to maintain interpersonal solidarity, Signal agreement and involvement, and express group voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absent Discursive Power:</strong> Minimal responses recognize authority; convey agreement; polite resistance; constrain anger &amp; frustration</td>
<td><strong>Access to Discursive Power:</strong> Signals participation in the conversation by offering minimal responses of agreement and disagreement, encouragement and exclamations, and laughter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interrupted Turns:</strong> Error in judgment; way to compete for the right to speak; maintain proper distance of institutional roles</td>
<td><strong>Jointly-constructed Turns:</strong> Turns were continued and the group would complete each other’s utterances shows involvement; maintain close relationships by talking for one another and saying the same thing at same time</td>
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</table>

The question/answer adjacency pair is a good starting point for examining turn-by-turn discursive practices of responding to questions, as it is a common type of adjacency pair. Within institutional talk, “participants, upon entering the setting, are normatively constrained in the types of turns they may take according to their particular institutional role” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 149). Only certain roles have the right and obligation to ask questions. Questioners must understand the appropriate types of questions to ask within the institutional setting and adhere to those practices. Frequently, courtroom questions by attorneys fall into two categories: information questions and examination questions (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). Information questions are “designed to inform the
questioner about something which he or she does not know” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 150). Examination questions are “designed to test the answerer’s knowledge about something which the questioner already knows” (p. 150). Through the series of questions an attorney builds a portrait not only of events, but of the social image of the person being questioned. It is also noted that in institutional settings “questioners are required to avoid stating their opinions overtly” (p. 151). Within institutional talk, the questioners may have the right to initiate topics, but there are restrictions that must be adhered to in order to achieve conversational competence within the speech community.

Respondents within an institutional setting must also be aware of their discursive power, role within the institution, and acceptable forms of responses. At the most simplistic, the respondent is expected to answer the questions posed (Tracy, 2002). The respondent’s orientation to the institutional turn-by-turn discursive practices ensures that the spoken interaction continues unimpeded. When a teacher asks question, she often directs questions to the whole class, but then determines which student gets to respond. The student, who wants to respond to the question, must signal to the teacher her desire to respond. The teacher selects which student will respond. The respondent, in this case a student, has an obligation to answer the question that was asked (Cameron, 2001). This common structure is evident within classrooms (Nystrand, et al., 2003). The commonality of this structure lends evidence to the fact that both questioners and respondents know, understand, and competently communicate through question/answer adjacency pairs.

Institutional talk question/answer sequences have identifiable and generally accepted practices. Whether you participate in a courtroom or classroom in New York City or rural Nebraska, the question/answer discursive practices are highly consistent. However, informal speech communities locally negotiate the turn-by-turn discursive practices (Cameron, 2001). As each informal speech community establishes the acceptable discursive practices, there is a much greater level of complexity to ascertain the question/answer discursive practices. Tannen (2005) recorded the discussion of a
mixed-gender group of friends during a Thanksgiving dinner and made the following statement, exemplifying the complexity of question/answer practices within informal settings.

To me, the way in which I asked questions of Chad, with high pitch, rapid rate, fast pacing with respect to preceding comments, and reduced syntactic forms, all signal familiarity and casualness, hence, rapport; that is, such questions are designed to make the others feel comfortable. However, my questions made Chad feel on the spot (Tannen, 2005, p. 82).

Because Chad experienced an uncomfortable response to the questions as they were posed, he was hesitant, only gave brief responses, or ignored the questions altogether (Tannen, 2005). Within informal settings, respondents are not required nor expected to always answer the question posed. Both Coates (1996) and Tannen (2005) found that questions were often used to initiate a topic of conversation or invite a story; however, if the topic was not of interest to the group then the question could remain unanswered. In one specific instance, Tannen (2005) expressed “I do not mind in the least that he has chosen to tell this story rather than answer my question. I am pleased that he realizes that I would like to hear what he most feels like telling and that he does not feel he must answer every question I happen to ask” (p. 85).

Gender and responding to questions discursive practices, like gender and politeness also appear to be related. Lakoff (1975) presented research indicating that women asked more questions because they were in less powerful positions. Coates (1996) contradicts Lakoff, instead offering that women ask more questions than men as this is the key means to build solidarity and construct friendship. In Tannen’s (2005) mixed-gender group, one woman had difficulty posing her questions because two of the men had such direct, domineering conversational styles. As gender seems to be a contributing factor to the type of questions and purposes of questions, and as my focal group is all-female, I will restrict the discussion of questions in informal settings to what Coates (1996) calls Women Talk.

Responding to questions can be broken into two categories: speaker-oriented and other oriented. Speaker-oriented questions are used whenever the speaker is in need of specific information,
to clarify the meaning of a word, or to complete an action (Coates, 1996). Information seeking questions are very similar to the institutional talk questions as they are often straightforward and the answer can be given in a simple manner. Word clarification questions also can be answered in a simple manner as the speaker is trying to ascertain the exact word that was used (Coates, 1996). Information seeking questions directed towards an action often do not add to the overall conversation of the group, but appear as a function of hospitality or courtesy. Coates (1996) uses the example of asking red or white?, followed by a response of white as a way of demonstrating the women were pouring glasses of wine. By answering the questions, the respondent gave the questioner the information needed to complete an action.

Most of women’s questions are other-oriented (Coates, 1996). Coates (1996) describes eleven separate other-oriented functions of questions within the women’s informal, friendship talk: 1) invite others to talk; 2) check on other’s viewpoints; 3) initiate and develop topics; 4) introduce narratives; 5) re-orient the conversation; 6) encourage speakers to continue talking; 7) clarify group’s understanding of the topic under discussion; 8) ask for help in finding the right word; 9) hedge, especially when introducing potentially conflicting viewpoints; 10) pose rhetorical questions to express general truths and to check for group consensus; and 11) avoid playing the expert. The responding to questions discursive practices consistent with the focal group will be discussed in greater detail in the analysis chapters. The diversity of these questioning practices demonstrates the complexity of describing turn-by-turn discursive practices within informal speech communities.

The adjacency pairs serve as conversational management units that can be examined so to understand how specific speech communities manage turn-by-turn discursive practices. As question/answer pairs are a common conversational unit, it will be necessary for me to describe the type of questions asked and their utility for the focal group. I will need to examine whether the
questions are more information-seeking oriented which may be due to the structured organization of the group or other-oriented similar to the informal friendship groups.

The second turn-by-turn discursive practice I present is repetition. Repetition is defined as the “recurrence and recontextualization of words and phrases in discourse” (Tannen, 2007, p. 9). Repetition is a feature of talk, whether in formal or informal speech communities. Analysts have found that mundane, ordinary, unplanned talk tends to be highly repetitive (Cameron, 2001; Tannen 2005, 2007). The methods of repetition within formal and informal speech communities are similar yet the way in which analysts interpret the utility of repetitions within these two contexts is quite different.

Repetitions can take on several forms. Lexical repetitions are specific word matches (Coates, 1996; Tannen, 2007). Semantic repetitions allow a speaker to mirror the meaning of a word or phrase previously spoken (Coates, 1996). Syntactic repetitions mirror or match the clause structure; these are grammatically-based repetitions (Coates, 1996). Phonological repetitions occur when speakers replicate similar sounds (Tannen, 2007). These four forms of repetitions have been found in both formal and informal speech communities.

There are two broad categories of repetition based on the number of speakers involved: single-speaker and multi-speaker. Single-speaker repetition describes when one speaker repeats her own words or phrases. Within formal settings the use of repetitions can be interpreted negatively with regards to the speaker as the repetitions reflect being less than fluent, insecure, or redundant (Cameron, 2001). However, repetitions may also reflect skillful rhetoric. Repetitions are commonly used within political institutional talk, as single speaker repetition is a key oratory device that allows the speaker to persuade and connect with the listeners (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). Single-speaker repetition also helps a speaker develop her thoughts and convey emphasis; within narratives the storyteller often uses repetition to ensure that the listeners are able to follow the nuances of the story (Coates, 1996). Similarly, Cameron (2001), maintains that speakers will repeat words as a way to buy
time to plan their next chunk of talk and to increase the chance the listeners will take in the information. As I am focusing on the interaction among participants of the focal group, I will focus on multi-speaker repetition.

Multi-speaker repetition is another version of adjacency pairs. The first speaker in the pair makes a statement and the second speaker will either mirror or match through repetition the first speaker (Tannen, 2007). Repetition is a key way for an informal group of speakers to indicate their participation in the conversation and it reveals their intentions to “maximize solidarity” by vocalizing agreement through repeated words, meaning, or grammatical structures (Coates, 1996, p. 203). Coates (1996) documents multi-speaker repetition within informal friendship groups using three forms: lexical, semantic, and syntactic repetitions. Additionally, Coates (1996) identified thematic repetition. Thematic repetition is the recurrence of broad topics of conversation throughout a span of group talk or across multiple group gatherings.

As repetition is a turn-by-turn discursive practice found within formal and informal discursive practices, I expect to find repetition within the blended space of the focal group. Through an examination of the multi-speaker repetitions, I will identify the frequency of repetition and forms of repetition, as well as describe possible explanations for the purpose and utility of the repetitions.

In addition to question/answer pairs and repetition are minimal responses, which are another discursive practice found in speech communities (Coates, 1996) and the third turn-by-turn discursive practice presented within this conceptual framework. Minimal responses include short utterances such as mm hmm, uh huh, right, okay, and yeah. Mills (2003) found that students would use minimal responses when being upbraided by their teacher within formal classroom context. In classrooms, the use of minimal responses may demonstrate recognition of authority and agreement, but may also signal polite resistance and signals anger and frustration (Mills, 2003). Minimal responses have also been
observed in courtrooms being used to show understanding and agreement to the dominant speaker (Cameron, 2001).

Minimal responses are much more prevalent in informal speech communities (Coates, 1996). Coates (1996) presents minimal responses as a way for collaborative floor participants to signal their ongoing participation in the talk. In Coates’ study, minimal responses were also used to encourage another speaker, to convey agreement, and to express solidarity (Coates, 1996). “Through signaling the active participation of all participants in the conversation,” Coates notes, “minimal responses play a significant role in the collaborative construction and text and of the maintenance of a collaborative floor” (1996, p. 145). While minimal responses may seem like unnecessary words, Cameron (2001) points out that “this kind of small stuff is both more important and more complicated than it might look” (p. 121).

In order to examine even the small stuff, such as minimal responses, I will look at how the focal group made use of minimal responses in their turn-by-turn discursive practices. The blended space may make room for minimal responses to be used to convey polite resistance as in formal speech communities. The blended space may also have frequent use of minimal responses for a myriad of purposes. The research on the focal group will help to explore the minimal response turn-by-turn discursive practice within a blended space.

The final turn-by-turn discursive practice I present refers to overlapping turns. Overlapping turns always involves at least two speakers as a second speaker begins talking while the first speaker is still talking. Cameron (2001) defines overlaps as “the new speaker’s failure to project the end of the last speaker’s turn with complete accuracy” (p. 92). In formal speech communities an error in judgment regarding turn transition is considered an overlap, but when the overlapping speech is considered “a hostile act designed to deny the current speaker their legitimate right to the floor” it is called an interruption (Cameron, 2001, p. 92). Interruptions and competition for the conversational floor are
more likely to be found within institutional talk (Cameron, 2001). Additionally, Tracy (2002) identified that speakers competing for the floor will often talk louder, use a higher pitch and faster pace, and will “conclude with one person dropping out” (p. 119). Those with powerful institutional roles and discursive rights tend to win the overlapping speech competition for the floor (Tracy, 2002).

Overlaps and simultaneous speech within informal settings may also be errors in judging when it is appropriate for the next speaker to talk, but these overlaps are rarely viewed as interruptions (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). Tannen (2005), in reviewing the transcript with the dinner group, learned that some of the overlaps she considered interruptions, the originating speakers considered an indicator of enthusiasm and interest. Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) found that speakers with close, long-standing relationships often had more overlapping speech as a feature of their talk. Tannen (2005) considers overlaps a signal of cooperation and high involvement in the talk: “we exhibited a pattern of cooperative sentence building in which the listener picks up the thread of the speaker and supplies the end of the speaker’s sentence, which the speaker then accepts and incorporates into the original sentence without a hitch” (p. 71). In the above case, repetition was also involved in the overlap. Coates (1996) claims that when the combination of repetition and overlap occur it “is clearly marked as supportive” (p. 223).

Women’s friendship talk is characterized by several forms of coordinated overlapping speech. In some instances two (or more) speakers “say the same thing but at slightly different times” (Coates, 1996, p. 128). At other times, the women work to complete the first speaker’s utterance simultaneously, but by saying different concluding thoughts (Coates, 1996). Overlaps may occur as speakers ask questions or comment while the first speaker is talking or while a speaker is sharing a narrative (Coates, 1996). Through these different forms of overlapping and simultaneous speech the speakers demonstrate their agreement, solidarity, and collaboration within their informal speech community.

The focal group turn-by-turn discursive practices may contain overlapping or simultaneous speech. I will need to look at instances in the group’s talk to describe and offer possible explanations for
the types of overlaps and whether those overlaps are considered as cooperative and supportive or interruptive and competitive. I will offer a description of the discursive practice of overlaps in the blended space speech community.

I have presented insights from research on turn-by-turn discursive practices. Formal, institutional talk and informal, friendship group talk are characterized by responding to questions, utilizing repetition, offering minimal responses, and overlapping turns. Questions in institutional talk require the answerer to address the question and conform to acceptable response norms. Repetitions may be viewed as redundancy or insecurity. However, within political oratory, repetition is viewed as a good way to persuade and connect with the listeners. Overlaps and simultaneous speech can be viewed as interruptions, errors in judgment, way to compete for the right to speak, and to maintain proper distance of institutional roles. Minimal responses have limited use in formal contexts, but are used to convey agreement with the dominant speaker.

Informal, friendship-group talk contains the same turn-by-turn discursive practices, but with different characterizations. Questions are asked for myriad and complex purposes. In many cases the questions do not require answers and respondents are free to answer or deflect the posed questions. Informal talk contains high levels of repetition of both single and multi-speaker repetition. Minimal responses are used frequently as they are another way participants’ signal involvement and are also used to offer encouragement. Overlapping turns demonstrate coordinated turn-taking management as overlaps show involvement in the talk and allow participants to maintain close relationships.

**Research Question**

Interactional talk occurs around us all the time both within formal contexts and as we gather with new or close friends. As I will explain in my findings, the focal group provides an opportunity to characterize a blended speech community, incorporating discursive elements of
both informal and formal speech communities. I have offered concepts regarding above-the-sentence and turn-by-turn discursive practices as a way to frame an analysis of the talk of the focal group. I have attempted to convey the complexities that exist within talk, regardless of the structured-nature of the speech community. Tracy (2002) eloquently states “there is no algorithm for communicative success; quick fixes that always work do not exist” (p. 191). The blended space of the focal group may also resist formulaic presuppositions. The focal group contains elements of both formal and informal speech communities. Within this blending, it is unclear what will be acceptable discursive practices. This research seeks to present a portrait of the talk of an alternative professional development program utilizing a small group model based on theories of symbolic interaction.

My data analysis seeks to address one primary research question: What is the nature of the talk among the members of the focal group? Additionally, I will seek to describe 1) the recurrent discursive patterns that characterize the talk, and 2) the type of blended-space speech community that is enacted and constituted by the talk. In conclusion, I will address potential implications the talk of the focal group suggest for developing professional development for teachers.

Before addressing the specific research methodologies that were used to address the research question, I first provide further background on the structure of the focal group’s leadership professional development program. The next chapter will contextualize the structure, curriculum, and learning activities of the professional development program. Additionally, the chapter will address my perspective as the facilitator of the group. Following the description of the professional development program, Chapter 4 will outline the research methods utilized. Chapters 5 and 6 provide the analysis findings. Finally, Chapter 7 will expand on the discussion by offering implications for the research.
CHAPTER 3 – LEADERSHIP-DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

I have explored teacher professional development as an area of emphasis from the beginning of my teacher career. When it came time to select the research focus for my dissertation, I had narrowed my focus to teacher study groups as a general model of professional development. I was most inspired by Grossman, et al. (2001), who posed: “what distinguishes a community of teachers from a group of teachers sitting in a room?” A community of teachers has proven challenging to define, however, teacher study group proponents have been working to construct theories, frameworks, and guidelines for teacher study groups that create a safe place for teachers to engage in inquiry and connect with other professionals (Clark, 2001; Craig & Deretchin, 2009; Fiszer, 2004; Grossman, et al. 2001). The overarching purposes of developing communities of teachers are often articulated as improving the quality of teacher and student learning and providing teachers the necessary support to retain quality teachers (Hollingsworth, 1992; Rust, 1999; Zeck, 2000). From my exploration of the literature, teacher study groups are fulfilling the purposes of developing communities of teachers.

Through my reading on teacher study groups, I recognized a consistent pattern: those researching teacher study groups were also the ones designing and implementing teacher study groups (Clark, 2001). My dissertation is consistent with this pattern. The purpose of this chapter is to detail my role as the designer and facilitator of a professional development program structured on a teacher study group model. I made decisions as the designer of the professional development program by gleaning successful practices and gaining an understanding of what practices to avoid when using a teacher study group model. First, I present a vignette of the initial group meeting from my perspective as the facilitator. Second, I detail the structure and curriculum for the professional development program. Detailing the professional development program will provide a description of the context in which the research occurred.
On a warm summer afternoon, I waited anxiously in my daylight basement apartment for my four group participants to arrive. Cassidy and Darlene were both coming from work. From past experiences I know that neither of them was good at getting away from work for a four o’clock meeting. These late-afternoon sessions would be challenging for them, but they were both really excited to be a part and were going to do their best to make it work. Holly arrived first, promptly at four o’clock. Holly ran her own business out of the same office as her husband. Holly was the most mature woman in my group. She had adult and teenage children. As Holly and I were greeting each other, I glanced out the window and saw Samantha’s husband dropping her off out front. Her husband was obviously keeping their two preschool aged children while Samantha participated in the group.

My first and most important task was to help with making the women feel comfortable. I offered them each a beverage and asked about their days; typical small talk. Neither Samantha nor Holly had been to my house so I showed them around the small apartment while we were waiting for the others to arrive. Suddenly, my phone rang and it was Cassidy. She was roaming the neighborhood, not sure of the exact address. I broke off from my conversation with Samantha and Holly to help Cassidy navigate to the house. She was only about ten minutes late, which was not too bad. I assisted Cassidy in finding a beverage in the refrigerator and we all found seats around the dining room table.

The dining room was open to the entry area and the kitchen. There was just enough room to sit around the table, but once people were sitting down, it was no longer possible to walk around the table. Fortunately, I could walk through the kitchen to get to the front door. Cassidy and Holly chose to sit on the same side of the table with Holly closest to me. Samantha sat across the table from Cassidy leaving the chair closest to me open for Darlene. I had positioned my chair at the head of the table so that I was directly facing the video camera that I had set up to record the group. I had not started recording as I

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All names have been changed to protect identities.
was waiting for Darlene to arrive. About fifteen minutes after four, Darlene was still missing. I tried calling her, but did not connect. Our first session was getting off to a late start, so I decided to move forward with the first formal activity and left the table to turn on the video camera. If I had been more focused on people’s feelings, I would have waited for Darlene and just continued to engage the others in small talk. However, I was more focused on the time and wanting to stick with my schedule.

About that time, Darlene called me, and she was very confused. She had been to the apartment, knocked on the locked back door, and did not receive an answer. Figuring she was at the wrong place, she headed to the church thinking that would be a logical spot for the group to meet. Darlene called from the church when she did not find us there. As it is not far from the church to my apartment, I started the first activity, confident Darlene would quickly catch on once she arrived. We were all relieved that Darlene was coming, but an air of anxiety hung over the place.

It was easy to sympathize with their anxiety. The women were not close friends, primarily acquaintances who ran into one another periodically at church. The video camera poised in the living room directed toward the table was not your typical small group experience and was also causing some discomfort. I hoped that by getting into an activity it would focus our attention on the task so that we could forget that there was recording equipment present.

To help with the tension, I focused on my role as a hostess, ensuring that everyone had a beverage and snacks. I had placed a plate of apple slices and caramel dip, a small stack of napkins, and dessert plates at the far end of the table, purposely positioned farthest away from me, ensuring that the others would need to assist one another with the afternoon snack. Unfortunately, the first activity required a large flip-chart which took up most of the space on the table. The flip-chart pad caused for more awkwardness as there was limited space for the women to place their drinks let alone a plate of food. Samantha had brought a water bottle with her and placed it on the floor at her feet. Holly ended
up cradling her 32 ounce ice tea to her chest. My best attempts to minimize tension were not enough to overshadow the recording equipment and first group angst.

I decided to push through the awkwardness and get the group focused on the task. For the opening activity, I opted to use an ice-breaker that I have used in the classroom and in other small groups. It has always been successful for me in the past, but as I explained the simple directions, the anxiety and awkwardness increased. The point of the activity was to share descriptive information about one’s self and find areas of commonality. The beginning activity was characterized by long moments of silence, short comments, and nervous laughter. The women asked several questions to clarify the activity instructions and process. I had hoped that the ice-breaker would be fun, but instead found the group was focused on doing it “right.” The group identified that we all had jobs, drove cars, and liked strawberries prior to Darlene’s arrival. This was not the meaningful conversation I was hoping for.

The activity was immediately suspended when Darlene arrived and we took time to hear her story. Darlene apologized for being late. Samantha apologized for not hearing Darlene knock on the back door. I apologized and took responsibility for the whole situation. Darlene is a long-time friend and had been to my apartment many times. She only ever used the backdoor, as that was my primary entrance. I had the back shade down and the door locked because I was attempting to obscure backlighting in the videotaping. Samantha and I had been standing in the kitchen visiting, yet did not hear Darlene knock on the door. After many apologies all around, Darlene helped herself to a soda out of the refrigerator. The group engaged in a few minutes of chit-chat and shared laughter as Darlene settled herself in. I then restated an overview of our activity.

Once Darlene arrived and was at the table, much of the tension dissipated. It was as if we weren’t a group until all of us were fully present. We were able to spend nearly forty minutes on the Different Spokes activity. We found many things in common and all identified something unique about ourselves. During the first ten minutes we shared personal information. We learned that Samantha had
been to Tanzania, Africa. Cassidy was born in Oregon and had lived in several different states due to her husband’s job transfers. Holly married at seventeen and had four children within the first six years of her marriage. The conversation was still a little awkward, so I opted to have us talk about the small groups we were leading, again looking for commonality and uniqueness. This discussion continued for quite some time, punctuated by many bouts of laughter. In my perspective, the women seemed to be much more comfortable discussing their small groups, rather than their personal lives at this stage of our group life.

For the remaining hour of our time together, I wanted to ease the anxiety about what we were going to do during our group time. I presented an overview of the leadership development program. I also gave them each a book called Walking the Small Group Tightrope. They all expressed their thanks for the thoughtful gesture. At this point, I was doing most of the talking as I described some common challenges of leading small groups that I thought we could study together. The women seemed to listen attentively and Cassidy took notes.

Their interest in the leadership development curriculum heightened when I started on the third challenge which was “conflict.” Both Holly and Darlene were quick to offer comments. Darlene hesitantly asked permission to share a story. I was somewhat taken aback that my long-time friend was asking me for permission to talk in a small group, but then I remembered it was the first group meeting and we don’t have a clear understanding yet of what is and what is not acceptable. After I gave her permission, Darlene shared her story. We were all able to connect with Darlene’s experience with conflict at work and sympathize with the struggle those types of conflicts evoke.

As I continued to review the leadership development curriculum, others were asking more questions and offering more comments, rather than just listening to me talk. I was encouraged that we were finally getting to a more comfortable space. Knowing that we were unsure of what was acceptable and not in our conversations, I proposed the group utilize four ground rules: 1) no interrupting, 2) no
unsolicited advice giving, 3) I pass, and 4) confidentiality. These rules sparked an interesting discussion regarding the irony of the fourth rule of confidentiality and the reality that the sessions are being video- and audiotaped and analyzed for research. I had not considered this disconnect. It became apparent through the comments made that the women were very aware of the dual nature of our group: one function was for leadership development and the other was research for my dissertation.

I then transitioned the group into our third activity: reflection. I distributed hardback journals to each participant and discussed the purpose of the journals. I explained how time would be given during each session for them to write in their journals followed by a time for people to share their thoughts with the whole group. The anxiety quickly returned. Holly asked if I would be reading the journals because she didn’t want to do it wrong. I explained that I would be reading the journals for two reasons: 1) to use the journaling as a part of the data collection for the research; and 2) to better understand what each person was learning. Once again, the group discussed the dual and somewhat conflicting purposes of the leadership development program and the research.

It took me several minutes, and much reassurance, to convince the women to write in their journals. I encouraged the women to find a comfortable place to think and write. Darlene, Samantha, and Cassidy all moved into the living room to write in their journals as they wanted to move away from the video camera. Only Holly remained at the table. During the journaling time, the house was ominously quiet. After about ten minutes, we regrouped at the table and shared our thoughts. Cassidy, Holly, and Darlene each shared from their journals.

My tension increased as I kept watching the clock. Time was running out very quickly. The conversation was just starting to get really good, our awkwardness was easing, and we seemed to be more relaxed with one another and our situation. Time became my enemy. I wanted to respect the women’s busy schedules and dismiss at the designated time. I knew Samantha’s husband would be arriving any minute to pick her up. I had to somehow take a good conversation and stifle it with logistics
of when we were going to meet again. There was a flurry of activity as we quickly decided when to meet next, collected personal belongings, and dispersed. I turned off the recording equipment as soon as we determined when we would meet again and the conversation shifted to small talk. Samantha, Holly, and Cassidy all exited together with warm smiles and excitement about our joint endeavor. Darlene remained to help me clean up.

In reflecting on this first session, I was struck by the pervasiveness of our hesitancy and awkwardness as we attempted to engage in conversation. I had mixed emotions following the first session, disappointment yet also elation and excitement. I was optimistic about the group. All of the women were willing to talk and share, even through the awkward moments. I knew that this group would stretch my knowledge and abilities as a facilitator, but I was determined to fulfill their expectations and goals of becoming more effective small group leaders. I became keenly aware that balancing my actions as the group facilitator and fulfilling my research agenda was going to be a big challenge.

**Structure of Focal Group**

The vignette of the first session reveals that even with the best of planning, once people are involved there is no predicting what may happen. In putting this group together, I was hopeful the decisions regarding the structure and curriculum would foster an atmosphere of safety and trust in which we could have meaningful conversation about the joys and challenges of leading small groups. These aspirations were based on literature that influenced my decisions as the designer of the professional development program. Insights from the literature will be presented in this section.

I was able to gain insight from the experiences of other professional development designers and researchers. Educational research literature and practitioner journals both offer suggestions on how to successfully implement teacher study groups. On the practitioner side, Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet (2000) offer their perspective on “Designing Professional Development that Works” (p. 28) after
examining sixteen case studies. Their research examined six key areas and determined best practices. In a similar fashion, I reviewed research literature seeking common successful practices in order to make informed decisions about the structure for my leadership development program. I categorized features of teacher study groups based on activities designed to enhance community, characteristics of conversation, common ground, voluntary participation, size of group, meeting frequency and duration. Not all of the studies revealed details on all of these features, but by looking at these key areas, I felt that I employed a logical approach to selecting best practices regarding teacher study groups. Table 3.1 below captures my review of thirteen research presentations regarding teacher study groups.

Most of the thirteen studies made mention of the term “community,” however, the term was rarely given a clear definition. The researchers offered qualitative, inferential suggestions about what community meant for each group. While there was limited clarity on the definition, there was consistent emphasis on the need for community in order to have a meaningful teacher study group. I identified common qualities of community that were presented in multiple studies as safety and trust, ground rules, setting, and food. More detail on these qualities will be offered as I present the structural design of the focal study group.

Additionally, teacher study groups represent a conversationally-based model of professional development. The thirteen studies I examined primarily focused on whether the teachers engaged in conversation about educational matters and how the teachers told their stories relaying the practical experiences of teaching and learning. Some of the studies identified conversational processes such as finding a topic of conversation and sharing multiple perspectives. These studies primarily focused on how to get teachers to discuss professional matters of teaching and learning, not just be a group of teachers sitting in a room.
| **Table 3.1: Summary of My Research on Teacher Study Groups** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Community** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Safety, trust** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Ground Rules** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Setting** | home | school | home | school | restaurant | school | school | home |
| **Food** | dinner | dinner | dinner | Dinner | dinner | dinner |
| **Conversation** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Ed. Topics** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Narratives** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Process** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Common Ground** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Women** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Mixed Gender** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Subject Matter** | Science | Math | Literacy | Literacy | English & Soc. Std. | Literacy | Math | Writing |
| **School** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Grade level** | Secondary | K-6 | K-5 | K-5 | 9-12 | K-5 | K-12 | K-5 |
| **Experience** | University cohort | Student work | Novice teachers | Novice teachers | Tech. integration | Student work |
| **Focus/Pursuit** | Texts | Texts | Texts | Texts | Texts | Texts |
| **Voluntary Participation:** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Size (# members)** | 10 | 4 | 12 | 6 | 22 | 7 | 12 | 6 |
| **Frequency** | Monthly | Weekly | Monthly | Monthly | Bi-weekly | Monthly | Bi-weekly | Monthly |
| **Duration** | 2-3 hours | 90 min. | 1 hour | 2 hours | Varied | 3 hours | 90 min. | 2-3 hours |
| **Longevity** | 3 years | 1 year | 2 years | 3 years | 2 1/2 years | 3 1/2 years | 1 year | 1 year + |
| **Voluntary Participation:** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Size (# members)** | 10 | 4 | 12 | 6 | 22 | 7 | 12 | 6 |
| **Frequency** | Monthly | Weekly | Monthly | Monthly | Bi-weekly | Monthly | Bi-weekly | Monthly |
| **Duration** | 2-3 hours | 90 min. | 1 hour | 2 hours | Varied | 3 hours | 90 min. | 2-3 hours |
| **Longevity** | 3 years | 1 year | 2 years | 3 years | 2 1/2 years | 3 1/2 years | 1 year | 1 year + |
| **Voluntary Participation:** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Size (# members)** | 10 | 4 | 12 | 6 | 22 | 7 | 12 | 6 |
| **Frequency** | Monthly | Weekly | Monthly | Monthly | Bi-weekly | Monthly | Bi-weekly | Monthly |
| **Duration** | 2-3 hours | 90 min. | 1 hour | 2 hours | Varied | 3 hours | 90 min. | 2-3 hours |
| **Longevity** | 3 years | 1 year | 2 years | 3 years | 2 1/2 years | 3 1/2 years | 1 year | 1 year + |
Teacher study groups have been formed around various commonalities. However, common ground does not always lead to the outcomes researchers sought. Grossman, et al. (2001) reflected “in many ways, starting with a group of colleagues who have worked together may be worse than convening a group of perfect strangers” (p. 949). Her group participants were all from the same high school and brought into the group impressions of one another as well as past histories and issues. These workplace differences needed to be aired before the group was willing to engage in developing an interdisciplinary humanities curriculum. In Table 3.1, I identified groups based on gender composition, teachers’ subject matter, teachers at the same school, grade level teaching, teachers’ experience, or focal interest of the group. Table 3.1 also displays information regarding groups using voluntary participation, the number of people in the group, the duration of group meetings, and the longevity of the groups.

For the focal group, I made decisions that I hoped would foster the qualities of community and meaningful conversation. As the group served dual purpose, including research, I remained cognizant of ensuring that the data collection would be manageable. The design and research needs had to balance to have optimal potential. First, I present the logistical considerations. Next, I present the decisions that I hoped would support an atmosphere that would foster meaningful conversations for professional learning.

Logistics

As the professional development program occurred within an alternative educational setting, we did not have a school schedule to follow. Three of us led groups that met on Sunday nights. Four of us led groups that met at the church; while Samantha had her group meetings at her home. Based on my review of teacher study groups, most of the groups met for about two hours. A two-hour time frame was also consistent with our small group meetings, which generally met for 90 minutes to two hours. Additionally, I suggested that we meet every other week. I thought meeting weekly would be too taxing
to schedules, but meeting monthly created too much time between meetings. I knew from research on teacher study groups that routine meetings provided continuity, consistency, and a sense of community for the professional development (Clark, 2001). We scheduled two hours for each session. I was hopeful that two hours would give the women enough time to discuss teaching practices in depth and explore potential conversation-based activities to integrate into their individual groups.

While we had several possible locations to meet, I offered my home as a meeting place for several reasons. It was in a central location, making it easy for the women to come from either their home or job. My home was a quiet location, which minimized distractions and made it easier to record the group's discourse. One teacher study group met in a restaurant which was good for the group, but was very problematic for audio-recording the conversations as even in private dining rooms, extraneous noises such as a group of cheerleaders caused problems to the recordings (Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001). Most importantly, however, my home was comfortable and allowed the group to gather around a table, share food, or interact in a casual atmosphere. My review of teacher study groups revealed two trends in location. Some researchers wanted the professional development to be at the workplace as a part of the routine schedule for the teachers (Crockett, 2002; Grossman, 2001; Kazemi & Franke, 2003; Saavedra, 1996; Sherin & Han, 2004), while others opted to create a more social setting (Cavazos, et al. 2001; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Hollingsworth, 1992; Swidler, 2001). We opted to meet bi-weekly on Thursday afternoons at four o'clock at my home. The logistical decisions incorporated input from the group participants. I believe this helped the group feel a sense of ownership to the group as well as optimizing attendance at the meetings.

**Fostering Community and Conversation**

Nearly every decision regarding the professional development program centered on fostering community and conversation. Meeting frequently for a two-hour block of time in a casual setting were all decisions that focused on developing personal relationships, much like a group of friends. “Meeting in
a comfortable place at a comfortable time can help. Coming together in a private home goes a long way toward establishing a safe atmosphere, as does sharing food” (Clark, 2001, p. 178). Meeting around a table of food is a concept shared by many teacher study groups (Cavazos, 2001; Florio-Ruane, 1994; Hollingsworth, 1992; Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001; Rust & Orland, 2001; Swidler, 2001).

I also opted to keep the number of participants to a small number of five people. Through my review of literature, I determined one feature that led to teacher study groups fostering community and meaningful conversation was their small size. Traditional professional development programs are held in conference facilities, where a speaker addresses hundreds of teachers or a full faculty. As a result, teachers rarely have the opportunity to engage in conversation. As Table 3.1 reveals, the largest teacher study group was comprised of 22 English and Social Studies teachers who met in their high school to participate in a University of Washington professional development program (Grossman, et al., 2001). Most groups range from 6 to 12 participants, although some groups have been as small as four teachers and a participating researcher (Crockett, 2002; Sherin & Han, 2004).

Direct research has not been conducted on the effectiveness of the size of the group; however, many of the groups have reported that the small size contributed to forming a community of safety and trust (Cavazos, 2001; Clark, 2001; Hollingsworth, 1992). The group size appears to be a contributing factor in the amount of time it takes to build a community based on trust. The larger the group, the more time it will take to establish the type of community that facilitates learning conversation. This area of research is inconclusive at this point. As more research is conducted, a better understanding of the correlation between the size of a group and the learning that occurs may be realized. For the focal group, the small number of teachers in the group was selected to enhance the formation of trust and safety. With an environment of safety and trust there was a higher potential to engage in meaningful conversation.
Voluntary participation is another common feature of teacher study groups (Clark, 2001; Crockett, 2002; Flood & Lapp, 1994; Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001; Kazemi & Franke, 2003; Rust, 1999; Sherin & Han, 2004; Swidler, 2001). According to Clark (2001), “for a conversation to have a chance of getting good, the participants must want to be there, must want to cooperate” (p. 177).

Participating in professional development can be characterized as either voluntary or mandated. Mandated professional development is the typical approach. Anyone who has taught in public schools has attended mandatory professional development called “inservice days.” These mandated sessions have been criticized as inadequate to transforming educational practices (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Clark, 2001; Putnam & Borko, 1997, 2000; Wilson & Berne, 1999). While teachers may be forced to attend an inservice, they are not required to participate, nor even pay attention.

Teaching through conversation can be a scary enterprise. There is no guarantee that a learning conversation, or any conversation, will occur as there is always the risk of silence. These concerns advocate for the voluntary nature of conversation-based groups. There is a greater likelihood of people participating in conversation if they are interested in and desire to interact with others in the group. Rust (1999) determined “an important aspect of the group’s strength is its voluntary nature” (p. 378). I opted to utilize voluntary participation when forming the focal group for these very reasons. I wanted people who were interested in participating in conversations and interacting with the others. Additionally, the alternative education context is fully comprised of volunteers. It would be nearly impossible to coerce or impress small group leaders into participating. Voluntary participation was a good fit for the focal group.

I also hoped to foster community and meaningful conversation by inviting participants with some common ground. Common ground is one characteristic of teacher study groups that researchers indicate is instrumental in generating learning conversations and building safety and trust (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Clark, 2001). Ball and Cohen (1999) advocate for “creating common ground on which individual
teachers and groups might work, compare thinking, explore alternatives, and play imaginatively [which] would offer a meeting place for a new kind of professional development” (p. 24). One way of creating common ground is to center professional development on teachers’ own practice. Practice-based professional development is also advocated by Hollingsworth (1992) as a “structural feature that supported teachers’ learning within collaborative conversations” (p. 399). Additionally Clark (2001) determined that “common ground makes full participation possible” in teacher study groups (p. 178). Whether the common ground is established through teachers’ practice or similar “values, ideas, fears and shared experiences” (Clark, 2001, p. 178), it is another element of teacher study groups that can be purposefully selected at the design stage to contribute to the development of community and conversation of a group.

My review of literature on teacher study groups revealed that most groups are established based on at least three reported areas of common ground. Interestingly, the study groups I reviewed tended to be all women or mixed gender. I have yet to read about an all-male teacher study group. Cavazos (2001), Florio-Ruane (1995), and Hollingsworth (1992) designed their teacher study groups specifically for women. Hollingsworth wanted to design a professional development alternative by utilizing a feminist approach to support beginning elementary teachers from one teacher education program. Similarly, Cavazos designed her group to support beginning science teachers from the same graduate program. The women of WEST—Women Educators of Science and Technology—developed a framework to understand how their common ground made their teacher study group successful. Their common ground was evident in their shared goals and values about teaching science, shared content and curricular knowledge, shared experiences with sexism on the job, shared pedagogical knowledge, and similar students. Their common ground helped to create the supportive learning environment for these novice women science teachers.
Common ground can also be established by gathering teachers from the same educational organization, grade level, or subject matter. The Kazemi & Franke (2003) group was comprised of teachers who taught at the same elementary school. The participants shared a goal of focusing on improving how to teach math. Grossman, et al., (2001) gathered social studies and English teachers from the same high school with a goal of developing an interdisciplinary humanities curriculum. Another group formed based on a common interest in integrating technology into the curriculum (Jenlink & Kinneucan-Welsch, 2001). Whatever the characteristics, common ground begins to unite individuals into a group and gives them a common purpose.

For the focal group, I wanted to have an all female group as research indicates that women and men have different conversational patterns (Coates, 1996); restricting the group by gender was one means of fostering trust and meaningful conversation without having to overcome gendered conversational differences. This decision was also consistent with teacher study groups. The group also had common ground. By selecting participants from the same educational organization, the Church small group ministry, the women had common ground based on the expectations and obstacles of the larger institution.

This section presented the structural elements and supporting literature I utilized when designing the professional development program for the focal group. Logistically, the group was designed to meet bi-weekly, for a period of two hours, in a casual setting. These design decisions, along with the small size, voluntary participation, and common ground were all selected to foster community characterized by safety and trust and meaningful conversation. I also selected activities intended to foster community and meaningful conversation. These activities will be discussed in the next section which details the curriculum for the focal group.
Focal Group Curriculum

Once the four women accepted the invitation to participate in the professional development program and research study, I began designing a curriculum that would be practice-based, and therefore, relevant for church-based small group leaders. Additionally, I sought to utilize activities that would support fostering community and meaningful conversations. The curriculum activities for each session follow a similar pattern: beginning each session with some type of community-building activity, followed by a conversation-based teaching activity, and concluded with a reflection activity. Specific activities will be detailed in the discussion of the curriculum. For the reflective activities, I followed the pattern provided by McMillan and Harriger (2002), and opted to use debriefing, reflective conversation, and written responses to encourage the women to examine their own participation within the group. The intention of the debriefing was to help the women learn about and modify their interaction patterns and in doing so foster a community of trust more conducive to meaningful conversations.

The topics comprising the curriculum address five common challenges encountered within small groups: 1) the community challenge, 2) the conversation challenge, 3) the content challenge, 4) the conflict challenge, and 5) the leadership challenge. These challenges served as a guideline for the learning of the focal group. It is important to note, however, that there is not a step-by-step plan that can adequately prepare all teachers to develop a trusting environment and teach their groups to engage in meaningful conversations. The intent was to have the women, as a group, explore several of these challenges together taking into account their own group situations, and draw on knowledge available from research. I wanted the women to find common ground through the curriculum and hoped that the topics would be relevant to their small group contexts. I selected the first two topics we would explore as a group: community challenge and conversation challenge. The remaining topics were addressed based on the women's interests and time available. Without knowing if all the topics would be
addressed, I pre-selected activities for the first two challenges, but waited to select other specific activities until they were necessary.

We used *Walking the Small Group Tightrope* (Donahue & Robinson, 2003) as a resource for the group's exploration of leading small groups. The book discusses six topics regarding leading small groups through juxtapositions. I was drawn to this book because it lent itself to exploring multiple perspectives. Each chapter presents at least three perspectives for each topic: two extremes and then a middle ground. I distributed the book at our first session and encouraged the women to use it as a resource by reading whichever chapter addressed a current challenge they were facing within their own small groups. In the curriculum overview I distributed to the group, I included the juxtapositions from the *Tightrope* book. Table 3.2 below represents the document the group received. The juxtapositions and corresponding chapters are noted.

Table 3.2

*Handout on Focal Group Curriculum Overview: Leadership Development Challenges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What is community?</td>
<td>• How does the curriculum affect what happens in the group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Why should we develop community?</td>
<td>• What are the best topics for a small group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can we develop community in our small groups?</td>
<td>• How should curriculum be chosen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ice-breakers</td>
<td>• How do personal values, interests, and teaching affect content choices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-disclosure</td>
<td>• Discipleship/Care tension (ch. 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Friendship/Accountability tension (ch. 3)</td>
<td><strong>Conflict</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Openness/Intimacy tension (ch. 6)</td>
<td>• Why is conflict important for a small group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversation</strong></td>
<td>• How do I respond to conflict?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What is authentic conversation?</td>
<td>• What types of conflict are possible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What is the best means for developing authentic conversation?</td>
<td>• How can I use conflict to benefit the group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can we teach our group different processes of conversation?</td>
<td>• Kindness/Confrontation tension (ch. 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deliberation</td>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Video Club</td>
<td>• What kind of leader should I be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ground Rules</td>
<td>• What should be my role within the group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Truth/Life tension (ch. 1)</td>
<td>• Task/People tension (ch. 5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the group's eight sessions, we were able to explore the Community, Conversation, and Conflict Challenges. The next sections detail specific activities.

**Community Challenge**

As the facilitator, I presented several questions to the group as a way to introduce the community challenge: *What is community?, Why should we develop community?, How can we develop community in our small groups?, What is the role of ice-breakers and self-disclosure activities?, How can we understand the tension of friendship and accountability in small groups?, and How can we understand the tension of openness and intimacy in small groups?* I selected activities that I thought would help address these questions and create a foundation to foster trust within our group.

To explore the question, *What is Community?*, we examined forty different quotations that offered definitions or characterizations of community. I assembled these community characterizations from the literature on small groups and teacher study groups. The goal of the activity was to build consensus on a definition of community that would be consistent with the women's experiences leading small groups. This definition of community led to a discussion of the second question, *Why should we develop community?* I thought it was essential that the group explore why community was important before discussing ways to build community in a small group.

We examined and practiced using four primary community-building activities: 1) eating together, 2) sharing personal narratives, 3) ice-breakers, and 4) self-disclosure. I had food and non-alcoholic beverages for each session so the women could experience if there was a difference due to the food. I selected activities and maintained a facilitation style that encouraged the sharing of personal narratives. I selected ice-breakers and self-disclosure activities from literature on church-based small groups, which I will describe in more detail next.

Ice-breakers are commonly used within church-based small groups to begin the process of building community (Donahue & Robinson, 2003). Ice-breakers are activities designed for self-
description and “getting to know you” (Gorman, 2002). Donahue and Robinson (2003) consider self-description to be the “headlines about me and my life” (p. 77). As part of building community is developing an atmosphere of safety and trust, it is difficult to trust someone you know nothing about. Consequently, ice-breakers are essential first-steps in building community.

Many ice-breaker options are available through books and games. There are several games available in stores that may be used to get people talking about themselves, their likes, and their dislikes such as Whoonu, ImaginIF, and Rate It. During our first session, I used an ice-breaker I call "Different Spokes." In this activity, the group uses a shared surface to record items they all have in common as well as self-descriptions unique to one person. At other times, we simply started by sharing about our week's activities or family events. In these instances we were sharing narratives about our personal lives as a community-building activity.

Ice-breakers encourage self-description, but I also wanted the group to engage in activities that encouraged more trust and therefore provided an opportunity for self-disclosure. Self-disclosure involves sharing one's feelings, hopes, and thoughts (Donahue & Robinson, 2003). Gorman (2002) provides several activities specifically related to getting group members to build community through self-disclosure. I selected two activities. In one activity, individuals completed a twenty question inventory and marked each item as to whether they considered each statement a “low risk, moderate risk, high risk, or disclose to no one” (Gorman, 2002, p. 134). The activity was designed to bring awareness to our individual feelings of interactional risk.

A second self-disclosure activity I called “self-disclosure awareness.” I distributed a list of personal characteristics to the group. Each person needed to “mark five or six adjectives that best describe your personality as you see it” (Gorman, 2002, p. 138). Then each person selected three or four adjectives that describe each other person in the group. After collecting all the adjectives about one person, the adjectives were placed in a Johari Window that consisted of four quadrants: open, blind,
hidden, and unknown. Adjectives placed in the open quadrant are known to self and known to others. Those placed in the blind quadrant are known to others, but not known to self. The hidden quadrant contains adjectives known to self, but not known to others. No adjectives would be placed in the final quadrant as these are adjectives that are “unknown to self” and “unknown to others.” I intended for activity to help with awareness whether or not those in the group were disclosing feelings and motivations about themselves to others in the group. These activities were a means to encourage the participants to engage in further self-disclosure and understand how self-disclosure contributes to building community within a small group.

The group discussed in an interactive lecture format ideas from two chapters of the Tightrope book: Chapter 3, Meeting the Relational Challenge by Balancing Friendship and Accountability, and chapter 6, Meeting the Connection Challenge by Balancing Openness and Intimacy. Both of these tensions affect the community of a group. We discussed the extremes and the middle ground of "authentic relationship" (p.73) and "inclusive community" (p. 144) to understand community in small groups.

Conversation Challenge

We explored the Conversation Challenge by discussing ways to facilitate discussions and different processes for conversation. The Conversation Challenge included the following topics: What is authentic conversation?, What is the best means for developing authentic conversation?, How can we teach our group different processes of conversation?, How can we use deliberations and ground rules to enhance conversation?, and How can we understand the truth and life tension that happens in small groups?

Similar to the Community Challenge, I felt it was important for the group to develop consensus around the characteristics of desired conversations they would like to experience within their own small groups. I planned a brainstorming activity to elicit characteristics of “good” and “bad” conversations. I
also planned activities regarding the utilization of ground rules, deliberations, and sharing personal narratives to enhance small group discussions.

For the group’s first meeting, I introduced the idea of ground rules. Ground rules are agreed upon regulations that govern a group’s discourse (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). Ground rules help to foster notions of safety and trust (Clark, 2001). I presented four ground rules for the focal group to follow for our group sessions: 1) no interrupting, 2) no unsolicited advice giving, 3) I pass, and 4) confidentiality (Clark, 2001). “No interrupting” conveys a message that each person is worth listening to. This is a necessary rule to establish in order to foster personal authority. “No unsolicited advice giving” is one of the most difficult rules to follow and enforce. This rule requires breaking the educational cultural norm of traditional professional development workshops (Palmer, 1998). Traditional workshops are full of experts dispensing advice to those with a problem. It is very difficult to deconstruct this discourse pattern; however, it is necessary in order to construct a safe learning environment, which will help build community that supports learning conversations. I was hopeful that the focal group would also “welcome both silence and speech” (Palmer, 1998, p. 77). This idea is at the heart of Clark’s “I pass” rule. Individuals should always have the option to not share without feeling isolated, coerced or embarrassed (Clark, 2001). Confidentiality implies that any shared information will be kept private.

Although ground rules were introduced in Session 1, when the curriculum addressed the Conversation Challenge, I designed an activity to help the group examine how to form ground rules for conversation within a group. I used a conversational activity to lead the women in a discussion of ground rules. First, I had each person reflect and write about the best and worst group discussions they have experienced. Next, each person shared what they wrote so that common themes and shared experiences could be identified. The group then brainstormed good and bad characteristics of discussion. Finally, the group discussed ground rules they could use to foster good conversational characteristics in their own small groups.
I distributed a list of ground rules for consideration. Brookfield and Preskill (2005) used this list with students in their higher education courses as ground rules for conversation they dubbed “dispositions of democratic discussions” (p. 8). They focus on nine dispositions including “hospitality, participation, mindfulness, humility, mutuality, deliberation, appreciation, hope, and autonomy” (p. 8). Hospitality is fostered by encouraging all students to talk and share something personal about their lives. As instructors, they teach their students that participation is everyone’s responsibility. Each participant’s responsibilities include speaking, listening, and inviting others to share their perspectives. They teach their students to be mindful of the whole conversation by encouraging them to pay attention by asking questions to clarify other students’ ideas, contributing to the current thread of conversation, and not speaking just to be heard. The instructors model the disposition of humility by “acknowledging that others in the group have ideas to express that might teach us something new or change our mind about something significant” (p. 12). A climate of mutuality is highly important. “Mutuality means that it is in the interest of all to care as much about each other’s self-development as one’s own” (p. 12). With mutuality, the learning of the group is elevated above the learning of the individual. Brookfield and Preskill additionally characterize a disposition of deliberation. This disposition requires that people enter conversations with an open mind, willing to listen to alternative perspectives and even change their original ideas. These instructors encourage their students to express their appreciation of one another openly and honestly within the group and throughout the course of a discussion. The disposition of hope is necessary when students become frustrated with the length of time it takes to deliberate topics: “hope provides us with a sense that all of the time, effort, and work will benefit us in the long run” (p. 16). The final disposition is one of autonomy. Although they encourage their students with dispositions of mutuality, there is a time for students to take a stand for their convictions. There needs to be space in the group for this disposition. Modeling and teaching these nine dispositions was the vehicle through which Brookfield and Preskill fostered a trusting community that was conducive to deliberations within
their courses resulting in meaningful conversations. As the focal group, we reviewed these nine dispositions and discussed how they could be presented and used within our own small groups.

Another conversational process the focal group practiced was deliberation. I selected the conversational process model of deliberation because it lends itself to exploring divergent perspectives without clearly discernable conclusions. Deliberations foster conversation as each person can share her perspective with others in the group. I also selected deliberations because they require group members to engage in some form of conflict, confrontation, or wrestling with differences and multiple perspectives, and subsequently come to a resolution or consensus. As the challenge of conflict in small groups was the next curriculum topic, the deliberation model seemed to be a good fit for addressing both the Conversation Challenge and the Conflict Challenge.

Parker (2001a) defines deliberation as “discussion with an eye toward decision making” (p. 113). A good deliberation is characterized by the exchange of multiple perspectives and alternative solutions. Additionally, “deliberative people enter discussion aware that the ensuing exchange of views may modify their original opinions” (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999, p. 13). Deliberation enhances the learning within a group as “it entails a commitment to rethink, reexamine, or reformulate issues or problems in the light of new experiences or new lines of thought” (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999, p. 14). As positive processes of conflict are a necessity to enhance both community and conversation, engaging teachers in deliberation of relevant, practice-based controversial issues should be a group activity.

Learning to deliberate is known to be a challenging endeavor for both the teacher and the students (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). A certain level of trust must be present for individuals to comfortably share divergent ideas. Researchers have identified that one challenge to deliberations is avoidance (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Ryfe, 2006). Many times participants will step back from controversy in order to keep the peace (Ryfe, 2006). Both the discussion facilitator and those participating will need to learn how to engage in deliberations (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Ryfe, 2006).
Fortunately, researchers have proposed how to teach people how to engage in deliberations (Noyé, 1994).

To teach the women how to engage in deliberations, I selected a public policy deliberation model as formulated by Parker (2003). The public policy deliberation model draws inspiration from two sources: the Problems of Democracy course recommended by the 1916 Social Studies report and public policy deliberation experts. The model contains three basic steps with subparts for each section. These steps can be taught in a linear fashion although Parker (2003) recommends utilizing the model in an iterative fashion.

Part I: Identify and explain a public problem
1. Identify a public problem
2. Explain the problem
3. Map stakeholders and their perspectives

Part II: Develop and Analyze Policy Alternatives
4. Formulate policy goals
5. Develop policy alternatives
6. Assess consequences of policy alternatives and evaluate trade-offs

Part III: Deciding What Action to Take
7. Selection
8. Political Analysis
(Parker, 2003, p. 112).

Part I begins the deliberation process by having students gather information about the public problem under scrutiny. As students gather information, they are obligated to explore the problem from multiple viewpoints [see step #3]. After students have gathered sufficient information, in Part II they will begin to formulate goals [see step #4] and explore alternative solutions to the problems [see step #5]. Part I can be seen as preparation for deliberation. Part II of this process is the heart of a deliberation. Identifying solutions and weighing the potential consequences of those solutions for the stakeholders is essential to the deliberative process. The deliberation is concluded when a decision is made regarding which solution to act on. This is captured in Part III of the model. This model is representative of other deliberation models that have been used with groups in that it requires students to gather knowledge
about the issue, explore multiple perspectives, engage in deliberative discussions, and make decisions about a course of action.

I felt it was important that the issues the focal group deliberated needed to be relevant to their teaching circumstances and their learning goals. To learn the process, we began with an inquiry that sparked interest but that I believed the women would feel safe discussing. We deliberated regarding the most important thing you can do in a small group. This topic was of interest to the group and generated the sought after style of discussion as we learned to engage in the deliberation process. As Parker (2001a, 2001b) claims, deliberation is difficult. By engaging in deliberation as learners, the women in the group endeavored to learn about deliberation in a more practice-based activity. The deliberation activities were designed to encourage the development of trust and a specific process of conversation.

The group also discussed sharing personal narratives, how to elicit personal narratives, and the value of personal narratives in small group discussion. Through my review of teacher study groups, narratives were vital group activities for nine of the thirteen groups (see Table 3.1). While the women were encouraged to share personal narratives during the opening moments of each session, I also planned a specific activity for sharing narratives and discussing the use, elicitation, and value of narratives. I developed a list of sharing questions and distributed them so the leaders would have the questions to use during our session and in their own groups later. The activity encouraged participants to share a narrative from their past, present, and future. I asked the women to share a response to one of the past and present questions.

Brookfield and Preskill (2005) advocate that topics under discussion must connect to “memorable experiences in their lives” (p. 74). People enjoy telling stories of their experiences, but “a critical discussion will open people to the possibility of seeing their stories from different perspectives and understanding their experiences in new ways” (Brookfield & Preskill, p. 75). Donahue and Robinson (2003) refer to this as the truth-life tension: “Too much story leaves no room for truth. Too much
discussion of truth without connection to life can produce arrogant, puffed-up Christians who never practice what they study” (p. 21). Groups need to be willing to let knowledge and experience have the same or similar value to a conversation. Both need to be considered within the course of the discussion. In designing the various activities of the professional development program, I opted for activities that would elicit narratives that I hoped would honor both the participants’ knowledge and their experiences.

**Conflict Challenge**

As every group will have conflict, how the group deals with conflict is vital (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Donahue & Robinson, 2002, 2003, 2004; Gorman, 2002; Keyton, 2002). Conflict in its negative manifestation raises discomfort and hurt feelings. However, conflict in which multiple perspectives are explored can be a positive and healthy experience for groups (Keyton, 2002). Conflicts cause tension within groups, yet tension is necessary and can be productive for groups. According to Roth and Tobin (2002) tensions provide an opportunity for learning. Gorman (2002) views conflict as necessary to overcome pseudocommunity, a falsified representation of community. Zellermeyer (2001) believes conflicts are necessary to develop authentic conversation. Donahue and Robinson (2003) advocate for healthy conflict to exist in church-based small groups as it “can facilitate some of the most transforming moments your group will ever have” (p. 104). Each area of literature I have drawn from to design the focal group advocates optimizing conflict within groups.

I presented several questions in conjunction with the Conflict Challenge: *Why is conflict important for a small group?, How do I respond to conflict?, What types of conflict are possible?, How can I use conflict to benefit the group?, and How can I balance the tension of kindness and confrontation?* To help the focal group explore how to view and utilize conflict as a healthy and community-building aspect of small group life, I planned for us to engage in activities that reflected on our personal perspectives of conflict and established ground rules to regulate activities. Keyton (2002)
characterizes six types of conflict: affective, competitive, cooperative, cognitive, procedural, and normative. I planned for the group to examine these six types of conflict to give the group a framework to ground their understanding of conflict in small groups. In another activity, we each completed an inventory of 35 questions to reflect on what strategies each one typically uses when conflict occurs (Keyton, 2002). I hoped these activities would serve as a good guide for their conversations about the conflict challenge.

The curriculum topics and activities were grounded on literature relevant to teacher study groups and leading church-based small groups. As a facilitator, I selected conversation-based activities that would encourage the participants to develop trust, engage in deliberations, and share narratives as they explored three central challenges of leading small groups. Now that I have presented information on the structure and curriculum, I would like to share some comments from my experience as the focal group’s facilitator as it regards enacting the design.

**Facilitator Reflections**

I spent significant time constructing what I believed to be an excellent curriculum for the leadership development program. I knew it would be important to follow the established plans. However, the best laid plans often change within the moment. Table 3.3 provides an overview of the specific activities for all eight sessions. I note the type of activity as community-building, teaching, or reflective. I also note which challenge was addressed by the various activities.
### Table 3.3

**Overview of Curriculum Activities for the Focal Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Activity Title</th>
<th>Activity Type</th>
<th>Challenge Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Different Strokes – identify personal similarities and differences</td>
<td>Community-building</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Curriculum Overview – interactive lecture to review leadership development program</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reflective Writing &amp; Sharing – reflect on something learned during the session</td>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>ImaginIf</em> – a board game was played in which the players guess how one person would respond to a question</td>
<td>Community-building</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Brainstorming characteristics of the ideal small group</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Discussion: What is Community? The group examined 40 characterizations of community and developed consensus on one</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reflective Writing &amp; Sharing – reflect on one of the session activities</td>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Risk Assessment – Completed inventory, revealed responses to inventory, discussion on risk and talking in a small group</td>
<td>Community-building</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sharing Questions – I provided the group a list of possible questions prompting individuals to share on past or present experiences, or hopes for the future, followed by a discussion on how to use these questions in small groups</td>
<td>Community-building</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Personal Awareness – the group exchanged positive characteristics used to describe each person, compared to see if personal descriptions and other participant descriptions matched</td>
<td>Community-building</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Community Continuum – I presented an interactive lecture on community based on chapter from <em>Tightrope</em> book</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reflective Writing &amp; Sharing – reflect on one of the session activities</td>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sharing about small groups and current challenges</td>
<td>Community-building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reflective Writing – reflect on characteristics of good and bad conversation experienced</td>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Brainstorming conversation of good and bad conversation</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ground Rules – discussed using ground rules in small groups to assist with conversations</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Whoonu</em> – played board game to determine players favorites</td>
<td>Community-building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Watched Nooma video: *Bullhorn*. Discussed various conversational approaches to leading small groups

Deliberation Model introduced. Walked through deliberation steps by discussing: What is the most important thing you can do when leading a small group

Reflective Writing & Sharing – reflect on one of the session activities

Catching up conversation

Readers Theater: examined a scenario of conflict in a small group

Conflict Strategies: completed questionnaire and discussed possible strategies people use when conflict arises

Conflict 101: I presented an interactive lecture regarding managing conflict

Conflict 101, continued: discussed definition of conflict, including healthy conflict, and sources of conflict

Reflective Writing & Sharing – reflect on one of the session activities

Catching up conversation

Conflict 101, continued: discussed definition of conflict, including healthy conflict, and sources of conflict

Reflective Writing & Sharing – reflect on one of the session activities

Human Knot – team-building activity in which the group must become one string of rope and tie a knot without letting go of the rope

Deliberation: How should we do small group leadership development in Connection Ministries? Followed steps of setting ground rules, goals, identifying stakeholders, alternatives, and consequences

Reflective Writing & Sharing – reflect on one of the session activities

I had not planned all the community-building activities prior to the start of the group, only for Session 1. For the most part, I selected the community-building activities prior to each session. I wanted to use community-building activities that the women could also use in their own small groups. As the women shared experiences from teaching their own small groups, I was able to better match activities with their needs. I also wanted to use activities that would get the women to interact and get to know one another better. I became more intentional with the community-building activities as the sessions
progressed. During our eighth and final group meeting, Holly shared her discomfort with the community-building activities. This revealing comment sparked very thought provoking discussion.

We had five challenges we were going to explore as a group. However, we only touched on three in the eight sessions: community challenge, conversation challenge, and conflict challenge. Time really did become my adversary. The women expressed a desire to delve into the conflict challenge, so I did not spend as much time on the conversation challenge as I would have liked. This was one instance when meeting the expressed needs of the group took priority over the preconceived design of the leadership development program. However, I believe the group activities addressing the conversation challenge were adequate to meet my teaching goals.

Another alteration I made to the curriculum was the use of the deliberation model. My original plan was to use deliberations with each challenge. Yet, I waited to introduce the deliberation model until Session 5 and only used it one other time in Session 8. In retrospect, I think time was the biggest factor. Deliberations take a lot of time; time to prepare and time to enact. It seemed most appropriate to wait on the deliberation process until the conversation challenge was introduced and as a way to engage in the conflict challenge. I had hoped to have five or six deliberations to compare as a part of my analysis. In this case, my interest in researching the process by which the group deliberated was set aside to better support the learning that was happening within the group.

As time became such a crucial factor, I began to understand how much I had over-planned when designing the group. The women were not slow learners requiring me to slow the pace. On the contrary, they were so invested in learning everything they could they wanted to spend more time on each activity. I wanted to create a context in which the women could explore topics relevant to leading small groups and did not feel that rushing through the curriculum was the best choice. Once again, my intuitions as a teacher took precedence over the research.
My preference, as supported by the literature is to maintain structure and therefore designed the group to meet every other week. This did not happen. We had three weeks elapse two different times due to schedule conflicts and our desire to have everyone present for each session. On another occasion I was sick and had to cancel the group meeting; this delay put a full month between two sessions. Then to make up time and avoid the holidays we met weekly for three weeks. This weekly frequency was stressful on all our schedules. The need for scheduling happened during every session. Instead of focusing on deliberations or narratives, we had to spend time comparing schedules to find the next time to meet. I found the schedule confusing due to our inconsistencies.

While much of this reflection has highlighted the irregularities that occurred between the designed professional development and the actualized focal group, I found the experience to be incredibly rewarding and worthwhile. Darlene and Samantha started meeting weekly outside of our group time and eventually co-led a small group. Interestingly, Holly opted to stop leading her small group after participating in the focal group. She shared that she was reexamining many of her leadership practices and wanted some time to explore these ideas further. Holly is now developing small group leaders for all the small groups for women in the church. She is leading two different groups specifically for women. Cassidy transitioned from being the youth pastor to children’s pastor and now is serving as a consultant to all the pastors regarding small groups at the church. Cassidy and I have continued to meet routinely since the focal group concluded.

In this chapter, I have described the focal group structure which was premised on a teacher study group model utilizing common ground, voluntary participation, and small size to enhance the building of trust and engaging in conversation. Additionally, I presented an overview of the curriculum topics and activities. I also presented my reflections on facilitating the focal group.

In the chapters that follow, I focus on the research component of the focal group. The next chapter reviews the research methodology used to collect and analyze the data: primarily their talk.
Chapters 5 and 6 address the primary research agenda: What is the nature of talk among the members of the focal group? In Chapter 5, I describe the recurrent turn-by-turn discursive patterns and how these patterns characterize the talk of the blended space of the focal group as a speech community. In Chapter 6, I describe the above-the-sentence discursive practices and how these patterns characterize blended space speech community enacted for this study. The talk of the focal group is the window of research to examine this alternative educational context for teacher professional development.
CHAPTER 4 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this dissertation, I was simultaneously responsible for the dual roles of leadership-development program facilitator and researcher. The participants were aware of these dual roles as they signed consent forms and observed audio and video-recording equipment at each professional development session. The previous chapter reviewed my information pertinent to facilitating the focal group. This chapter focuses on the research of the focal group, outlining my methodological choices. Here, I provide an overview of my general approach, then detailed descriptions of the research setting, research participants, data sources, data analysis, and my role as the researcher. All of my methodological choices were grounded and informed by the theoretical lens presented in my conceptual framework encompassing symbolic interactionism and sociolinguistics.

Guided by my interest in how discourse both shapes and is shaped by the social context in which it is situated, my research questions were as follows: What is the nature of the talk among the members of the focal study group?; including What recurrent patterns characterize this talk? and What type of blended space is enacted and constituted by this talk? These research questions, the subsequent focus on discursive practices, and the concept of a blended-space speech community came about after the focal-leadership-development program concluded. The research question emerged from my process of reviewing the transcripts, developing my conceptual framework, conversations with Anne DiPardo and Dan Liston, as well as my explorations of a variety of related literature.

Wolcott (1994) states “data are tainted with an analytical or interpretive cast in the very process of becoming data” (p. 16). Ultimately, as the researcher, I served as the primary filter through which all decisions were made regarding the setting, participants, data sources, and data analysis. I primarily drew from the research work of Coates (1996) and Tannen (2005) for my sociolinguistic techniques. In both cases, the researchers were participants in the conversations and used sociolinguistics to identify patterns in the conversation of a group of less than six people. Coates (1996) identified patterns that
were gender-specific, while Tannen (2005) identified and discussed conversational styles. In my case, I am looking to identify patterns of conversation occurring within a conversationally-based leadership-development program in which I was an active participant.

**Setting**

Both symbolic interactionism and sociolinguistic approaches focus particular attention to the social context or setting in which talk transpires. Specifically, I wanted to explore the arena of a small group of teachers gathering on an on-going basis to interact through conversation as a means of professional development. Within my review of symbolic interactionism, I wanted to focus predominantly on the concept of interaction as defined by McCall (2003).

Sociolinguistic studies seek “to understand how a focused gathering manages to begin, carry on, and finally conclude a conversation” (McCall, 2003, p. 340). Symbolic Interaction’s small-groups tradition studies group dynamics and takes account of group culture (Herman-Kenny & Verschaeve, 2003). The leadership-development program seemed to me a meaningful site in which to explore the nature of talk within a hybrid educational structure incorporating elements found in both formal and informal settings for a gathering-based small group.

This research setting resulted out of the convergence of my graduate studies and my volunteer work. As I described in Chapter 3, my design of the leadership-development program was informed by my review of related empirical and conceptual literature, drawing on alternative teacher professional development efforts that specifically incorporated conversation as a central means for facilitating teacher learning of professional topics. Through volunteering at a church I was afforded the opportunity to utilize my knowledge of teacher professional development and apply it to this alternative educational setting of small-group ministry.

One of the key deficits of the small-group ministry was leaders with limited teaching knowledge and experience in addition to leaders lacking of familiarity leading conversationally-based small groups. I
was able to apply my knowledge and experience by forming a leadership-development program to address this leadership weakness. I opted to use the leadership-development program as the setting for my research as it aligned with the basic parameters of conversationally-based professional development that I wanted to explore. As is consistent with symbolic interactionism studies, high-levels of participation in the setting and talk are not only permissible, but desired (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003).

**Research Participants**

With the research setting of the leadership-development program derived from leaders within the church-based small-group ministry, I needed to involve participants from within the larger organizational context. When forming the leadership-development group, I endeavored to find a maximum of four, women, adult small group leaders consistent with teacher study groups. Although there were nearly fifty small group leaders, there were only six women who met the criteria, including me. One woman was experiencing some serious health problems which impacted her hearing and was unable to participate. The other four women I spoke with accepted my personal invitation to participate in the pilot study of the leadership-development program.

I was unaware of most of their personal strengths and interests at the outset; however, no have a good understanding of each one. In describing the participants, I suggest background that may have influenced their talk. In this section, I provide an overview of each participant, her areas of ministry, family situation, small groups led, and education background.

**Participant Descriptions**

The focal group was comprised of five small group leaders from one church: Samantha, Cassidy, Holly, Darlene, and I (Tabitha). In describing the participants, I intend to provide contextual background

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3 Due to the specific nature of these descriptions, the participants have approved disclosure of this information even though it may result in some readers determining their true identities. However, some liberty has been taken to obscure identification, including using pseudonyms.
to help the reader better understand the focal group’s talk presented in Chapters 5 and 6. The participant descriptions also provide areas that the women have in common as well as areas of distinction. Most focal-group participants are married with children. The participants’ ages range from mid-twenties to early-forties: two participants are older and two are younger than me. The participants’ educational backgrounds are varied: three have professional degrees and licenses and two married young and did not pursue formal education in lieu of raising children. The women all lead at least two small groups as a part of the church’s small-group ministry and all five led a group on Sunday morning.

Table 4.1 provides a summary chart of participant descriptions.

Table 4.1

Summary of Participant Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Small Group</th>
<th>Other Ministries</th>
<th>Career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Married to a pastor, two children</td>
<td>Licensed pastor, BS-Teaching ESL</td>
<td>Girls’ Night, Cleansing Stream</td>
<td>Master’s Commission</td>
<td>Homeschooling children &amp; ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>Married to businessman, four children</td>
<td>Life experiences, correspondence ministry courses</td>
<td>Youth Leadership, Youth Sunday School</td>
<td>Youth Ministry</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Married to businessman, four children</td>
<td>Life experiences</td>
<td>Sunday Night Small Group, Adult Sunday School</td>
<td>Women’s Ministries</td>
<td>Business-owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Married to a pastor, four children</td>
<td>BS in Nursing; RN license</td>
<td>Junior Bible Quiz, Family Night</td>
<td>State Coordinator of JBQ</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Single, no children</td>
<td>BS in Secondary Ed (Social Studies &amp; Library), M.Ed. (Curriculum &amp; Instruction), ABD-Ph.D. (Educational Psychology)</td>
<td>Leadership-Development Program, Cleansing Stream (subgroup leader), Choir Sunday School</td>
<td>Small group director, choir, signing for the hearing impaired</td>
<td>Teaching, business executive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Samantha was a licensed pastor. Her husband was a staff pastor at the church and she worked
closely with him to run a post-secondary school program called Master’s Commission\textsuperscript{4}. She had attended the church for approximately six years at the beginning of the focal group. She and her husband developed and launched the MC program which was their primary ministry at the church. They started with five students and grew to a staff of five with twenty-five students. The MC program was akin to experiential learning in that many of the lessons occurred in the outdoors while rock climbing, orienteering, and through survivalist training. Team-building, leadership skills, and problem-solving were integral components of the program. Samantha set the schedule of activities and co-taught with her husband.

Samantha had an undergraduate degree in teaching English as a second language. She taught several courses at a local college. In her mid-twenties, she was the youngest member of the focal group. She was also a mother of two young children, both under school age. Teaching and family were both primary foci for Samantha. As such, Samantha planned to home-school her children. She and her husband had considered having more children in the near future. Samantha was known as always having a willing smile to share and for her dedication to her various ministries and family.

Samantha led two different small groups at the church. One was comprised of the female students within the Master’s Commission program called Girls Night. During Girls Night, Samantha had the opportunity to teach about being women-in-ministry and other issues specifically for women. The other was Cleansing Stream\textsuperscript{5}, a weekly group that at times had upwards of one hundred people. As a hundred people were too many people for a small group, Samantha had recruited and trained eight assistants and divided the whole group into eight subgroups. Samantha was highly organized, seemingly successfully juggling multiple jobs, family, and volunteer activities.

Cassidy was the youth pastor at the church. When she agreed to participate in the focal group,

\textsuperscript{4} Master’s Commission in an International program with approximately 120 locations in 15 countries.

\textsuperscript{5} Cleansing Stream in an international program developed by the Foursquare denomination.
she was a volunteer youth sponsor. Her shift from volunteer into a professional role created some internal and external conflicts as she engaged in the focal group. Additionally, she was pursuing correspondence coursework to obtain her pastoral license. Cassidy was the first female pastor hired at the church in decades. She had faced many obstacles as she was female, non-licensed, had limited formal education, and had to navigate changing relationships as she began to serve on a staff with Samantha's husband.

Cassidy was married and a mother of four children (one deceased), ages ranging from three to ten. One of Cassidy's twin daughters died close to her first birthday after a long-term illness, which has had a significant impact on Cassidy's family. Cassidy and her family had attended the church for approximately three years at the start of the focal group. Cassidy's husband worked for a large national chain and transferred to the area shortly after the birth of the twins. Cassidy's first year at the church was challenging because the level of care her daughter needed prevented her from meeting many people or being involved in many activities. She then faced the greater obstacle of getting involved while grieving the death of one of her babies. These experiences shaped Cassidy's strong character and her compassion for others. Cassidy was known as being sensitive to the needs of others, showing empathy, and cautious about saying anything that someone would interpret as offensive.

In previous church experiences, Cassidy had served as a children/youth pastor and in women's ministries. She had married before age twenty and had not received formal schooling to pursue her ministerial career. She was eager to learn and improve her knowledge and skills to be a more effective pastor for the youth. In following the ministry direction of the church, she had incorporated small groups into the youth ministry. Cassidy led several small groups and supervised the leaders of the other youth ministry small groups. All of her small group participants were students between seventh and twelfth grades. When I invited Cassidy to participate in the leadership-development program, she was leading a group called Good Grief, which was a support group for adults engaged in the grief process.
Cassidy discontinued the group prior to the leadership-development program starting.

Holly was a volunteer at the church, which she had attended since elementary school. Holly had four generations of her large, extended family attending the church. Both her father and her husband had served in key leadership positions on the board of deacons at the church. She led Women's Ministries, taught Sunday school, and led small groups. Her small groups frequently had several members of her extended family participating. Holly preferred a curriculum that has DVD teachings, study questions, and possibly a book for the participants to read as she felt more comfortable using a pre-packaged curriculum. I was surprised to discover this as Holly was an excellent public speaker and more than capable of developing her own small-group material.

Holly married immediately out of high school and had four children within five years; as a result, Holly was unable to pursue any formal higher education. However, Holly and her husband both ran their own businesses. Holly's oldest child was married. One of her children was a student in the Master's Commission program run by Samantha and her husband. Holly's two youngest children were both involved in the youth group under Cassidy's leadership. Holly was the oldest member of the group. Holly was known for her vibrant personality, especially her ability to make people laugh.

Darlene was another volunteer at the church. She led two small groups. One was for elementary aged students called Junior Bible Quiz⁶ (JBQ), which she co-led with her husband and three other adult leaders. Approximately fifteen children and about ten adults were involved with JBQ. The group met every Sunday morning and four times a year participated with other churches for a full day of activities. Darlene coordinated these statewide events both for the church and for the state.

Darlene and her mother also co-led a weekly group for families. Most of the groups at the church separate families by stages of life. There were groups for kids, teenagers, young-married, and seniors, for example. Darlene and her mother wanted to create a group that encouraged parents and

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⁶ Junior Bible Quiz is a national competition on bible knowledge from the Assemblies of God denomination.
their children to interact as they focused on growing their personal and spiritual characteristics.

Approximately, four families were involved in this group, about fifteen people.

Darlene married while in college. Her husband was a licensed pastor who taught at a private school. She had four children, ages ranging from four to thirteen. Darlene was a registered nurse and worked full-time in a management position at the local hospital. However, Darlene had also spent time as a full-time stay-at-home-mother and a pastor's wife. Her oldest child was diagnosed with cancer at nine years of age. After three years of treatment, her daughter was cancer-free. The three years were an extensive time of change for her family: relocating to a new city and home, changing jobs, and the children changing schools, all while facing the potential serious illness and death of one of the children. I had a great understanding of Darlene, her character, and the how these life events have helped to shape her view of ministry, as Darlene and I had a longstanding relationship.

I served as the group facilitator, researcher, and group participant. I had never been married and I had no children. I also volunteered at the church as the director of the small groups, taught Sunday school groups, and led a small group. I had attended the church since I was an infant, with the exception of a few years at other churches while attending school for my undergraduate degree and my doctorate. I had been involved in the church leadership in various capacities since I was a teenager. I began teaching Sunday school groups while I was in the sixth grade. By the time I was in high school, I was mentoring other teenagers to become Sunday school teachers. I have led small groups since I was an undergraduate. I have preferred leading small groups that involved engaging in discussion around a shared text.

I have an undergraduate degree in Secondary Education, a Masters of Education with an emphasis on Curriculum and Instruction, and this research project served as my dissertation for my PhD in Educational Psychology. I have worked in professional businesses, state government offices, as a middle school teacher, and as a high school librarian as I have pursued my degrees. I am very devoted to
my family, my church, and my education. I am also known for being highly organized and creative.

After spending several months meeting routinely, I learned that this group of women was very special. Their conversation seemed a rich context in which to explore the potential of talk within alternative professional development context. As a group, we had commonalities that made conversation seem easy. We were all small-group leaders within one church program and desired to have successful groups that were safe and healthy places for those in our church to grow both personally and spiritually. We were all interested in learning effective practices for leading small groups to help us overcome the challenges we had encountered while leading small groups. As the women all chose to be a part of the leadership-development program and subsequently the research study, they were motivated to see both succeed. Our shared aspirations, values, and life struggles, allowed us to develop respect for one another and in some cases developed, deepened, and renewed friendships.

I would describe the participants as highly successful women. They balance families, parent multiple children; hold leadership roles not only as small group leaders, but also in other areas of ministry at the church; and professional careers. While the women have differing educational backgrounds and levels, they all are highly verbal; able to express their ideas, engage in conflict about differing perspectives, and express empathy, sincerity, and passion for their endeavors. The combination of their highly verbal style, commonalities, voluntary participation, and personal aspirations resulted in a speech community which was respectful of each person, the group, multiple perspectives, and a pursuit of truth. The speech community, formed by the focal group, seemed fertile ground for exploring discursive practices.

**Data Sources**

The talk of the group was at the center of the data collection for this research project. To support the research focus, I utilized data collection techniques designed to capture talk. Data collection included audio- and videotaping all group activities and creating transcripts of selected sessions.
However, the primary data was not the transcript, but the recorded talk of the focal group, as I could always return to the recordings and add greater levels of linguistic detail to the transcript in a similar fashion to Coates (1996). Audio-taped conversation is the preferred technique for capturing talk that will be transformed into a transcript. Additionally, I video-recorded the sessions if objects or gestures were identified as an integral feature of the group’s interactions. The videotapes would then provide insight into any non-verbal interactions that could be added to the transcripts to bring clarity to the talk.

The recordings of the talk were supplemented by field notes to provide context to the group’s activities. Because I am a facilitator and participant within the group, it was not feasible to take field notes during the group sessions. Instead, I reviewed the videotapes in order to generate field notes and capture my reflections. The field notes were intended to note the contextual or structural elements of the group’s life.

I recorded each session, eight in all, of the leadership-development program. I started the recordings at what I considered the “official” beginning and ending of the session. Most sessions had talk that occurred prior to and following the official time; however, as I was focused on the professional learning within the structured elements of the leadership-development program and I did not capture all of the group’s talk. In retrospect, this was shortsighted on my part as I was not able to analyze their talk outside of the structured activities.

The audio-recorder was positioned near my chair so I could easily, (and, I hoped, discretely,) flip the tape when necessary. I had a conference microphone connected to the audio-recorder to provide better sound quality to the recording. The microphone sat in the middle of the table so all the voices could be easily heard. The video-recorder was positioned about ten feet from the table where the group sat for their meetings. The five of us were positioned in a semi-circle around the table so that no one had her back to the camera. This positioning allowed the video-recording to capture gestures or items on the table that the group was focused on. It was challenging to have two recorders operating at the
same time. The audio-tapes needed to be turned every 45 minutes, while the video-camera tape needed to be changed every 60 minutes. I found that this task distracted me from my role as the facilitator. I often paused the recording during reflective writing times as the women were not talking. Since I wanted to capture their talk, I opted not to keep the recording running during long silences as the women were engaged in writing in their journals. This choice may also have been shortsighted as I was not able to determine how long the women were quiet while writing, nor capture their side conversations.

The recordings needed to be transformed into a format that could more easily be coded and analyzed. Following sociolinguistic techniques, I transformed the recordings into transcripts. Transcription techniques have many variations depending on the level of detail needed to address one’s research question. The transcription conventions I utilized will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

When it came time to represent the data in a transcript I needed to determine if all or only a portion of the recordings would be transcribed. As my research questions focus on the nature of talk for the focal group, I felt it was important that all five of the women’s voices be present in order to have consistency as I examined the data for patterns of talk. A review of my field notes revealed that only three of the eight sessions involved of all five group participants. As I wanted to provide a description of the full group talk, it was important to only analyze the data that included all the participants. This was an unanticipated challenge as the research question that is the heart of this study (What is the nature of the talk among the members of the focal study group?; including What recurrent patterns characterize this talk? and What type of blended space is enacted and constituted by this talk?) was derived after the leadership-development program and therefore the data collection period had concluded. I had not realized there were only three sessions in which all five participants were present.
Although I therefore examined just three sessions of data, linguistic studies of conversation have established that working with small and specific data samples is appropriate for determining the nature of talk (Tannen, 2004). “One way in which analysts know they have enough data for the purpose at hand is when they realize that analysis is not turning up anything new, but only additional examples of patterns they have already identified” (Cameron, 2001). As I proceed through the analysis of the data, I will note areas with limited examples.

The audio recordings were transcribed to convert the data sources into a format that can be more easily analyzed to search for discursive practices. The transcripts, as a representation of the group’s talk, need to accurately reflect the group’s talk. There is much variation in transcribing conventions due to varying analytic pursuits. Following protocol of sociolinguistic studies, the following section will describe the transcribing conventions and my choices for the level of detail I included and omitted from the transcripts.

**Transcription Conventions**

“The transcript functions as a permanent record of what you heard in a form that allows you to perform analytic operations” (Cameron, 2001, p. 31). The transcript serves as linguistic representation of the recorded data. My analysis focused on the transcribed talk of the focal group. Three sessions of the discourse were transcribed to record what was spoken, including pauses, overlapping speech, and laughter. The transcript also provided a written representation of each utterance spoken, including incomplete words, false starts, and repeated words or phrases.

In creating the transcripts, I first captured the turn changes. A turn captures one speaker’s words until another speaker begins talking. In this manner, the transcript provides a chronological and primarily linear representation of the talk. The transcript identified each turn by indicating the speaker and then the speaker’s words. I also used line numbers throughout the transcripts as a means of locating examples. Representing the talk through this type of transcript allowed me to examine the
group’s talk as it unfolded which is consistent with sociolinguistic methods and also made it possible for me to examine the possible turn-by-turn discursive practices that I described in Chapter 2.

The transcripts were developed through several steps. Each step added a greater degree of linguistic representation until I felt I had the appropriate level of detail to adequately identify patterns within the talk. At the first level of transcription, I visually recorded the speaker and the words spoken. The words spoken in the transcripts are presented using common English spellings rather than phonetic representations. The only deviation from this practice was when minimal responses or other utterances were vocalized that did not have common spellings such as *mmm or uh huh*.

Next, I added more detail to the transcripts by adding punctuation symbols to provide linguistic markers. Talk often does not conform to written grammatical structures, and so punctuation within a linguistic transcript does not serve a grammatical function, but a linguistic representation purpose. Table 4.2 below provides the transcribing conventions and corresponding symbols I used to add linguistic detail I felt was relevant to the transcript. I elected to use this level of linguistic detail so when one reads the transcript aloud a more consistent sound is elicited; capturing a sound that represents the audio recording.

Following sociolinguistic transcription techniques, I opted to use a period to represent a speaker’s natural break in her talk. These natural breaks are not always consistent with typical written sentence structures, but allow a reader to experience the cadence within a speaker’s talk. The use of periods is helpful for readability of the transcript, but is not necessary for the analysis. I used the punctuation of a question mark to capture when a question had been offered. Many times a question mark used in a transcript indicates an up-tick of inflection. This up-tick commonly occurs with questions, but not all up-ticks are questions and not all questions use up-ticks. I specifically wanted to examine the discursive patterns related to questions and responses, so I needed to identify questions within the talk. Questions were identified either by the common practice of rising intonation or through the next turn
responding with an answer. Identifying questions within the talk was definitely an interpretive endeavor. Others listening to the recording of the talk may interpret the utterances differently than I. Every effort was made to accurately represent the spoken talk through the transcripts.

Table 4.2

**Punctuation Uses in the Focal Group Transcripts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Punctuation Sample</th>
<th>Description of Punctuation Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>Pauses are indicated in parentheses. Pauses of less than one second are indicated by a period (.) and pauses that are longer than one second indicate their time (3.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[words ]</td>
<td>Text in brackets indicates transcriber notes that gives additional information such as a gesture or action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>words?</td>
<td>A question mark indicates the end of a chunk of talk that is being analyzed as a question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>words.</td>
<td>A period at the end of a chunk of talk represents a falling intonation marking a natural break in one’s talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rea:::lly Bu-</td>
<td>A colon in the middle of a word indicates the tone or syllable sound is elongated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r too well¹</td>
<td>A hyphen indicates an incomplete word or utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¹Sorry you guys¹</td>
<td>An extended square bracket indicates the start and end of overlap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>words=</td>
<td>An equal sign at the end of one speaker’s utterance and at the start of the next indicates the speaker continuing her turn as if there had not been a gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“words”</td>
<td>Quotation marks indicate a chunk of talk that is a ventriloquated or a quote of another person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words</td>
<td>Words underlined indicated the word or utterance was emphasized by louder speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

Guided by my research questions and conceptual framework, I identified features of group talk including turn-by-turn discursive practices and above-the-sentence discursive practices. These linguistic
categories provided a starting point for a coding schematic. Following recommended conversation analytic methods as outlined by Hutchby and Wooffitt, (1998) I focused on a broad reading of the transcript of the first session in order to identify “potentially interesting phenomenon in the data” (p. 94). While creating the transcripts I noticed some recurring patterns such as overlapping speech and laughter.

**Units of Analysis**

I quickly realized I was going to need to define units of analysis that would provide boundaries for isolating and then comparing the recurrences of discursive patterns. The units of analysis that were relevant for the study included words or chunks of talk and turns.

The smallest unit was a word or chunk of adjoining words. Hedges were the only discursive feature coded as the individual word or chunk of adjoining words. The analysis procedures regarding hedges will be discussed later.

The most commonly used unit of analysis was a turn. A turn captures one speaker’s words until another speaker begins talking. In some cases, the transcript noted that the group was all laughing at the same time as one turn. These turns were transcribed as group laughter.

While lines were not unit of analysis, I did use the lines of the transcript to describe the length of turns and narratives. For consistency, I used a font type in which each character uses identical spacing width: Courier New, 12 point. Each line could hold 49 characters. The font with identical spacing also made it easier to visually represent when the women’s talk had overlapping or simultaneous speech. I could clearly show at what point the overlap started.

**General Analytic Process**

The next step recommended by Hutchby & Wooffit (1993) is to “describe one particular occurrence formally, concentrating on its sequential context” (p. 95). Additionally, examine data for other instances of this particular phenomenon (Hutchy & Wooffitt, 1998). I developed descriptive coding
for all of the discursive phenomenon I identified. For some of the coding categories, quantification was used to note the size of the collection of a particular phenomenon. It should be noted that the quantification is limited as it does not describe why or how participants are orienting their talk to the particular phenomenon (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1988). The quantification becomes a tool to help identify recurrent patterns within the talk.

For example, I was interested in the group’s use of hedges. Hedges are defined as speech that allows a person to "avoid saying something definite and so keep our options open" (Coates, 1996, p. 152). Utilizing Coates (1996), I compiled a list of twenty words or phrases of hedges. As I completed a review of Session 4, I added 24 words/chunks (noted in italics below) to the original coding list. The list is provided in Table 4.3 indicating the number of times a hedge was coded in the transcript from Session 4.

Table 4.3

_Hedges Coding List_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A bit/a little/a little bit</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actually</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can/could</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does that make sense?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t get me wrong?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For me</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I guess</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mean</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I suppose</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think/I’m thinking/I don’t think</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kind of/sort of</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like/not like</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May/maybe/might</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not necessarily</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perhaps</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty/prettty much</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really/not really</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So/and so/so much</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some/something/something like/some times</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whatever</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You know/[do]you know what I mean?</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the compiled list, I highlighted every word I could identify as a hedge on a printed copy of the transcript. I opted to do my coding by hand, rather than through a software program as it could be done away from a computer, a purely personal preference. After highlighting each hedge, I then coded
each hedge noting session and line location, word(s) used, speaker, number of hedges in a turn, and location of hedges to note the use of hedges during various activities. These codes were assembled into a spreadsheet so I could sort by codes and look for informative patterns.

Once I identified patterns for a discursive practice, I generated questions to look for meaning within the context. From my notes, I have the following list of questions regarding hedges: What was the function of the hedges used within a speech-turn?, Do the speakers hedge when talking about themselves; providing self-disclosure of personal actions or attitudes?, Do the speakers hedge when discussing other people's actions or attitudes?, Do the women hedge when offering advice to others in the group?, Do the women hedge when offering comfort or sympathizing with others in the group?, and Do the women hedge when conveying their agreement with another person? I inferred explanations to address each question. I then examined each place the phenomenon occurred to determine if my explanation remained constant for each instance.

After the transcripts were coded for hedges, I compiled the data into spreadsheets via Microsoft Excel. One spreadsheet of hedges included fields identifying the session, line number, speaker, and the hedge. Each word or phrase of hedging was considered one record in the spreadsheet. From the spreadsheet, I was able to determine what words were used as hedges, how often, and by whom. Another spreadsheet of hedges data included fields identifying the turn, speaker, and the number of hedges in the turn. A third spreadsheet examined hedges that occurred within each topic of discussion. The fields for this spreadsheet included: topic code (session number-chronological number e.g. S4-T01), start line, stop line, number of lines comprising the length of the topic, number of turns, number of turns with hedges, each speaker (e.g. Cassidy, Darlene, Holly, Samantha, Tabitha), speaker who started the topics, and the type of prompt used to start the topic. I then compiled a spreadsheet to examine the use of hedges within different activities.
The overall data analysis was a reiterative process through which I would look for a particular pattern based on addressing a speculative question, such as the questions posed previously. Working with one session’s transcript at a time, I would code words or turns. I would compile the coded information into a spreadsheet. I would sort the data and refine my description of the discursive practices. As I drafted the description of the nature of talk for the focal group, I often returned to the transcript, coding, or spreadsheets to search out further details.

For each of the coding schemes detailed below, I followed a similar recursive process. I look for discursive practices based on the research literature. I would code the transcripts based on the coding schemes based on the literature and adding to the coding schemes as I deemed it necessary. Human talk is diverse, so that, there is no guarantee that the speakers will use particular discursive practices. To this end, I realize that the coding schemes and coding of the data was often an interpretive process as I made decisions while coding the transcripts.

Specific Coding Schemes

Turns were coded in many ways in order to derive a full description of the above-the-sentence and turn-by-turn discursive practices. Above-the-sentence discursive practices for the focal group are described in Chapter 5. Turn-by-turn discursive practices for the focal group are described in Chapter 6. In this section, I first present the coding schemes utilized to address the turn-by-turn discursive practices which include responding to questions, utilizing repetition, offering minimal responses, and overlapping turns.

To examine how the speakers were using their turns to respond to one another, I coded each turn based on whether it was 1) a new idea (new), 2) a speaker continuing her utterance from a previous turn (continuation), 3) a response to the previous speaker’s utterance (response), or 4) a mid-turn change (mid-turn). In a mid-turn change, the turn begins as a response to another speaker and then the
speaker introduces a new idea. The analysis, including examples, derived from the coding of use of response turns is presented in Chapter 6.

**Turn-by-Turn Discursive Practice Coding Schemes.**

I also coded the transcripts based on the type of turn. Turns overall fit into one of three types: 1) question, 2) statement, or 3) laughter. Some turns were longer and therefore more complex. In these cases I expanded the coding adding two additional categories: 4) question/statement, and 5) statement/question to capture turns that incorporated both statements and questions. The number of questions and statements within a turn were not counted, only that the turn contained at least one statement, or question, and which occurred first. The analysis, including examples, derived from the coding of types of turns is presented in Chapter 6.

Questions were coded to describe the type of questions being asked. Following Coates (1996), I identified questions if there was a subject and verb inversion, by placement of WH-words (why, what, where, who, when, and how), rising intonation, and a phrase tagged onto the end of a statement which transforms a statement into a question. Some questions were coded as “clarification of activity procedure” when participants asked questions to understand the tasks. I chose to separate these questions from the next category as they were specific to the structural component of the leadership-development program. Some questions were “inquiries for more information.” Other questions were asked “prompting participation.” Rhetorical questions were also coded as a type of question.

Repetitions were coded when at least two turns were connected by their words or grammatical structure. The second turn would either mirror or match a preceding turn; however, the turns did not need to be adjacent. Coates (1996) coded multi-speaker repetition within women’s talk as 1) lexical, 2) semantic, 3) syntactic, and 4) topical. Tannen (2003) also coded phonological repetition. As I examined the focal group’s data I found evidence of lexical, semantic, and syntactic repetitions. Additionally, I coded repetitions as synchronous to represent when at least two speakers said the same thing at the
same time. The group all laughing at the same time was coded as synchronous talk, one form of multi-
speaker repetition.

Lexical repetition was coded when the second speaker repeats the exact word or phrase of a
previous speaker. Semantic repetition was coded the second speaker repeated the basic concept stated
by the previous speaker, but may “vary the words used while preserving the meaning” (Coates, 1996, p.
214). Syntactic repetition was coded when the second speaker mirrored or matched the grammatical
clause structure. So far I have described the coding schemes for turn-by-turn discursive practices of
questions and repetitions. Next, I present minimal responses and overlapping turns.

Coates (1996) noted that minimal responses were a heavily used discursive practice of women’s
talk in a collaborative floor to “signal that speakers are present and involved” (p. 143). Minimal
responses are defined as brief utterances that convey one thought. I examined the focal group’s talk for
minimal responses. Table 4.4 provides the words/phrases coded as minimal responses. Some of the
minimal responses do not have formal spellings, in these cases, phonetic representations were used.

Table 4.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimal Responses Used by Focal Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahhh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahuh/Ahuh I agree/Ahuh yup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alright/it’s alright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awesome/that’s awesome/yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>really awesome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bless you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool/that’s cool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine/that’s fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good/good job/that’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good/very good/well good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hey/hey thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know/I know it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impressive/that’s impressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mmmhm/mmmhm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>okay/mmmhm that’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>true/mmmhm that’s good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no/no doubt/no way/no you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>won’t/nope/nuh uh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oh/oh dear/oh good/oh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>great/oh man/oh my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goodness/oh no/oh that’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cool/oh that’s right/oh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whatever/oh wow/oh yeah/oh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>okay/kay/okay that’s good/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>okeedokee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probably not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>really</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>right/right okay/that’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>right/yeah right/you’re right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shoot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thank you/thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there/there you go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>true/that’s true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uh oh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uh uh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wow/wow awesome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yeah/well yeah/yeah I do/yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oh no/yeah we did/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes/yep/yes I do/yes yeah/yup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to coding the word/phrase of minimal response turns, I also coded the location of minimal responses. Locations for minimal responses were coded as brainstorming, chit chat, comment, narrative, question, or teacher talk. Then, I coded minimal responses based on the perceived purpose of the minimal response within the talk. Coates (1996) noted that minimal responses were used in a collaborative floor to signal involvement and as a sign of encouragement. After reviewing the transcripts, I coded the purpose of the minimal responses as 1) agreement, 2) disagreement, 3) encouragement, 4) encouragement, 5) exclamations, 6) common courtesies, 7) neutral (as I was unable to determine from the context if the minimal response was agreeing or disagreeing with previous speaker), and 8) laughter. Agreement minimal responses included words such as _ahuh, alright, mmhmm, yeah, yes, yup, okay, kay, sure, right_, and _that’s true_. Disagreement was conveyed through a minimal response such as _me neither, no, nope, and uh-uh_. Words such as _cool, good job, that’s good, very good, it’s alright, and there you go_, offered a speaker encouragement. The exclamations used by the focal group included _oh my goodness, holy cow, oh my, oh man, oh great_, and _wow_. Common courtesies were _bless you and thank you_. Laughter was a response to utterances of teasing or joking, enthusiasm or excitement, agreement or sympathy, and as a way to convey nervousness or to ease tension.

The final turn-by-turn discursive practice was overlapping talk. Overlapping talk occurs when “friends combine as speakers so that two or more voices may contribute to talk at the same time” (Coates, 1996, p. 128). In some cases, the talk may be uttered simultaneously. The simultaneous overlaps were easy to identify in the transcripts as the transcription conventions dictated using half-brackets to indicate simultaneous talk. Overlapping talk was coded into two categories: 1) continuation of turns, and 2) completion of other’s utterances. With a continuation of turn several speakers may be involved to construct one complete thought across varies turns. With completion of other’s utterances, a second speaker finishes the first speaker’s thought.
To examine turn-by-turn discursive practices, I focused on four areas: 1) responding to questions, 2) utilizing repetitions, 3) offering minimal responses, and 4) overlapping turns. These patterns were consistent with Coates’ (1996) analytic categories used to examine female, friendship talk which resulting in the concept of a collaborative floor. The previous section provided the coding schemes for turns, responses, questions, repetitions, minimal responses, and overlaps. These coding schemes were informed by sociolinguistic studies and elaborated to be relevant to the talk of the focal group. Once I identified these mostly turn-level discursive practices, I examined broader patterns within the focal group’s talk. Cameron (2001) refers to these as above-the-sentence discursive practices.

**Above-the-Sentence Discursive Practices Coding Schemes.**

Four broader aspects of the focal group’s talk resulted from the overall analysis: 1) managing the conversational floor, 2) enacting discursive power, 3) offering representations of reality, and 4) maintaining appropriate relations. Cameron’s (2001) overview of *Working with Spoken Discourse* was instrumental in informing my analysis of the focal group’s above-the-sentence discursive practices. In this section, I review the coding schemes I followed to describe the concept of a blended space for the focal group.

To analyze the concept of a conversational floor for the focal group, I examined the patterns of participation and patterns resulting from the formal structure of the leadership-development program. These formal, structural elements are absent from the talk of friendship groups studied by Coates (1996) and Tannen (2003).

Participation was examined for each speaker. I counted the number of turns for each speaker and compared it to the total number of turns. I also examined participation based on the length of turns by counting the number of lines per turn per speaker. Through comparing these participation levels across speakers, the three sessions, and various group activities, I was able to describe the overall
participation practices for the group and determine how these practices helped the group manage their conversational floor.

Friendship talk generally does not involve an agenda of prescribed activities, nor a designated facilitator. However, the focal group did contain structural elements as the group came together, not to enact friendship, but to engage in a leadership-development program. I examined these facilitated activities. The activities were coded as 1) opening, 2) community-building, 3) teaching, 4) reflective, and 5) closing. Community-building, teaching, and reflective activities comprised most of the group’s talk. As I was most interested in the talk within the leadership-development program, I typically started and stopped the recordings based on the formal activities of the group; therefore some of the sessions did not have any opening or closing talk recorded. I also coded turns as 1) giving instructions, and 2) transitions. Giving instructions for activities was the role of the facilitator. However, by coding turns that gave instructions, I could then analyze how the participants responded. Additionally, I coded the facilitation turns of transitioning. These transitions may have come within various parts of a specific activity or from one activity to a new activity. Once again, by coding the transitions, I could then examine how the participants responded to the facilitator’s attempts to shift the group from activity to activity.

The second above-the-sentence practice analyzed focused on discursive power within the focal group. Discursive power describes those with the authority and access to talk within a speech community. To examine how the focal group enacted discursive power, I focused on two patterns within their talk: 1) inviting others to talk and 2) initiating topics, influenced by both Coates (1996) and Tannen (2003).

To look at invitations to talk I coded the speaker’s who issues invitations, whether the invitation was offered to one, specific person or to the whole group in which anyone could respond. I then compared the facilitator’s invitations to talk with the participants’ invitations to talk. I was looking to see
if the discursive power was enacted differently due to our various roles within the structured leadership-development program. Invitations were issued to invite others to join the conversation, expand thoughts, and to manage their turn-taking.

To examine initiating topics, I identified each topic in the transcript. The topics were coded by session and then sequential numbering. I identified the topics that received no response, the number of speakers involved in each topic of conversation, the length of each topic by the number of turns and total lines, and any topics that were “off-topic,” which I called side-bars. I also identified which participant initiated each topic of conversation. Through these two overarching patterns of invitations and topics I analyzed the data to describe the focal group’s above-the-sentence discursive practice of enacting discursive power.

The third above-the-sentence discursive practice focused on representations of reality. The conceptual framework provided codes that would be applicable to formal and informal speech communities: competing realities for formal and co-constructed (even conflicting) realities for informal speech communities. I did not find examples of either of these types within the focal group. As I reviewed the instances in which the focal group’s talk focused on arriving at a shared understanding of a concept, I determined that they deliberated reality. Through these deliberations they arrived at shared understanding of a particular concept.

The final above-the-sentence discursive practice examined maintaining appropriate relationships. The literature I had examined provided descriptions of formal and informal speech communities and the ways in which these groups maintained proper roles and responsibilities. As I read through the focal group’s talk, once again, I did not find evidence of either the formal or informal speech community practices to maintain relationships. Instead, I had to infer practices in order to determine how the group was maintaining their relationships. I identified two primary areas: extending politeness and presenting personal information.
For example, on line 48 of the first transcript, I commented that the group was very polite. With this in mind, I coded turns based on extending politeness informed by Mills (2004) presentation of *Gender and Politeness*. Enacting politeness occurred through extending hospitality, using common courtesies, and offering apologies.

Additionally, I examined instances in which the women disclosed personal information. These personal disclosures contained varying degrees of risk to personal reputation and character. There was two prominent patterns to the women’s talk when they were disclosing personal information: use of hedges. The coding scheme for hedges was presented at the beginning of the Data Analysis section as an example of my general analytic process.

My coding schemes were informed by appropriate methodological research studies and relevance and frequency of patterns that occurred within the focal group’s talk. The coding schemes developed and were presented above in their final formation. As I began writing descriptions and explanations regarding the nature of talk among the focal group, I would often return to the coding with new questions to explore as instructed by Richardson (2000), as this was a reiterative process. I would select a discursive practice, develop a coding scheme by starting with possible categories derived from literature on linguistic practices, then code the transcripts and compiled spreadsheets which allowed me to sort by variables and search for frequent patterns. I would then return to writing up my ideas incorporating input and from my dissertation advisors. Through this process, I completed my analysis of turn-by-turn discursive practices and above-the-sentence discursive practices to address the research question and sub-questions.

**Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher within studies grounded by symbolic interactionism and sociolinguistics is very clear and specific. The researcher, in order to best understand the interaction, must be an accepted and full participant in the group (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003). In this
section, I endeavor to make my role as the researcher transparent, self-reflective, and open to professional scrutiny (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003).

In retrospect, it was very challenging to design, facilitate, and research the leadership-development program. I was constantly juggling priorities between these three areas during the group sessions. How closely do I follow the established curriculum? Should I place the perceived and expressed needs of the group before the integrity of the design and research? How is my knowledge of the research influencing how I facilitate the group and interact with the other members? I did not find easy solutions to these challenges. Some sessions I felt like I had found a good balance, but other sessions I became very concerned about the quality of the data. To mitigate these concerns and because of the promise of the group’s talk to understand the concept of blended-space speech communities, new research questions, conceptual framework, and data analysis was developed following the conclusion of the leadership development program.

I knew it would be important for me to be as transparent as possible about my dual role as group facilitator and researcher. My role as a researcher affected the group. I tried to be very careful about what I told the women about the research side of our endeavor. When they would ask me about the research, I would explain I was going to analyze the data to better understand how people learn in small group contexts. I had also provided the women a five-page summary of the project, which I hoped would ease some of their curiosity. The summary discussed the concept of developing community within teacher study groups.

During the first session, the women made several comments about the video camera and audiotape recorder. Several times, one of the participants would ask, "are we giving you what you need?" or "are we helping you with your research?" After Session 7, I made an observation about the group and their attention to the recording equipment.
Today was also the first time, I think they were unaware of the video camera. In fact, when Cassidy realized there were only four of us she moved her chair so we were each sitting on one side of the table--like a normal arrangement. I had to be careful to maneuver myself so I would be in the camera and not blocked by her head, but I also think this is a good sign that enough community has developed that the camera and recording devices can be easily ignored, instead of something that makes people uncomfortable (Researcher Journal, Session 7).

The research component was as much an issue for me as it was for them. I am glad I was careful about providing generic statements about the goals of the research.

As a researcher, I am aware of the confines of the data collection. For this project, I recorded their group activities. However, I also engaged in conversations with these women outside of the leadership-development program. They would ask me questions, offer ideas, or reflect on something we had discussed in the group. I learned information about an individual that I felt I could not refer to during group times. I felt like I had privileged information because of what was shared with me outside of the full group’s talk. I commented on this issue in my journal.

I have several inner conflicts that all stem back to one idea. A conflict between my role as a researcher and my role as an educator. Should I do what’s planned or should I do what I feel is the best thing to do at that moment. What should I share? For example, I have knowledge from individual conversations that I'd like to build on. But feel like I can't share these things due to confidentiality (Researcher Journal, Session 1).

After Session 2, I recorded a similar comment that speaks to the challenge of the research due to limits on the data collection.

It's these side conversations that trip me up when it comes to researching this group. I am only able to capture one part of what is happening. The part that could be identified as the official group meeting time. People make research messy. Small groups as an educational concept make research messy. These side conversations are vital, yet it is not always possible for me to capture the data. (Researcher Journal, Session 2).

I believe I operated within a good balance between these competing priorities. I was diligent about maintaining confidentiality. As I analyzed the data, I was careful to only use evidence from the transcripts of their talk. The focus of the research questions and conceptual framework also helped to reconcile these challenges as only the talk of all five women were analyzed.
The final challenging aspect of my researcher role was a result of individual relationships. I have past shared experiences with all of these women, some more than others. I have met individually with all the women because of my role as the Director of Connection Ministries. They have all come to me, at one time or another, for guidance or input regarding leading their small groups. Cassidy and I have many shared experiences as we both are considered part of the church staff. We have attended the same staff meetings and other social functions that give us common ground. During the data collection period, I was a participant in a small group that Samantha was leading. Every week I was witness to her integration of ideas discussed in the professional development program. Prior to the data collection period, Holly and I also worked in the same office building. Our mutual friends and shared work environment provided us with common experiences. Darlene has also been a longstanding friend. It as questionable whether she should be included in the study; however, she met the basic criteria I was using to recruit a group. Our relationship was close prior to the group, but grew even closer as a result of sharing this experience.

Objectivity is not possible, nor should it be the goal (Wolcott, 1994). The research is not pure. Each person, each interaction, and each experience affects the research. Symbolic Interactionists Herman-Kinney and Verschaeve (2003) state “the sociological pursuit of knowledge is complex, for human life is never, ever, exactly the same” (p. 214). My attention to my dual roles has given me insight into these challenges as I endeavor to complete my dissertation.

Conclusion

The next two chapters present the result of the analysis addressing the primary research question: what is the nature of talk among the focal group? Chapter 5 focuses on describing the group’s above-the-sentence discursive practices as they characterize a blended-space speech community including 1) managing the conversational floor, 2) enacting discursive power, 3) offering representations of reality, and 4) maintaining appropriate relationships. Chapter 6 continues the write-up of the analysis
by addressing the turn-by-turn discursive practices that characterize a blended-space speech community. Chapter 3 provided a brief narrative of the focal group. In the following chapters, I explore the group’s talk in depth as I present my analysis of those sessions in which all five women were participating in the talk—Sessions 1, 4, and 8.
CHAPTER 5 – ANALYSIS OF TALK: ABOVE-THE-SENTENCE PRACTICES

In order to frame my research question, (What is the nature of the talk among the members of the focal group?), in Chapter 2, I presented information on symbolic interactionism, speech communities, and discursive practices. Symbolic interactionism focuses analysis on the interactions of people within specific social situations. My data analysis focused on the spoken interactions of the focal group as they gathered for a leadership development program, that is, I studied the nature of talk for the focal group based on the group’s discursive practices enacted within a specific speech community (which I have referred to as a blended space), while noting any variation due to the type of activity. Primarily, three types of activities occurred in each session: 1) community-building, 2) teaching, and 3) reflection.

I considered discourse within speech communities on a continuum of formality. Formal talk occurs within institutions and informal talk occurs amongst friends. The focal group is a blended space incorporating formal elements of a leadership development program with informal discourse practices encouraged by conversation-based activities. In this chapter (5), I present the analysis of the focal group’s talk by describing their broader above-the-sentence discursive practices. In Chapter 6, I focus on the nature of the group’s talk within the blended space by describing the fine details of their turn-by-turn discursive practices.

Above-the-sentence discursive practices look beyond a sentence or an adjacency-pair to overarching patterns that occur in the talk (Cameron, 2011). In Chapter 2, I conceptualized four above-the-sentence practices: 1) managing the conversational floor, 2) enacting discursive power, 3) offering representations of reality, and 4) maintaining appropriate relationships. These four practices were described based on the formality of the speech community with institutional talk on the left and friendship talk on the right. Table 5.1 reviews the above-the-sentence discursive practices as presented
in Chapter 2 (see Table 2.1). I describe each of these practices for the focal group in this chapter, in order to characterize the concept of a blended-space speech community.

Table 5.1

**Above-the-Sentence Discursive Practices (repeated from Chapter 2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managing the Conversational Floor</th>
<th>Formal – “Institutional” Courtroom, Classroom</th>
<th>Blended Space</th>
<th>Informal – “Friendship” Friendship gathering, Dinner party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singular:</strong> Only one person at a time has the right/obligation to the conversational space</td>
<td><strong>Collaborative:</strong> All speakers have simultaneous and equal access to the conversational space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enacting Discursive Power</td>
<td><strong>Asymmetrical:</strong> One person/position has designated &amp; legitimized responsibility &amp; obligation over talk to determine who can talk, when, and on what topics</td>
<td><strong>Symmetrical:</strong> Speakers are regarded as equals and will avoid playing the expert in order to maintain the equality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering Representations of Reality</td>
<td><strong>Competing:</strong> Speakers use persuasion to convince listeners of their reality as well as attempt to discredit speakers voicing an alternative account</td>
<td><strong>Co-Constructed:</strong> Reality is co-constructed through the dynamic interaction of the speakers and listeners and can result in contradictory statements, yet be accepted by all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Appropriate Relationships</td>
<td><strong>Relational Distance:</strong> Talk maintains distance by using technical language and minimal uses of politeness strategies</td>
<td><strong>Relational Solidarity:</strong> Talk maintains solidarity through consideration, sensitivity, and politeness strategies of hedges, apologies, and courtesy words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Managing the Conversational Floor**

“Controlling the conversational floor—the place and space for talk—in an appropriate manner is a task everybody must manage” (Tracy, 2002, p. 113). The conversational floor is best viewed as a continuum, going from a single floor on the far left to a collaborative floor on the far right. All the speakers involved in the speech community have a role in managing the conversational floor as speakers need to cooperate in order to fashion a coherent conversation. When one person speaks at a time, researchers refer to it as a single floor. Formal speech communities maintain a single conversation floor
in which only one person has the right or obligation to speak at any given time. In speech communities of friendship gatherings, the friends manage their conversation through a collaborative floor. In a collaborative floor, “the floor is thought of as being open to all participants simultaneously” (Coates, 1996, p. 134). In a friendship gathering, each speaker must accept a more equal obligation to speak and share the floor with others.

The focal group needed to manage their conversational floor. The focal group was designed to use a facilitator and conversation-based activities in which all speakers were encouraged to participate. To characterize the management of the conversational floor for the focal group, I present their patterns of 1) participating in talk and 2) facilitating activities. The analysis points to the focal group having a facilitated conversational floor in which one person, the facilitator, determined the agenda, activities, and time spent on each activity, yet all the participants had equal access and obligation to engage in the conversation.

**Participating in Talk**

The nature of talk for the focal group will first be described according to participation as it pertains to managing the conversational floor. The participation will be described based on two categories: 1) amount of participation and 2) length of participation. The intent of this section on participation is to get a sense for whether the group is functioning with more formal institutional talk or more informal, free-flowing, friendship talk. In formal speech communities, participation in the talk is controlled by the person with the most authority over talk within the given speech community. Participating in talk in friendship-based speech community is simultaneously accessible to all. The focal group had a designated facilitator which points toward a more formal speech community. Yet the focal group’s participation patterns indicate a space in the middle of this formality continuum.

Throughout the next two chapters I will provide some quantification of patterns I found in the focal group’s talk. The quantification is not intended to provide a statistical analysis, but to provide a
more accessible means of comparison. By examining these two features, I offer my findings on the patterns of participation that pertain to the conversational floor as enacted by the focal group.

**Amount of participation.**

I examined the amount of participation for each speaker. To do this, I coded each turn by speaker for the three sessions in which all five participants were present. Each session transcript captured at least 70 minutes of talk. Session 1 had 793 turns, Session 4 had 764 turns, and Session 8 had 1047 turns. Overall, the smallest percentage of speaker involvement as measured by the number of turns was Cassidy’s at just over 11% of the total turns. The highest speaker involvement was mine, representing 27% of the turns across the three sessions. Table 5.2 below provides an overview of the total turns for each session, categorized by speaker, and the percentage of turns spoken by each person. One of the speaker categories is called “All” which indicates that all the speakers were talking at the same time saying the same thing, such as “oh” or “no.” Most of these moments of simultaneous speech were group laughter.

Table 5.2

**Turns by Participant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th></th>
<th>Session 8</th>
<th></th>
<th>Averaged Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turns</td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>Turns</td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>Turns</td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>793</td>
<td></td>
<td>764</td>
<td></td>
<td>1027</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Samantha had the fewest turns for Sessions 1 and 4, but because of her increased participation in Session 8, her overall average turn participation was just over 13%. Interestingly, the group identified Cassidy as a “quiet” participant in Session 1 while they were sharing ideas during a reflection activity. Excerpt 5.1 presents the exchange in which Cassidy is asked about her quietness in line 1617.

**Excerpt 5.1: Session 1-Trust is Harder for Leaders**

1614 Cassidy   Oh. Just two things I I just noticed. I don't know I could be wrong but I think trust is harder for leaders than for regular people.
1617 Samantha  That's why you're so quiet?
1618 Cassidy   But. Um. I talk a lot less after I work all day cuz I talked all day long. So it's nicer to sit and be quiet. (2.4) You learn at work that if you talk too much you get in trouble anyways.
1622           Group laughter
1623 Cassidy   So I shut up. Normally I would talk a lot. (3.2)
1624 Darlene   I actually have kind of the opposite. I keep my mouth shut at work.
1626 Cassidy   Really?
1627 Darlene   Because I don't trust the people I work with.
1628 Cassidy   Mmm hmm.
1629 Darlene   Cuz I've done little things to (. ) see if they're trustworthy and they're not and I actually feel safer here. So I talk more. (2.9)

Samantha responded to Cassidy’s idea by questioning why she was so quiet. Cassidy was known by her friends for talking extensively in informal settings, which she states in Line 1623: “Normally, I would talk a lot.” I have experienced this first-hand when invited to Cassidy’s home for dinner and did not leave until after midnight because of our long conversations. Cassidy responded, “it’s nicer to sit and be quiet” after talking so much at work (Session 1, Line 1619). Darlene then shared an opposite experience with her work and talking and sums up her participation as “I actually feel safer here so I talk more” (Session 1, Line 1630). Although Cassidy was attributed as being quiet, Samantha actually had the fewest turns in Session 1; ten less than Cassidy.

Darlene’s participation was in the middle for this group. She spoke more turns than Cassidy and Samantha, but less than Holly and me. Darlene’s participation ranged from 16% to nearly 21% of the total turns. Samantha’s turns ranged from nearly 9% to almost 20%. Holly’s turns ranged from more
than 19% to over 25%. I had the highest percentage of turns ranging from 26% to 28% of the total turns for each of the three sessions. I attribute this higher level of turns to my role as the facilitator.

I also examined participation by turn for each speaker within the three primary session activities: 1) community-building, 2) teaching, and 3) reflection as I wanted to determine if the speaker’s participation varied depending on the type of activity. All of the participants had multiple turns during the various activities for all three sessions analyzed. Table 5.3 presents an overview of the turns for each participant by activity by session. Holly and Darlene had the highest percentage of turns within the community-building activities. During the teaching activities, I had the highest percentage of talk at 35% which was almost double the other participants’ turns. Holly and Darlene had similar percentage of involvement with 18% and 17%. The reflection activity participation was similar to the teaching activity. I, once again, had the highest participation at 32%. Cassidy and Holly had the next highest involvement by turns with 19% and 18%.

Table 5.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community-Building</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 4 8 Avg</td>
<td>1 4 8 Avg</td>
<td>1 4 8 Avg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>14% 4% 6% 8%</td>
<td>7% 14% 12% 11%</td>
<td>20% 29% 7% 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>16% 21% 24% 20%</td>
<td>15% 17% 19% 17%</td>
<td>22% 6% 12% 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>26% 34% 28% 29%</td>
<td>17% 20% 16% 18%</td>
<td>20% 23% 12% 18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>13% 8% 19% 13%</td>
<td>9% 9% 20% 13%</td>
<td>4% 9% 27% 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>21% 20% 13% 18%</td>
<td>40% 32% 32% 35%</td>
<td>24% 30% 42% 32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>11% 11% 9% 10%</td>
<td>11% 7% 2% 7%</td>
<td>9% 4% 2% 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Turns</td>
<td>478 249 343</td>
<td>175 377 582</td>
<td>96 114 60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of turns reveals that all five speakers were participating in the conversations regardless of the type of activity. The information presented above indicates that the participation was
distributed so that no one person monopolized the majority of the turns. However, as the facilitator, I had a larger amount of turns than the other participants, especially during teaching and reflection activities. These finding on the participation indicated to me that the turns were distributed amongst all the speakers. Additionally, it indicates that they were cooperating in managing the conversation of the blended-space, facilitated, conversational floor. In the next section, I present information on another turn participation pattern: the length of participation.

**Length of participation.**

I also examined the length of the turns to provide another perspective on participation, in the event that a speaker may have offered few turns yet each turn was longer in length. Coates (1996) indicates that a collaborative floor is suggested by a pattern of talk characterized by shorter turns by all participants; that is, because participants do not need to compete for the floor, turns tend to be shorter. Additionally, minimal responses such as *yeah, mmhmm, right,* are frequently used in an informal speech community which accounts for many of the shorter turns (Coates, 1996). In a formal speech community, a speaker needs to hold the floor until the fullness of an idea is completed; therefore, the turns tend to be longer in length. Examining the length of turns will describe another pattern of conversation management to clarify the nature of talk in the blended-space speech community of the focal group.

The majority of turns for the focal group were only one line in length: Session 1=69%, Session 4=53%, and Session 8=61%. Utterances of two lines or less comprised 85% of turns for Session 1, 70% for Session 4, and 80% for Session 8. I will provide several excerpts that demonstrate the length of turns. Excerpt 5.2 provides a fourteen-line sequence of turns in which all the turns are less than two lines long.

**Excerpt 5.2: Session 1-We All Have Cars**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>What are you thinking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>We all have cars. (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>There you go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Good job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Alright we are making progress now. (3.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We all have jobs. (15.4)

We all help raise kids. Cuz you help raise your sister's kids.

Cassidy

Laughing

It's true. (9.3). Uhmmm. (2.5) Does anyone not like strawberries?

I like strawberries.

You like strawberries?

Yeah, I do.

Okay.

Group laughter

The longest turn in this section was line 82. This line had three thoughts spoken divided by long pauses noted in the parenthesis. The first part of the turn was short: “it’s true,” conveyed Samantha’s response to line 79. There was a pause of 9.3 seconds after which she voiced a drawn out “uhmmm.” The uhm is a way to signal that a speaker has something to say, but that the words are not yet formed. After the uhm was another 2.5-second pause before Samantha inquired of the group: “does anyone not like strawberries?” Overall, the turns in this section were short and reflected simple grammatical structures. The utterances in this excerpt, for the most part, used a single noun and verb structure.

The next excerpt occurred in Session 4. The group was discussing characteristics of good and bad conversations. The excerpt below captured the group’s attempt to arrive at a shared understanding of the word stress. The group was expressing multiple perspectives on a word, “stress,” that can be challenging to define. Even with a complex topic the group tended to utter shorter turns.

Excerpt 5.3: Session 4-It’s Stressful

You like that better?

Yeah. Because it’s stressful. (2.4)

I forget that stress is one of those words that people define in different ways.

Yes.

Okay.

I was going to say. Our definitions might be different.

That’s true. Shared meaning. So we shared meaning on the stress?

Obviously not. Because

You don’t think it’s stressful. And we do.

I would claim that I- yeah.

But you don’t mind confronting people. rSo much. l

lNo. That's l one r of my gifts. l

lAnd I do. l
In Excerpt 5.3, Samantha, Darlene, and I were the main contributors. Cassidy’s comment was interjected at line 362 and the conversation continued, although I did not present the full topic discussion in Excerpt 5.3. Holly did not provide any verbal signals of her participation. All of the turns in this excerpt were two lines or less, continuing the pattern of short turns.

Excerpt 5.4 from Session 8 captured the group’s discussion while attempting to complete a community-building activity of tying a knot in a rope. I had given the group instructions and then observed as the other four participants worked to solve the task. It is easy to see in the excerpt that none of the speakers provided lengthy opinions about what to do or how to solve the task.

**Excerpt 5.4: Session 8-Looping**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Utterance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>You two have to do most of the looping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>That’s what I’m thinking too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Cuz the loop has to happen-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>154</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>In the middle?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Because you two-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>We’ll help each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group Laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>You are the end of the rope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>I’m the end of the rope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Correct? And Holly’s this end of the rope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>And I’m going to go-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>You and I need to cross-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>And then we go underneath.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the thirteen-line excerpt, all five participants spoke and each utterance was a maximum of one line in length. Once again, this excerpt of turns revealed utterances that were short and grammatically simple. Four of the lines were incomplete thoughts as indicated by hyphen at the end of the line. These utterances might be incomplete because a speaker was interrupted or because the speaker stopped talking. Regardless of the reason, the conversation continued seemingly without disruption. I believe these short turns may have functioned to allow for a group of five speakers to all have more immediate access to speak during the many topics of conversation.
I also examined the average length of turns for each participant during the various activities. The length of turns by activity reveals more insight into individual participation. Cassidy had the smallest average percentage of turns for teaching activities; however, she had the second highest average turn length with 3.1 lines per turn for teaching activities. Darlene had the smallest average percentage of turns for reflection activities; however, she had the highest average turn length with 2.49 lines per turn for reflection activities. My participation was the highest for the teaching activities. This high level of involvement is enlarged by looking at my average length of turns: 4.73 for teaching activities. As the facilitator, I appeared to speak more frequently than the other speakers as well as offering longer turns when I did speak. As the facilitator, my turns were not consistent with the participation patterns of the rest of the group. This reveals that the focal group was not enacting a collaborative floor, but a facilitated conversation floor.

Table 5.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Community-Building</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Avg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As presented previously, on average, 78% of all the turns were less than two lines in length. I presented three excerpts, one from each session analyzed, as examples of the shortness of the turns. Examining the participants’ turns by activity type revealed increased levels of participation as in some instances those with a smaller percentage of turn also had higher average length of turns. In this way,
the participants were able to balance their participation through two means: turn taking and length of turns. The overall nature of participation within the talk of the focal group was to use shorter turns.

The above-the-sentence discursive practice of managing the conversational floor for the focal group has been characterized as a facilitated conversational floor. As the lengths of turns were mostly shorter, this indicates that the focal group’s speech community was more reflective of informal discursive practices except in regards to the facilitator. The facilitator representing the highest percentage of turns and some of the highest average length of turns which tends to reflect more formal speech communities in which one person has the responsibility and obligation to speak. The focal group cannot be characterized as strictly a formal or informal speech community; the participation patterns taken as a whole reveal that it existed in a blended space. Within this blended space the turns were distributed, but the facilitator tended to have more frequent and longer turns. The next section, Facilitating Activities, will explore in more detail the discursive patterns specifically tied to the formal leadership-development program to provide further insight into characterizing a facilitated conversational floor.

**Facilitating Activities**

The leadership-development program was designed to focus on three primary activities for the focal group. I detailed these activities in Chapter 3. For the sessions analyzed, three activities occurred as a part of the planned curriculum: community-building, teaching, and reflection. As the facilitator, I attempted to manage the conversational floor by giving instructions for each activity and helping steer the flow of activities by using transitions. I present descriptions of both of these patterns beginning with giving instructions.

**Giving instructions.**

When giving instructions, my turns were generally longer than the normal turn length for the focal group. In Session 1, turns identified as giving activity instructions ranged from 1 to 9 lines with an
average of 2.87 for 15 total turns. Session 4 only had 7 turns coded for giving activity instructions. The length ranged from 2 lines to 9, with an average of 4.71. Session 8 involved the highest number and average line length for turns coded as giving activity instruction with 27 total turns and an average of 5.7 lines per turn. The turns ranged from 1 to 39 lines. When I was giving instructions, the group appeared to deviate from the short turn length pattern. I believe this was due to my relaying specific activity instructions to the group which was very different than simply engaging in conversation.

Management of the facilitated conversational floor involved the cooperation of the participants and the facilitator. As I gave specific instructions for activities, the group responded. The focal group tended to ask questions or offer comments in response to the activity instructions. This pattern occurred during all three types of activities and in the three sessions that were transcribed and analyzed. The recurrence of this pattern across these various factors leads me to believe that the pattern would occur anytime instructions were given. Through the instructions and subsequent responses by the participants, a cooperative management of conversation occurred. Cooperation occurred as the participants tended to comply with the instructions by asking clarifying questions and offering comments of agreement.

Excerpt 5.5 presents the opening words of Session 1. The group had been engaging in small talk, but I did not start the recording until I began offering instructions on the first community-building activity. The group had a pad of flip-chart paper on the table as well as an assortment of Crayola markers. The excerpt has a total of 19 turns. During the opening turn, I began giving instructions when Holly immediately voiced a comment in response. My giving instructions occurred over the span of 7 turns. Holly, Samantha, and group laughter were all interjected as I attempted to relay the activity instructions. My turns are generally two lines or longer, which contrasts with overall participation pattern of single line length turns.
Excerpt 5.5: Session 1-Fingerprint

1 Tabitha    Okay. You all get to pick whatever color marker you want. (. ) Pick a color Holly. It's alright.
3 Holly     Alright. I'll match my pants.
4         Group laughter
5 Holly     I don't want to think very hard today.
7 Tabitha   That's a good thing to do. Alright. The first thing I want to do is just take some time to get to know each other better. And I like this activity. I have named it Different Spokes. I don't know what its name is. But that's what I've name it? So basically, the way this works is this line represents you. Each one of you. See that's why I got you to draw a line straight to your belly.
15 Holly    Kay.
16 Tabitha  You'll put on? Or around your line anything that is unique just to you. So if any other one person has that same thing then you can't put it down.
20 Samantha Oh.
21 Tabitha  But in the circle? We can put things that all of us share in common. But everybody has to share it in common in order for it to go into the circle.
24 Holly    So this only has to be unique to the five of us? It doesn't have to be unique? Like our fingerprint.
27 Tabitha  No.
28         Group laughter
29 Holly    Okay. Just wanted to be sure.
30 Tabitha  Like. See me? I know I can put down single. Cuz all the rest of you are married. So married can't go in the middle because I ruin it.
33 Holly    Okay.
34 Samantha So we start talking?
35 Tabitha  Yeah. So what do you think? Want to think of things you all have in common first? Would that help get you started? (. )
38 Holly    That would be easier I think.
39 Samantha Okay. We're all female.

The group responded with minimal responses in lines 15, 20, and 33. Group laughter occurred at lines 4 and 28. Clarifying questions were asked at lines 24 and 34. (Minimal responses and clarifying questions will be described in more detail in Chapter 6.) Additionally, 17 turns elapsed between the opening instructions and Samantha starting the activity by offering her comment “We’re all female” (line 39). Through these turns, the participants focused on the activity, but needed further information before starting into the activity. I believe this indicated their cooperation with the structured activities.

In the next excerpt (5.6), I had begun the recording as soon as two of the participants were present. Once everyone had arrived, I began giving instructions at line 116 for Session 4’s community-
building activity. Holly responded with a minimal response of the colloquial “okeedokee.” There was a pause in the conversation and then Holly spoke again by sharing about her small group, thereby following the instructions I had provided. In this case, the group seemingly started the activity without the need for further information.

**Excerpt 5.6: Session 4-Just Keep Going**

116 Tabitha Well I know that you started your small group up on Sunday? With your new curriculum. And Darlene did too. Kind of a different group and a different curriculum. So I just thought we’d talk about where our small groups are at? To start with? It’s kind of what we’re already talking about, so we’ll just keep going.

125 Holly Okeedokee.

126 Holly Well. I need prayer. Big time. I mean put me at the top of your list...

For Session 8, I had an outline of activities listed on the flip-chart. The recording once again started with giving instructions for the opening activity. It took 25 turns before the group had their questions asked, comments voiced, laughter shared, and started the activity. The group once again used minimum responses, comments, and clarifying questions while I endeavored to give the group instructions. My instructions occurred over 9 turns; representing just over one-third of the total turns in Excerpt 5.7.

**Excerpt 5.7: Tie Us Up**

1 Tabitha Well I put on the board what we’re going to try to get through today.

3 Holly Okay.

4 Samantha She going to tie us up.

5 Tabitha We’ll see how this goes. I’m going to tie you all up first. So most of the community-building activities we’ve done have been “getting to know you” type of things.

10 Holly Uh-huh.

11 Tabitha So I decided I’d mix it up and do a trust-building activity.

13 Holly Okay.

14 Tabitha So the four of you are going to work as a team and I’m going to watch you and laugh.

16 Holly Oh thanks.

17 Tabitha Cuz I don’t fit. It’s a four-person activity. So you’re each going to have a section of rope and one section of rope is just like this one. It has a piece of tape on the middle. And the object is to take your rope and to make a knot like this. Kay?
24 Samantha Kay
25 Darlene Okay.
26 Holly That doesn’t look very hard.
27 Tabitha You all become part of the rope. So you’re going to have to get up and come over here to the living room where there’s more
30 Holly If you’re trying to feed me through a loop of arms
32 Group laughter
33 Holly This is going to be really not a good thing.
35 Group laughter
36 Holly Just want you to know that. Just so you’re aware.
38 Samantha We all have our own piece of rope?
39 Tabitha Alright. So I think I know how to do this right.
41 Holly Are you sure this can be done?
42 Tabitha Oh yeah. It can be done. I’ve done this with many many groups. Many many people.
44 Holly Alright.
45 Tabitha Okay. So you are all now the rope. You are all part of the rope. So now you get to try to make a knot.
48 Holly Oh that’s easy. We’ll climb over that end cuz you’ve got one side that’s got to go under and one side that’s gotta go over.

In Excerpt 5.7, participants offered minimal responses in lines 3, 10, 13, 16, 24, 25, and 44.

Group laughter occurred at lines 32 and 35. Comments were voiced at lines 4, 26, 30, 33, and 36. Only one clarifying question was asked at lines 41. The management of the conversation involved all but Cassidy. She waited until line 104 to vocalize her participation. Overall, the group engaged in the community-building activities after asking questions and extending some comments.

The instructions for the reflective activities were discussed in great detail during Session 1, when I presented an overview of all of the activities for the leadership-development program. During the sessions, at the scheduled times for the reflective activity, I provided limited instructions. This often prompted the group to respond with comments or ask questions. Additionally, the group offered some reluctance to engage in the activity. Their comments were often presented as teasing in which the group typically responded with laughter, but I had to really encourage them to begin the activity. Excerpt 5.8 reveals Darlene’s reluctance. Excerpt 5.9 reveals reluctance from Holly, Samantha, and Cassidy. Excerpt 5.10 shows one reluctant comment from both Holly and Samantha. By Session 8, I had learned not to
engage with them to ease their reluctance. The three excerpts that follow reveal comments of reluctance (italicized for emphasis).

Excerpt 5.8: Session 1-Write in Our Books?

1563 Tabitha   Okay. Alright. So it’s now your time to reflect-
1564 Darlene  Do we have to write in our books? Or do we not need to write in our books?
1566 Tabitha   Now is your time to reflect.
1567 Group laughter
1568 Darlene  I have a concern.
1569 Group laughter
1570 Tabitha   What concern is that?
1571 Darlene  That I have to write in this book today.
1572 Tabitha   Oh it’s fine. You learned that from mother. About being silly.

Excerpt 5.9: Session 4-Oh Dear

933 Tabitha   I actually want us to think about the best learning part- the conversation where you really learned something. The best one. And then a time you were in a group? And you guys were supposed to be learning something? But it was just a flat out bad conversation. So the two extremes (.) really good and really bad. So we’re actually going to journal about that? first.
942 Samantha Oh dear. What are we going to-
943 Holly    Ooohh. I hope I can think about one?
...[17 turns]...
982 Samantha Can I run away?
983 Tabitha   No.
984 Holly    This is gonna be hard.
985 Cassidy  This is hard.
986 Samantha Really hard.
987 Holly    I hope I can think of something?
...[8 turns]...
999 Holly    This is liable to be quite personal.
1000 Tabitha  Okay. You don’t have to share the details of the personal.
1002 Holly   Okay. Cuz I would say both my highs and lows are probably gonna be more personal.
1004 Samantha I know. Me too.
1005 [silence for a time-not recorded]
1006 Cassidy I used to like this class.
1007 Holly   I know.
1008 Tabitha  (laughing) I heard that.
1009 Holly   I’m skipping next time. No.
1010 Group laughter
1011 Samantha I’m with you.
Excerpt 5.10: Session 8-I’ve Said A Lot

1996 Tabitha So. I want to give you a couple minutes to write in your journals. Cuz I think you all have something to say.
1999 Samantha I don’t know. I feel like I’ve said a lot.
2000 Holly I’m sorry.
2001 Tabitha This is a time for you to process for yourself. Not for me. You want some more water?
2004 Holly Yes. Please.

The women tended to respond with reluctance whenever I gave instructions that we were going to write in our reflective journals. In Excerpt 5.8, Darlene jokingly responded with a clarifying question. During Session 4, in Excerpt 5.9, Samantha and Holly were concerned about having something to write about. A few moments later, Cassidy adds support to their claims. Additionally, I had to encourage Samantha and Holly once again to engage in the reflection activity after they both voiced unenthusiastic comments in Session 8. In all three of these instances, I had to respond to further questions and comments from various participants for several more turns before they completely engaged in the reflection activity. Their reluctance may have occurred because of their lack of familiarity with reflective writing or that reflective writing is personally revealing.

Despite the reluctance with journal writing revealed by these excerpts, the participants also indicated their support for using journaling as a small group activity. In Session 4, following all their reluctant comments about their own journaling, the group offered Holly advice on how to create a safe place within her small group so that people could feel comfortable talking about personal issues, especially with close friends and family in the group. Both Darlene and Holly referred to journaling as a good activity in Excerpt 5.11. Since the women expressed positive regard for reflective writing, I believe the discursive practices employed helped the women overcome their own discomfort and reluctance with reflection activities.

Excerpt 5.11: Session 4-I Can Easily Do That

2195 Darlene Because you are talking about issues that- you know? Taking up offenses and things. (2.6) um. A thought that just came to me was if you
gave each person a journal? And let them spend ten minutes at the end of your class? Writing down? Maybe. And sharing their thoughts with their journal? About what’s going on. And it could stay personal. But yet. They could still verbalize it in a way to process it.

2205 Holly  Right. Right.
2206 Darlene  I mean. It’s just a thought?
2207 Holly  No that’s a good idea. Because if I don’t verbalize something at the time I think about it? It gets stashed somewhere and it just becomes another part of the crud that builds up. You know? And so I think that is good. I can easily do that. And that’ll help.

I also gave instructions to introduce each of the teaching activities. Some teaching activities were more complex, such as the steps for deliberation in Session 8, warranting longer turns to explain the instructions. Other activities were seemingly obvious and very little instruction was given to manage the activity. Overall, for the teaching activities, the participants easily engaged in the activity once their questions were addressed regarding the instructions.

In Session 1, the main teaching activity was a lecture-based overview of the leadership-development program. The group was not given any specific directions regarding the teaching activity as they primarily were listening to me talk. Although there were not instructions, the group cooperated to manage the conversational floor, only asking questions or offering comments that pertained to the current activity.

In Session 4, I had the group write in their reflective journals prior to the teaching activity. I was hoping the journaling would prepare them for the planned brainstorming activity. While the women were writing, I prepared the flip-chart by drawing a line down the middle, and wrote “Bad” on the left-hand column and “Good” on the right-hand column. I relied on the flip-chart to give visual clues for our activity in addition to the verbal instructions I provided. The group quickly engaged in the activity. Holly offered a minimal response of agreement and Darlene identified the first item for our list of characteristics of bad conversation in Excerpt 5.12.
Excerpt 5.12: Session 4-What Happens in Bad Conversation?

1165 Tabitha Alright. So. (2.7) If we try to understand what makes a good conversation. And what makes a bad conversation. I think it’d just be easier to start here? [Tabitha pointed to flip chart with two columns. One labeled “Bad” and the other “Good”] Do you agree?
1171 Holly Mmm hmmm.
1172 Tabitha Alright. So? What do you? So? Based on your experiences? What happens in a bad conversation?
1175 Darlene Somebody can’t stay focused. (5.7) Lack of focus (3.6)

In Session 8, I prepared the group to engage in a deliberation activity. The instructions occurred over nineteen turns. I had only 7 turns, but they were long totaling 94 lines. Holly, Samantha, and Darlene had interjected comments, but their turns conformed to the focal group’s normal turn length of less than two lines. Excerpt 5.13 shows an abbreviated presentation of the group’s conversation during the instructions to the teaching activity.

Excerpt 5.13: Session 8-Doing Collaboration

550 Tabitha I figured. I figured. Okay so Samantha had asked to get more specific on collaboration. So I started thinking about what kind of process you would need to go through to actually do a collaboration. And you see it all fit on one sticky note.
556 Holly Cool.
557 Tabitha That’s a good thing. And other people may do this different ways...[21 lines removed]...So part of it is that we need to have ground rules. An the other part of it is that it’s like a warm up.
583 Holly Mm hmm
584 Samantha That’s good.
585 Tabitha Okay. The second thing you need to do collaboratively is decide on what the goal is going to be...[36 lines removed]...That’s going to be one of our first ground rules.
624 Darlene No one gets mad at Tab.
625 Tabitha Yes.
626 Darlene That’s just one- you can write down.
627 Samantha If that’s what she’s starting out with we’re in trouble.
629 Holly Okay.
630 Darlene Big trouble.
631 Tabitha Okay...[18 lines removed]...So that’s the scenario.
650 Darlene So the goal is to-
651 Tabitha We are going to need to do ground rules first.
654 Holly Laughing
655 Tabitha But does everybody understand the premise?
The banter continued for another 9 turns before Darlene offered the first ground rule and officially started the first step of the deliberation activity. In Excerpt 5.13 participants offered minimal responses to the instructions in lines 556, 583, 584, 629, and 656. Comments were voiced at lines 624, 626, 627, 630, and 653. Only one clarifying question was asked at lines 650. Cassidy once again was the only participant who did not speak during this excerpt of giving instructions. However, she offered her first verbal response to the activity shortly thereafter in line 659, thereby indicating that she was actively participating through listening.

While giving instructions to the group, the above-the-sentence pattern of talk was characterized by frequent and brief interactions from all the participants. The participants’ responses included minimal responses, comments, laughter, and clarifying questions. The instructions for reflection activities also had a pattern of reluctance to engage in the activity. This reluctance was mitigated by their laughing responses. The conversation was cooperatively managed by the facilitator providing activity instructions and the participants offering responses before engaging in the activity. This pattern characterizes an aspect of the focal group’s above-the-sentence discursive practice of managing their facilitated conversational floor.

Facilitating transitions.

The management of the facilitated conversational floor can also be characterized by examining the transitions from one activity to another and within stages of activities. To ensure the focal group navigated their way through the curriculum, I took responsibility for transitioning the group through specific activities of the preset agenda. In this section, I present excerpts in which I urged the group to shift from the current thread of conversation to the next part of the agenda. In some instances, I transitioned the group by providing instructions. In other instances, I responded to a speaker and in the same turn transitioned to a new activity. At other times, I debriefed an activity as a way to bring closure
to one activity and transition to the next. Regardless of how I transitioned the group, the participants tended to respond cooperatively and thereby involved themselves in the management of the facilitated conversational floor.

The transition into a new activity was mostly done by giving instructions for the next activity. These instructional turns were described in the previous section. As I gave instructions, the participants responded by asking questions or offering comments which maintained the group’s high levels of interactivity. However, there were a few instances in which the transition occurred within one turn. This was the case for Excerpt 5.14: Session 1: Just Keep Going and Excerpt 5.15: Session 8: Stakeholders. In these instances, the group offered minimal responses of affirmation or immediately shifted the conversation to the new agenda focus.

**Excerpt 5.14: Session 1-Just Keep Going** (repeated presentation of Excerpt 5.6, abbreviated)

116 Tabitha Well I know that you started your small group up on Sunday? With your new curriculum. And Darlene did too. Kind of a different group and a different curriculum. So I just thought we’d talk about where our small groups are at? To start with? It’s kind of what we’re already talking about so we’ll just keep going.

117 Holly Okeedokee. Well I need prayer. Big Time...

**Excerpt 5.15: Session 8 -Stakeholders**

1026 Tabitha Okay. So the next step is to identify the stakeholders and their perspectives. (.) So one stakeholder is me (.) Oh. I guess I should speak in third person.

1030 group laughter

1031 Darlene The group leaders? Would be stakeholders.

The transitions may have occurred quickly because I offered an example immediately after providing instructions. This occurred in the previous Excerpt, 5.15: Session 8-Stakeholders, as well as in Excerpt 5.16: Session 1-Something in Common.

**Excerpt 5.16: Session 1-Something in Common**

518 Tabitha Why don’t we talk about our different groups? Maybe there’s something in common within our small groups?

521 Holly Okay.
The group I’m focusing on at least for this purpose is my Sunday School class.

I offered a transitional statement and then led with the first example. In this manner, the group was transitioned into a new stage of an activity. The participants followed the flow of the conversation without the need for questions, comments, or reluctance.

In some cases, I used one turn to both respond to the previous speaker’s utterance and then to transition the group to the next stage of an activity. At the end of Session 1, I made one of these mid-turn transitions to end the activity and closed up the group. Excerpt 5.17 presents a mid-turn transition. I provide the preceding turns as well as my transitional turn. The mid-turn transition is indicated by a double forward slash (//).

**Excerpt 5.17: Session 1-Tradition**

| 1767 Darlene | You better read the conflict chapter. |
| 1766 Cassidy  | I. Yeah.                                |
| 1767 Darlene | Because it’s what you saying is exactly what I just walked through this last week. |
| 1769 Cassidy  | Yeah.                                  |
| 1770 Darlene | You know? Twenty years of tradition.   |
| 1771 Tabitha  | Well that’s why I wanted to put the books in your hands too. Cuz you’re all gonna like hit it different in these areas. You’re gonna hit areas moments where you like “okay I need this now.” And so at least then you’ve got a resource to go to. // I just wanted to close us...[15 lines] Your husband’s out front so I’m going to make a quick copy of this. |
| 1793 Samantha | He is? Oh you can keep it here         |

In Session 4, Cassidy shared at length about an experience in her small group. I was able to respond directly to her narrative in line 1937 and then transitioned the group to a teaching activity in which I distributed and reviewed a list of ground rules by line 1959. The excerpt provides the final lines of Cassidy’s story and my responding turns. The mid-turn transition is indicated by a double forward slash (//). Following the transition, Cassidy and Darlene both offer affirmative minimal responses indicating their cooperation with the new activity focus.
Excerpt 5.18: Session 4-Flick Her Back

1936 Cassidy ...you know? And Richard’s like “flick her back.”
1937 Tabitha I think I think she’ll respect some ground rules? ...
1943 Cassidy Right.
1944 Tabitha But. Um. But. They were there? And they made you feel you knew what some of the parameters were...
1949 Cassidy Right.
1950 Tabitha And everybody else knew...
1953 Group laughter
1954 Tabitha ...So that we get at the good conversations and can um try to avoid some of the – some of the bad ones. Um. // This is another list—this is another list of ground rules. Um. I don’t think I’d use quite these words. Cassidy? If I were you with your high schoolers?
1964 Cassidy Right.
1965 Tabitha I would change a few words. Cuz these are all big words.
1967 Darlene Yeah.

To help the group conclude one activity and transition to the next, I sometimes debriefed the activity. These debriefing transitions occurred in all three sessions analyzed. In Session 1, I needed to conclude the community-building activity and transition the group into a teaching activity. It was not a smooth, nor quick, transition. I started the transition with a debriefing statement in line 809 and ending in line 854. Holly interjected a related comment in the midst of my debriefing.

Excerpt 5.19: Session 1-We Don’t Know Each Other

809 Tabitha An activity like this. Especially on a first group meeting. Just gets people past the awkwardness which. I’m surprised to the degree you all are feeling awkward cuz you all know each other. It’s taken awhile for you to get comfortable. Forty-five minutes. That’s pretty good.
816 Holly Well we all know each other. But really don’t know each other.
818 Tabitha Don’t know each other. Right. So.
819 Holly We all say hi
820 Tabitha So we act as a group of strangers coming in or forming a new group or somebody who’s coming in and everybody else is comfortable with each other and knows what’s going on. And they’re like the odd person out. They don’t know anybody. How awkward it is to do that. And so I like to use an activity like this one...[25 lines]...I took a longer time with this cuz I wanted to get you guys past your awkward feeling. We’re getting there. Doing better than we were when we started.

It took another fourteen turns before I successfully transitioned the group to the next activity and began providing an overview of the leadership-development curriculum. In Session 4, I attempted to
use a debriefing to transition the group from the community-building activity to a reflection activity.

Once again, it was a slow transition punctuated by several interjections by the other participants. The exchange started in line 903 and contained fifteen turns before I offered another transitional turn in line 933.

Excerpt 5.20: Session 4-How to Teach a Dull Class

903 Tabitha Well. I just wanted to take some time to get caught up? Because once groups get started again? Things can take on a whole different- your priority list? Sometimes can change?
908 Group laughter
909 Tabitha Like you experienced? Okay I really need to know that now...[8 lines]
918 Group laughter
919 Tabitha And like praying for patience-
920 Darlene Yeah. You shouldn’t do that.
921 Samantha You shouldn’t do that.
922 Tabitha You should never pray for patience. Because the lessons that come are just too hard.
925 Group laughter
926 Holly Are you going to teach about how to teach a dull class today?
928 Group laughter
929 Holly This is the lesson I want to hear.
930 Group laughter
931 Holly So I won’t have those experiences for the next two weeks.
933 Tabitha I actually want us to think about the best...

Most of the time, the group responded positively to the transitions, asking questions or offering comments directly related to the transition. However, there were instances in which the group offered an alternate to the transitions by proposing their own actions. Both examples occurred during Session 8’s teaching activity in which the group was enacting a deliberation. In the first instance, Excerpt 5.21, I offered the transition in lines 932-935 from identifying the goal to recognizing specific issues. Before I could finish the transition, Darlene asked “should we vote?” (Line 937) and Cassidy asked “could you add to that though?” (Line 938). I responded to Cassidy’s inquiry in an exchange that involved Holly, Cassidy, and me over the course of six turns. Then I responded to Darlene’s question. This exchange involved all the participants over the course of 28 turns. At line 996, I was able to use a mid-turn transition,
indicated by a double forward slash (///), to successfully transition the group to the next stage of the activity.

**Excerpt 5.21: Session 8-Add to That**

932 Tabitha So we will go with this as our goal? Developing community among small group leaders. Will we all remember that if I flip this page over?
936 Holly mm hmm
937 Darlene Should we vote?
938 Cassidy Could you add to that. Though?
939 Holly I’m okay with it.
940 Cassidy While educating small group leaders?
941 Tabitha I don’t. I don’t if. I don’t know if we’re ready to go beyond this
943 Cassidy Just developing community?
944 Tabitha Because then we’re into process...[6 lines]
949 Tabitha Why do you want to do a vote?
951 Darlene I don’t know? Just to make sure everybody agrees with it. (2) So we have consensus.
...[21 turns involving all speakers]...
994 Samantha Okay. That’s good.
995 Darlene Thank you.
996 Tabitha You’re welcome. // So the goal is to develop community. I’m gonna have to write it up here. So are there any specific issues with that? I mean one issue I see is people have to show up to develop community.
1002 Darlene Yeah.
1003 Cassidy Chuckling. True.

The group clearly was not ready to move to the next phase of the activity when I first offered the transition in line 932. After responding to both of participant’s alternate courses of action, I once again offered a transition in line 996 which the group immediately followed. The group spent some time identifying different issues, then the stakeholders and the stakeholders’ perspectives. When I tried to transition the group from stakeholders to identifying alternative solutions to address the goal, I once again was faced with alternative courses of action by the participants. Excerpt 5.22: Session 8-Brain Food presents my attempt to transition the group in line 1407 and their alternative response. Cassidy, Holly, and Darlene focus on the food in lines 1408-1410. Samantha seeks clarification on the activity instructions and then joins the exchange regarding the food.
Excerpt 5.22: Session 8-Brain Food

1407 Tabitha  Okay. Here we go. Alternatives?
1408 Cassidy  I need a brownie though.
1409 Holly    Go for it.
1410 Darlene  Brain food.
1411 Tabitha  Remember that the goal is to develop community among leaders. How do we do that? What are alternatives to get us to do that?
1415 Samantha Do we have to make alternatives and consequences at the same time?
1417 Tabitha  No.
1418 Samantha Or can we just do alternatives and then go with consequences.
1420 Tabitha  Yeah.
1421 Samantha Cool. I’ll have another brownie.
1422 Tabitha  So?
1423 Cassidy  Is this weird for you though?

When Cassidy asked “is this weird for you though?” a longer thread of conversation occurred.

Cassidy was concerned about my feelings and whether I was feeling criticized because of many of the comments that had been shared during the deliberation. The conversation involved 28 turns and involved all the participants. It still took a few exchanges to get fully transitioned. The next excerpt presents the conclusion of the conversation and my second attempt to transition the group. The transition is noted by double slashes (//) and Cassidy immediately responds to the transition offering the first comments starting the next phase of the activity.

Excerpt 5.23: Session 8-My Emotions Shifted

1494 Cassidy  Wow. This is weird.
1495 Tabitha  You don’t have to feel bad for me. Okay I’m ready for you. No. Cuz my goal overrides my disappointments... // alright. You said you had some ideas.
1505 Cassidy  Well when we were going through all of those? I don’t remember some of them now. Cuz my emotions shifted to you really
1509 Tabitha  Well I’m glad we dealt with that. Do you want me to flip back to the other page?
1513 Cassidy  Yeah. I was thinking. Like some of the things...

As the facilitator, I assumed the responsibility to ensure that the agenda comprising the curriculum was followed; but it was only through the cooperative discursive patterns of the participants that the curriculum was successfully achieved. Managing the conversational floor involved the full group
even though it was facilitated. The facilitator enacted the primary responsibility for controlling the agenda, activities, and time spent on each activity. The facilitator had the highest percentage of turns and average length of turns for most activities. The facilitator gave instructions on activities and transitioned the group through the activities. The participants all uttered turns within the activities. The turn lengths varied depending on the specific activity. The participants responded to the facilitation by asking clarifying questions, offering pertinent comments, or minimal responses of agreement. Through these cooperative actions, the facilitator and participants worked together to manage the facilitated conversational floor.

**Enacting Discursive Power**

The second above-the-sentence discursive practice characterizes enacting discursive power for the focal group. Enacting discursive power represents the degree to which an individual has the responsibility to speak, opportunity to speak, and the right to introduce topics of conversation (Cameron, 2001; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). Within formal speech communities the discursive power is asymmetrical so that one person or position has the designated and legitimized responsibility and obligation over talk. The person in authority determines who can talk and the topic of focus. Informal speech communities are characterized by symmetrical discursive power in which all the speakers are given equal responsibility and opportunity to speak and introduce topics for discussion.

Another facet of the focal group was that it enacted a distributed discursive power to characterize the blended-space. The sections that follow present an analysis of patterns that emerged regarding 1) inviting others to talk, and 2) initiating topics. As the facilitator, I took primary responsibility for ensuring that all the participants were given opportunity to speak and introduce topics that were mostly relevant to the activity at-hand. Additionally, the participants took responsibility to include others in conversation. Both the facilitator and all the participants offered new topics of conversation. The enacted discursive power cannot be described as being equally shared; however, it may be more
reflective of distributed power in which all have power, but it is enacted to differing degrees. I will begin by presenting the analysis of inviting others to talk; both the facilitator’s invitations followed by the participant invitations.

Inviting Others to Talk

Table 5.5 summarizes the turns coded as invitations to talk for each participant. Overall, 22% of Session 1 turns were coded as invitations to talk. This percentage varied in Session 4 to 16% and in Session 8 at 28%. For Sessions 1 and 4, the highest number of turns was directed to an individual. These are identified in the table as “One.” However, in Session 8, the highest number of turns was directed to the “Group” as a whole.

Samantha and Holly both averaged 16% of the turns that were invitations to talk. Cassidy uttered 12% of the turns that were invitations to talk, and Darlene offered 11%. Overall as facilitator, I issued the most invitations to talk. These invitations were most often directed at a specific person, but invitations were also posed to the group as a whole providing an opportunity for one or several from the group to respond. I averaged 46% of the turns coded as invitations to talk. During Session 1, I offered 55 invitations: 32 to individuals and 23 to the group. The number declined only slightly in Session 4 to 47: 34 to individuals and 13 to the group. In Session 8, I had the smallest number of invitations with 30 turns: 8 to individuals and 23 to the whole group. These numbers indicate that as the facilitator I consistently offered the highest number of invitations to encourage the participants to join in the talk thereby exemplifying a facilitated floor in which the discursive power is unequally distributed.
Table 5.5

*Invitations to Talk by Participant by Session*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th></th>
<th>Session 8</th>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>One Group</td>
<td>One Group</td>
<td>One Group</td>
<td>One Group</td>
<td>One Group</td>
<td>One Group</td>
<td>One Group</td>
<td>One Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Facilitator invitations.**

As the facilitator, I felt like I was responsible for encouraging and monitoring the interactions of the group. I used invitations through unambiguous questions and leading statements. My invitations were presented to the full group and/or were directed to a specific participant. Through these means, I enacted discursive power as the facilitator by ensuring that the conversation was open to all.

First, I focus on the invitations I issued to the full group. Some of the invitations were predetermined to start activities; however, most questions were voiced spontaneously to help keep threads of conversation going and involve more speakers. Throughout this section, the invitations to talk will be italicized for emphasis.

I spent time determining effective questions that would prompt the group to conversation. To invite the group into sharing ideas about characteristics of bad conversations in Session 4, I posed the question “Based on your experiences what happens in a bad conversation?” (Excerpt 5.12). In this case, once the teaching activity was started with a prompting question, the group engaged in the conversation-based activity directly so further questioning to prompt idea generation was not
In this example, the thread of conversation on characteristics of bad conversation lasted nearly 200 lines, 82 turns, and involved all five speakers.

During the deliberation activity in Session 8, I posed invitations at each stage of the activity in order to encourage the group to provide their input: “For those who do attend, what’s their perspective” (line 1195-1196) and followed up with “So what about this one. Group leaders that want relationships?” (line 1279-1280). The group understood that I was asking them to share ideas about perspectives, but I didn’t have to repeat the question “what’s their perspective” each time. These questions were posed to the whole group inviting anyone to respond.

In the midst of teaching activities, I also used invitations to check in with the group. I wanted to ensure that all participants had an opportunity to share her ideas. In Session 4, I asked “Do we like this list or do we have more stuff to put on it?” (Line 1324-1325). In retrospect, I am glad I asked this question because the group added several more characteristics of bad conversation before we transitioned to qualities of good conversations. In Session 8, I checked in with the group several times as we enacted the deliberation model: “Are there other issues?” (Line 1009), “Does this capture the variety?” (Line 1067), and “Any other thoughts on collaboration?” (Line 2145). Through the use of invitations to prompt a conversation and check in with participants before moving on to a new topic of conversation or activity, I used my discursive power as the facilitator to provide opportunity for everyone to speak during threads of topics. While these discursive moves may seem obvious, I feel that my discursive practices also needed to be reflectively analyzed in detail to describe the enacted discursive power.

In some instances, I issued an invitation to the whole group and followed up with invitations directed to specific individuals. In Session 1, toward the end of the teaching activity, I asked: “So any last concerns. Anybody?” (Line 1490). After Cassidy commented, I posed the question again in line 1499: “Okay. Any other concerns? Concerned about what you write?” Holly offered some comments. Once
again, in line 1516, I posed the invitation specifically to Darlene “do you have any concerns?” Lastly, in line 1523, I directed the invitation towards the remaining participant: “Samantha, any concerns?” Through the series of invitations, all the participants were given an equal opportunity to share with the group.

Most of my invitations to talk were directed to specific individuals in Sessions 1 and 4. In most cases, the specific individual being invited into the conversation must be inferred from the context. I rarely used a person’s name when inviting someone to talk. I speculate that eye-contact was most likely used to direct the invitation to a specific person as non-verbal cues are a common feature of conversation even though it is not explored as a part of this analysis. I used names in four turns in Session 1, seven turns in Session 4, and only once in Session 8. Regardless of whether I used a person’s name or not, almost all of the specifically-directed invitations to talk received responses. There were only two instances where another person responded instead of the specific person to whom the invitation was extended. Regardless, this indicates that the women were enacting discursive power.

The opening community-building activity instructions encouraged each participant to share information disclosing unique personal descriptions as well as commonalities within the group. In Excerpt 5.24: Session 1-To Your Side, I encouraged either Holly or Cassidy to join in the conversation. Holly deflected the invitation specifying that Cassidy could talk next, which could be attributed to avoidance or politeness. Holly enacted her discursive power by choosing to have someone else speak first.

**Excerpt 5.24: Session 1-To Your Side**

658 Tabitha  
659 Holly  
660 Tabitha  
661 Holly  
662  
663 Cassidy  

To your side of the table.
To my side of the table?
Whoever wants to speak.
Kay. Go ahead. We’re going. Clockwise.
Group laughter
Uhm. I’m doing Sunday School for this group...
Earlier in the session, I used a direct statement of invitation to encourage Samantha and Cassidy to share a unique personal feature. The statement was designed to be lighthearted encouragement. The teasing invitation appeared successful as Samantha responded by sharing about herself. During the initial session it appears that more invitations were needed to help establish the expectation that all were welcome to share.

**Excerpt 5.25: Session 1-Falling Behind**

347 Tabitha All right. Holly and I have two things on our lines. You guys are falling behind over there.

350 Samantha I can. I mean. I can think of a million things.

In Excerpt 5.26, I shifted the group’s conversation to sharing about the small groups they were leading. I shared about my group first and then used a question to invite Darlene to share next. As Darlene responded by repeating the invitation, it was clear that the invitation was intended for her.

**Excerpt 5.26: Session 1-That’s My Class**

557 Tabitha So. That’s my class...[7 lines]...Your group?

565 Darlene My group? Is adults with lots of kids.

Similarly, in Session 4, I was hoping to shift the conversation from talking about Holly’s small group to the other participants. I did this through a series of invitations to specific individuals. In line 455, I stated, “Darlene. You had a group start. Sunday night as well?” Darlene responded immediately and shared. The focus on Darlene’s group lasted for 31 turns and over 130 lines of transcript. When I tried to shift the focus to Samantha’s small group the exchange was much shorter (see Excerpt 5.27). As Samantha’s group hadn’t started yet there wasn’t much for her to share.

**Excerpt 5.27: Session 4-Girls’ Night**

891 Tabitha Samantha. Do you know when you’re going to start your Girls’ Night?

893 Samantha Probably not this Tuesday? Probably next Tuesday.

895 Tabitha I was thinking it would be soon. Cuz they had their three weeks gone.

897 Samantha Yes. They did. We were going to start this week but they had been asked to come help do a See-You-At-The-Pole Rally in Missoula on Tuesday night? So they’re going to do that. So it will be the next Tuesday night?
Sometimes, the invitation directed at a specific individual also prompted others to join in the conversation. This occurred in Session 1 while the group was hoping to find characteristics in common. Excerpt 5.28 presents two questions that I directed toward Samantha (lines 764 and 767) to invite her participation in the conversation. After the second invitation, however, Cassidy and Holly both respond; one confirming and one denying, commonality.

**Excerpt 5.28: Session 1-You’ve Read It**

764 Tabitha You guys read Bait of Satan in the last Cleansing Stream. Is that right?
766 Samantha Yeah we did.
767 Tabitha So you’ve read it.
768 Cassidy I’ve read it.
769 Holly I haven’t read it.

The same pattern occurred in Session 8 while the group was exploring options for a small-group leadership meeting. After Samantha and Cassidy had presented an idea for a meeting time, I invited Darlene specifically to respond to the idea in line 1685 of Excerpt 5.29. Cassidy, Holly, and Samantha all responded before Darlene shared her difficulty with their suggestion. I believe these women were able to enact their discursive power through discursive moves of offering invitation and responding by asking questions, offering options, and countering the possibilities presented.

**Excerpt 5.29: Session 8-I Can’t Imagine**

1685 Tabitha So how do you [Darlene] feel about that as a leader who has a group that meets during Sunday School?
1688 Cassidy Oh. It's during Sunday School.
1689 Holly O::h.
1690 Samantha Which ones?
1691 Tabitha The J.B.Q. and the Senior Bible Quiz both are.
1693 Samantha Okay. So what if we did options?
1694 Tabitha But it's just. It is one. If we stick with what we're doing which is every other month. It's once every other month.
1697 Darlene That means all of? Well? (.) We're short a coach. I can't imagine finding two people extra to run quiz.

Invitations to talk were used throughout the focal group’s sessions. In Session 8, the group was setting a goal as the second step in their deliberation model, when I addressed their participation:
“Anybody? Do we like that one the best? Or? Do we need to go back to one of the others? Or add something else. (5.7) This is where the participation part is needed because Darlene’s thrown out an idea and we don’t know if you agree with her or not unless you say so” (Lines 872-878). These types of prompting participation questions occurred throughout the three sessions as it is typical for a facilitator to encourage those in the group to speak.

While most of the time the group’s conversation progressed with limited need for overt permission to talk from the facilitator, there were a few instances in which the participants asked for explicit permission to talk and thereby acknowledged that one person had ultimate discursive power. This counter-example was interesting as it contrasted with the discursive pattern presented above. In Session 1, I had given the group instructions for the activity when Samantha asked, “So we start talking?” (Line 34). In another two instances, I was asked by Darlene if she could share a story. While it was a rare occurrence in the transcripts, I believe it is worth mentioning as it reveals that participants recognized the role of the facilitator.

During Session 1, I was providing an overview of the curriculum for the leadership-development program. I had just started presenting the second of five topics, when Darlene interjected: “That was my challenge” (line 933). After a few exchanges among Holly, Darlene, and I, permission was sought and granted as shown in Excerpt 5.30.

Excerpt 5.30: Session 1-Do You Mind?

936 Holly       How to have a good fight?
937 Darlene     Well-
938 Holly       I’d flip right to that page.
939             Group laughter
940 Tabitha     Yeah. That’s the name of the chapter.
941 Holly       I could have learned that twenty-three years ago. It would have done a lot of good.
943 Darlene     You know something in here. I mean. I will never forget it. It was fantastic. Whoops. Too far. See. Do you mind if I tell this?
946 Tabitha     Go right ahead.
947 Darlene     This was not my small group. This is my department....
Darlene’s narrative continued until line 1002. Afterwards, I resumed my presentation of the curriculum topic in line 1003. I was aware of the experience Darlene was going to share as she and I had discussed the situation previously. I felt the story had a good connection to the current issue I was lecturing on. Personally, I was very comfortable having Darlene share as she and I had a strong relationship based on trust. I believe Darlene sought permission out of respect for my role as the facilitator and her desire to support that role.

Darlene once again sought permission to talk in Session 4. The group was sharing about their small groups. Each participant took the primary role of storyteller in turn. Darlene was the second person to share. In this instance, she was asking permission to continue. She had been sharing about her Sunday evening small group and in one turn transitioned to speaking about her Sunday morning small group. After she asked permission, I encouraged her to continue sharing. Once again, I was familiar with the situation she wanted to share with the group.

Excerpt 5.31: Session 4-JBQ is Stressful

588 Darlene That was really nice. Junior Bible Quiz is stressful. But that’s okay. We’ll get through that. We had a - Do you mind if I tell?
592 Tabitha Go ahead.
593 Darlene We had a Junior Bible Quiz split this summer.

The story and subsequent discussion of Darlene’s Sunday morning small group continued for 73 turns, encompassed 271 lines, and involved all five speakers. In both of these situations, permission was sought before telling a longer narrative. The first situation was in the midst of a teaching activity and the second was in the midst of a community-building activity. These two excerpts indicate that Darlene was attentive to the leadership-development activities, the role of the facilitator, and the need to keep the conversation relevant to the activity. She was also attending to how much of the conversation she was contributing. In the previous section on participation, Darlene managed to keep her contributions balanced so that her participation patterns were right in the middle. As the facilitator, recognized as having more decision-making power in regards to schedule, I granted permission whenever it was
sought. I never denied a person access to share as my goal was to invite all the participants to contribute to the conversation in every activity. While only two of these instances occurred it may be a good indicator of a blended-space in which the facilitator’s role is recognized even when the discursive power is distributed.

**Participant invitations.**

Enacting discursive power was not restricted to the facilitator’s position. Overall, 54% of the invitations to talk were issued by one of the participants. Samantha issued 18% of the invitations to talk to the whole group. At 17%, Holly issued the most participant invitations that were directed to specific individuals. Many of the invitations to talk were issued in the form of a question, directed either to the whole group or to an individual. At other times, a participant would indicate it was time for someone else to have a turn. Through these turn-taking discussions and questions, the participants enacted their discursive power by issuing invitations to talk.

Another look at part of Excerpt 5.32 (repeated presentation, abbreviated) shows Samantha posing a question inviting anyone in the group to speak. She followed up with another question directed to a specific person, “you” (Line 85), to which Holly responded, “Yeah. I do” (Line 86).

**Excerpt 5.32: Session 1-We All Have Cars** (repeated presentation of Excerpt 5.2, abbreviated)

82 Samantha It's true. (9.3). Uhhmm. (2.5) Does anyone not like strawberries? (.)
84 Tabitha I like strawberries.
85 Samantha You like strawberries?
86 Holly Yeah. I do.

In some instances, Samantha used her turns to help with the facilitation of the group, by inviting others to participate in the conversation. Samantha may have felt more comfortable doing this as she also has a teaching degree and facilitated group discussions on a daily basis. In Excerpt 5.33, I presented the formal deliberation model steps we were going to follow for our next activity (lines 651-653). I responded to Holly’s nervousness in lines 654-665, at which point Samantha posed a simple question in
line 666 to get us all focused on the task-at-hand. Samantha, assuming the facilitator role, and enacting discursive power, was readily accepted as Darlene quickly offered a response.

**Excerpt 5.33: Session 8-Jumping Ahead**

651 Tabitha  We are going to need to do ground rules first.
653 Darlene  Oh yeah. Sorry. Jumping ahead
654-665   ...[11 turns]...
666 Samantha  *Ground rules?*
667 Darlene  Nobody gets mad at Tab.

In Excerpt 5.34, Samantha again posed a question to the whole group that invited further participation: “What are some other reasons people don’t attend?” (Line 1141). While asking questions is a technique frequently used by educators to direct the talk in a classroom, in these excerpts, Samantha was not the teacher or facilitator, yet she used her turns to invite others in the group to talk. Several other topics of conversation were facilitated by Samantha as she issued invitations to talk, which not only involved others in the talk but also kept the group on-task with the activity.

**Excerpt 5.34: Session 8-Fifty Years**

1141 Samantha  *What are some other reasons people don’t attend?* (2.7)
1143 Darlene  They don’t think that they need it. "Never had this before. I’ve been leading a group for fifty years."

**Excerpt 5.35: Session 8-I Don’t Understand**

1306 Darlene  That want relationships? But they haven’t been coming? Is that what that is?
1308 Tabitha  Well no. It could float either way.
1309 Samantha  *Want relationships and come? Want relationships and don’t come.*
1311 Darlene  I guess it would be under don’t attend. They have a different perception. Their perception may be flawed.

1315 Samantha  *Of what they think is going to happen when they go there?*
1317 Darlene  Right.
1318 (3.2)
1319 Holly  Expectations. Or something. Of the meeting.
1321 Tabitha  I’m still trying to understand exactly?
1322 Samantha  *Of the people who don’t attend?*
1323 Tabitha  Mm hmm.
1324 Samantha  *One of the reasons their perspective might be that they don’t even know what’s going to happen. They might want relationships? But they don’t*
even know relationships are being build. They just think its uh a teaching. If they've never been there before?

1331 Holly  Right.
1332 Samantha  Is that what you’re trying to say?
1333 Darlene  Right. Thank you for saying it better.
1334 Samantha  Well. I don’t know.
1335 Tabitha  Maybe I just had to hear it a couple of times. Um. I don’t understand.
1336 Samantha  Maybe the goals of the meetings.

Samantha used most of her turns in Excerpt 3.35 to ask questions of others in the group, thereby inviting them into the conversation. I did not understand the point Darlene was making and Samantha used her enacted discursive power to serve as an interpreter so the activity could move forward with clarity. A short time later, Excerpt 5.36 occurred in which Samantha once again focuses the group’s attention on the activity. Samantha used questions to the whole group to lead the conversation.

Excerpt 5.36: Session 8-More Consequences

1898 Samantha  So let’s think of some more consequences. Of those. Because to me it seems like it would be? For one. It would be a little bit hard to figure out how to sub-divide the sub-groups.
1903 Tabitha  So this one. This one is encapsulated in here?
1905 Cassidy  Yeah.
1906 Tabitha  Okay. So we are really looking at two different possibilities.
1908 Cassidy  Mmm hmmm.
1909 Tabitha  Right. Okay.
1910 Samantha  So that one has a challenge. Or I don’t know a consequence of just like how do you divide the groups.
1913 Darlene  And also if you
1914 Tabitha  I would oh oh I how do you divide the groups?
1916 Samantha  Are you going to do generation? Or are you? We can’t do. We don’t want to do generation in some ways. Because we already have a generational gap in our church.
1921 Holly  Mmm hmmm.
1922 Samantha  So we don’t want to do necessarily huge generational?

Samantha’s statement in line 1898, “so let’s think of some more consequences,” shifted the conversation and provided an opening for everyone to speak. I was the next speaker in line 1903 responding directly to her prompt as if I was the participant and she was the facilitator. Cassidy contributed in lines 1905 and 1908. Darlene jumped in at line 1913, and Holly voiced agreement in line 1921. Within ten turns, all five women contributed to the conversation. Samantha’s invitation to the
whole group in line 1898 successfully involved all the speakers and continued the pattern of a facilitated conversation floor.

Some of the participant invitations encouraged the first speaker to expand her thoughts. In Excerpt 5.37 below, Samantha asked Cassidy a question (Line 1617), thereby encouraging Cassidy to share more information and provide clarification on her original utterance (Lines 1618-1623). Cassidy used the same discourse move to invite Darlene to expand her thoughts in line 1626. Darlene elaborated her idea while tying back to the concept of trust originally introduced by Cassidy in line 1614. In this one example, three of the women used the same invitational discursive move thereby exemplifying their access to discursive power.

Excerpt 5.37: Session 1-Trust is Harder For Leaders (repeated presentation of Excerpt 5.1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1614 Cassidy</th>
<th>Oh. Just two things I just noticed. I don't know I could be wrong but I think trust is harder for leaders than for regular people.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1617 Samantha</td>
<td>That’s why you’re so quiet?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1618 Cassidy</td>
<td>But. Um. I talk a lot less after I work all day cuz I talked all day long. So it's nicer to sit and be quiet. (2.4) You learn at work that if you talk too much you get in trouble anyways.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1622</td>
<td>Group laughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1623 Cassidy</td>
<td>So I shut up. Normally I would talk a lot. (3.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1624 Darlene</td>
<td>I actually have kind of the opposite. I keep my mouth shut at work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1626 Cassidy</td>
<td>Really?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1627 Darlene</td>
<td>Because I don’t trust the people I work with.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This same pattern of question used to invite others to talk was found in Session 4. The group was brainstorming characteristics of bad conversations when the following exchange occurred. The excerpts below show how a question invited a speaker to expand her thoughts. All of the participants used this discursive move showing a consistent discursive pattern of invitation followed by an expanded response. Excerpt 5.38 reveals how I used this discursive move to invite speakers to expand their thoughts. In Excerpt 5.39, Darlene was telling a story. Samantha, Holly, and Cassidy all asked questions which invited Darlene to share more details of her story.
Excerpt 5.38: Session 4-Bad Timing

1254 Samantha  Bad timing.
1255 Tabitha    Like what? Can you think of?
1256 Samantha  Mmmm. If you can- A ba- good conversation could be done at really bad
time. If the other person isn’t ready for the conversation. Or if- does that make sense?

Excerpt 5.39: Session 4-Permission

687 Darlene   Yeah. It’s the Bible Quiz that’s going to be a little harder? I think this
               year in figuring out what to say if they do get to have a home school
               Bible Quiz team. Then we have to figure out as coaches how to support
               our kids through that an you know? The loyalty to the church and to the
               kids that they coached last year and why are they not coaching.
696 Samantha Who gives them permission to do that?
697 Darlene   May Brooks
698 Samantha Oh.
699 Holly     So has it been granted? Or is there just a process that they’re going
               through now?
701 Darlene   It’s the process. They’ve been written the letter and?
703 Cassidy   To May?
704 Darlene   Yeah. But you know? As state coordinators we were asked. You know.
               What’s your opinion. Well. That’s a sticky situation?

The participants also revealed their distributed discursive power as they explicitly discussed
taking turns. Through this discursive work, the group invited others to join in the conversation. The
group did not discuss taking turns during each activity, but it happened several times over the course of
the leadership-development program. In Excerpt 5.40, Darlene had arrived a few minutes after the
group started a community-building activity. I was explaining the instructions to Darlene when the
following exchange occurred. The lines in italics indicate a speaker is discussing taking turns which
indicates they are enacting discursive power by ensuring that all participants are invited to talk.

Excerpt 5.40: Session 1-I Have to Put Something on My Line?

137 Tabitha    And on our line we have to put things that are unique. Like I’m the only
               one who’s single. So I got to put single on my line.
140 Darlene   Okay. And I have to put something on my line?
141 Tabitha    Everybody will have to put something on their line-
143 Samantha  but we’re kind of going slow for Tab here-
145 Tabitha    They’re going slow, but
146 Darlene   So we’re going around the circle? Is it my turn?
In line 146, Darlene introduced the concept of taking turns with a question, “Is it my turn?” Interestingly, it is another participant, Holly, who grants permission to Darlene to speak in line 148. In the previous examples, since I was the facilitator, I granted permission to another speaker to talk. In this case, Holly assumed the role of facilitator which was readily accepted by everyone in the group as the conversation seamlessly continued. Darlene, several lines later, discussed taking turns again as a way to invite others to interact: “she could take my turn and then it could be your turn” (line 172). Both Holly and Darlene enacted discursive power by granting other participants a turn in the conversation.

In Session 4, while brainstorming characteristics of good and bad conversations, I used a question to prompt the group to begin sharing in line 1172. Darlene, Samantha, and I exchanged a total of twelve turns when Darlene invited Holly and Cassidy to take a turn to talk. Cassidy deflected and Samantha immediately offered another prompt. Samantha and Darlene did the work of including Holly and Cassidy in the conversation. They demonstrated the distributed nature of discursive power for the focal group in Excerpt 5.41.

**Excerpt 5.41: Session 4-Eating Candy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1197</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Kay. Your guys' turn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1199</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>I've been eating candy. Group laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1201</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>You had to write something down?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1202</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>We'll eat candy? You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1203</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Did you did this one first?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1204</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>Well mine is like? If um people talk. They knock you down first. (. ) To level the- Then you might as well not talk to me. That's like- That's condescending? Or? Um? Kinda starting off with &quot;You screwed up. But?&quot; You know? Or just something that like starts it off so you're defensive already? And? (9.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1212</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Defensive was going to be my word.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another example of discussing taking turns to invite others into the talk occurred in Session 8. Before the group determined a goal, they had discussed ground rules that would govern their
deliberation activity. Darlene specifically addressed participation and the group discussed their
expectations for individual involvement.

**Excerpt 5.42: Session 8-What About Participation?**

728 Darlene  What about participation? I mean do we expect that everybody should say something? Or is silence okay? Or you know?
732 Holly Am I allowed to remain the tail?
733 Darlene Does silence mean agreement?
734 Group laughter
735 Tabitha Well what do you think? As a group what do you think about that?
737 Cassidy It’s hard to collaborate if everybody doesn’t collaborate.
739 Samantha I don’t think there should be silence. You shouldn’t be allowed to be silent. But I don’t know if there’s a- how much you have to talk. I don’t know if there’s like a-
743 Cassidy That’s true.
744 Samantha It would be hard to determine how much is talking and how much isn’t but-
746 Darlene Everyone should contribute then
747 Samantha Contribute something? Sounds good to me.
748 Holly Thanks Darlene.

Darlene voiced the expectation that “everybody should say something” (Line 729). She asked
about whether silence was okay. Cassidy, Samantha, and Darlene then worked together to arrive at the
notion that everyone should contribute something. Holly also voiced her agreement by saying “Thanks
Darlene” (Line 748). In this exchange, the group demonstrated how they openly communicated their
expectations for participation: everyone takes a turn and everyone was invited to talk.

The participants demonstrated their enacting of distributed discursive power by inviting others
to talk. As small-group leaders, these women were responsible for managing conversation within their
own small groups. This may account for why the women felt comfortable enacting discursive power
which helped to manage the conversation. The participants used questions to invite others into the talk,
guide the activities, and encourage a speaker to expand her thoughts. The participants did not exercise
equal share of the work of inviting, but it was a feature of talk used by all the participants to some
degree. In this manner, the focal group’s talk can be characterized as enacting distributed power.
Initiating Topics

Who has the right and responsibility to initiate topics within discourse is governed by the speaker with discursive power. In an informal speech community with a collaborative floor that is open to all, one would expect that it is permissible that everybody would initiate topics. Formal speech communities, in contrast, restrict initiating topics to the person with the most discursive power. For the focal group, the discursive power seemed to be distributed; so that, all of the speakers have the opportunity to initiate topics but some more than others.

A topic of conversation refers to the chief describable focus of a sequence of turns. Identifying topics and the initiator of a topic can be incredibly challenging: “furthermore, how much talk needs to be devoted to a topic for it to be counted as such?” (Tannen, 2005, p. 54). For this study, I coded topics whenever a new focus was introduced, whether or not anyone responded. I determined the length of a topic by counting the number of turns. I also examined how many women participated in each topic. For this section, I will focus specifically on the turn that first introduced a new focus of conversation. I will use several excerpts to demonstrate the focal group’s practice of initiating topics and thereby exercising their distributed discursive power.

I identified topics, the person who initiated the topics of conversation, and whether there were topics left without a response. Table 5.6 reveals a total of 391 topics throughout the three transcribed sessions. Only 31 of these topics had no response. Over 90% of all the topics initiated garnered at least one additional turn of response. On average, the topics spanned four turns for Sessions 1 and 4 and six turns for Session 8. However, Session 8 had two of the longest topics of the leadership-development program; one with 58 turns and another with 162 turns. The longest topic in Session 1 was 23 turns. The longest topic in Session 4 was 40 turns. These longer topics involved all five speakers. All five speakers spoke during 12% of the topics.
Table 5.6

*Percentage of New Topics Initiated by Participant by Session*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th>Session 8</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Turns</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Session 1, 23% of the turns were new topics. This percentage decreased throughout the span of the leadership development program with 13% in Session 4 and 10% in Session 8. All five participants initiated topics in the three sessions. As the facilitator, I initiated nearly twice as many topics as any other person; however, I never offered more than 40% of the topics during a session. The participants were fairly equal in their turns that initiated topics: Cassidy and Samantha with 15%, Darlene with 17% and Holly with 18%. This information, taken together, indicates that it was a common practice within the blended-space of the focal group to have all speakers offer new topics of conversation.

Due to my role as a facilitator, I often introduced new topics to transition the group from one activity to another. In Session 1, I stated: “Why don’t we talk about our different groups? Maybe there’s something in common within our small groups?” (Lines 518-520). In this instance, I used a lapse in the conversation to initiate a new topic of conversation. At other times, I initiated a new topic of conversation in the middle of a turn. During Session 4, Cassidy was sharing an experience with one of her small groups. I responded with a relevant comment to Cassidy and then directed the group to a new topic of conversation regarding Samantha’s small group: “Awkward moments. They just show up everywhere. Samantha. Do you know when you’re going to start your Girls Night?” (Lines 890-892).
Through these strategies, I enacted my discursive power as the facilitator by steering the topics of conversation.

Although I was the recognized facilitator of the group, the other participants were comfortable introducing new topics of conversation. In looking at Excerpt 5.2: Session 1-We All Have Cars, several topics were introduced, although none of the topics went beyond a single response. Holly offered a new topic with “We all have cars” (Line 74). After several statements of encouragement, Cassidy introduced a topic that did not garner further comment: “We all have jobs” (Line 78). Then after nearly 16 seconds of silence elapsed, Cassidy offered another topic: “We all help raise kids” (Line 79). Samantha then initiated a topic by asking a question: “Does anyone not like strawberries?” (Line 82). Even in this short excerpt, Holly, Samantha, and Cassidy all initiated topics of conversation. Even though the group had only just started the women were already demonstrating a degree of discursive power as they introduced new topics. Their topics were relevant, conforming to the expectations of the community-building activity which also reinforces the notion that the women were all cooperating to manage the flow of conversation.

However, the topics initiated did not always conform directly to completing an activity. During Session 8, the group was enacting the steps of a deliberation model. I was in the process of transitioning the group to the next step of the deliberation when the following conversation occurred. The transition was a process as I described in a previous section with Excerpt 5.21: Session 8-My Emotions Shifted and is repeated below in Excerpt 5.43. The excerpt demonstrates the groups’ comfort with stepping outside of the activity parameters to pursue their own topics of conversation. This move reveals the group is employing a high degree of discursive power as they disregard the confines of the activity. I initiated the topic of conversation connected to the activity in line 1391, again in 1407, and again 1411. Although I provided three separate prompts to start an activity, the women used their discursive power to project their own agenda. Samantha offered another topic in line 1395. Cassidy introduced another topic in
1408. Then in line 1423, Cassidy initiated a new topic which was the focus for nearly 100 lines of transcript, 26 turns, and all five participants. The topic initiations are italicized for emphasis.

**Excerpt 5.43: Session 8-My Emotions Shifted** (repeated presentation of Excerpt 5.21, expanded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1391</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Okay. Are we good with this? So we can move on to developing alternatives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1393</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Mm hmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1394</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Mm hmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1395</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>I don’t know that we’re going to get done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1396</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>I’m sorry that’s my fault.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1397</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>That’s alright.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1398</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>It’s kind of all our fault. That knot took us a long time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1400</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Well. I had a wrong expectation to expect that something very complicated that I have not been able to figure out in the last nine months is going to get solved in half an hour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1405</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>I mean I’m starting to get ideas. Just from going through the thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1407</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Okay. Here we go. Alternatives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1408</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>I need a brownie though.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1409</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Go for it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1410</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Brain food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1411</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Remember that the goal is to develop community among leaders. How do we do that? What are alternatives to get us to do that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1415</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Do we have to make alternatives and consequences at the same time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1417</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1418</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Or can we just do alternatives and then go with consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1420</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1421</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Cool. I’ll have another brownie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1422</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>So?₁</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1423</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>Is this₁ weird for you though?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1424</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>What?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1425</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>This whole process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1426</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Oh. (...) Of doing this with you guys? Here about this particular topic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1491</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>See my empathy gift though feels. I feel bad. ₁You don’t have to₁ feel bad for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1493</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Wow. This is weird.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1495</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>You don’t have to feel bad for me. Okay I’m ready for you. No. Cuz my goal overrides my disappointments. My goal is to build community among the leaders. To help leaders be better. To help them prevent them from being burned out. My goal is not to keep up what I? You know? Just to make my plan successful? My plan can change. (...) Alright. You said you had some ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1505</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>Well when we were going through all of those? I don’t remember some of them now. Cuz my emotions (...) shifted to you really₁</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By line 1513, Cassidy was ready to contribute to the topic I had initiated back at line 1413. From the ready involvement of all the participants, one could infer that it was acceptable for Cassidy to initiate the sidebar topic of conversation.

A “sidebar” is a term usually used to indicate a discussion between judge and lawyers during a trial that the jury cannot hear. I adopted this term for the focal group, as periodically the group would have a short topic of conversation that was not directly related to the activity at-hand. For Session 1, 20% (23) topics were coded as sidebars, Session 4 had 14% (12) sidebars, and Session 8 had 15% (20) sidebars. Sidebars were likely to occur during a transition time (53%). Additionally, the sidebars tended to focus on physical objects such as food, cell phones, and chairs that caught the participants’ attention. Sidebars were started by all five participants. Even as the facilitator, I was distracted by objects and contributed to use of sidebars as a type of topic of conversation. Originally, I thought the sidebars were really frustrating and distracted from our focus. After analyzing the data, I now understand that many times these sidebars may have served a purpose in helping the women navigate through tension. As the women employed freedom to disengage from an intense conversation for a brief exchange, they may have found a means for regrouping and reengaging in deliberations. For the most part, however, the group maintained focus on the conversation-based activities of the leadership-development program.

The focal group can be characterized as enacting distributed discursive power. The facilitator took primary responsibility to ensure that all participants were engaged in the conversation. The facilitator offered invitations to the group as a whole and to specific individuals through the use of questions and direct statements. The participants also took responsibility to include others in the talk. The participants invited others to talk by asking questions, encouraging a speaker to expand her thoughts, and by discussing turn-taking. All five speakers enacted the work of inviting others to talk,
however, the facilitator issued the highest number of invitations. Topic initiation was also distributed for the focal group ranging from 15% to 37% of the turns. The participants enacted their discursive power by offering topics both relevant to the activity and at other times as an alternative course of action. Through the combination of the facilitator and the participants inviting others to talk and initiating topics of conversation, the focal group’s blended-space speech community reveals patterns of enacting distributed discursive power.

**Offering Representations of Reality**

The third above-the-sentence discursive practice used to describe speech communities describes offering representations of reality. Depending on the formality of the speech community, this practice is handled differently. In formal speech communities, it is common to find competing representations of reality (Cameron, 2001). Speakers will use persuasion to convince listeners of their reality as well as attempt to discredit speakers voicing an alternative account. The judge, jury, or classroom teacher often determines which account of reality is genuine. Informal friendship groups tend to co-construct reality through dynamic interaction of the participants. These exchanges can contain contradictory statements, yet the group will accept the account of reality co-constructed by the group.

The blended space of the focal group, containing elements of formality and friendship, developed a practice of deliberating reality. As the group explored challenges of leading small groups, they incorporated the facilitator’s teaching, their own knowledge and experiences, and the group’s discussion in order to arrive at an understanding of accounts of reality.

The group’s curriculum specified that they would learn the conversational process of deliberation which they practiced in Session 6 and Session 8. The prescribed curriculum had the group explore characteristics of good and bad conversation in Session 4. However, the group also deliberated the perceived realities of leading small groups within community-building and reflection activities, as well as throughout the teaching activities. Additionally, the book I distributed to the group presented
challenges of leading small groups along a continuum of reality. For example, the group looked at balancing kindness and confrontation as presented in the book during the conflict challenge. The group also looked at balancing openness and intimacy as presented in the book during the community-building challenge. Through the activities and teaching resources, my teaching and facilitation style most likely established and reinforced the group’s pattern of deliberating realities. It is unclear whether the deliberated reality discursive pattern is related specifically to the group of speakers or to the leadership-development teaching methods.

To demonstrate the group’s above-the-sentence discursive practice of deliberated reality, I present excerpts from their talk capturing four separate situations: 1) solving team-building task, 2) establishing safety, 3) developing ground rules, and 4) managing family members within one’s small group. The first three areas were products of the curriculum. The fourth area emerged from the group’s talk during Session 4.

First, the team-building task occurred in Session 8. In all the previous sessions, the group’s community-building activity was a get-to-know-you game or conversation to catch-up on one another’s lives. The team-building task caught some of the women off-guard, but non-the-less they jumped right into the activity. Their conversation lasted from line 1 to 446, encompassing 304 turns, and all five speakers. The women were given three lengths of rope. Each one needed to hold onto one end of the rope so that as a whole group, they comprised one continuous rope. Their task was to tie a simple knot in the middle of the rope without any of the participants letting go. Their conversation revealed several false starts. Holly, Darlene, and Samantha each took the lead in trying to complete the activity. I was watching them struggle with the activity, offering instruction and encouragement until they accomplished the task. Excerpt 5.44 presents the group’s final and successful deliberation of tying a knot in the human rope.
Excerpt 5.44: Session 8-We Have a Knot?

405 Tabitha So why don’t you start back fresh?
406 Darlene Okay.
407 Tabitha Cuz you have a new plan. And Holly’s gonna be your tail.
408 Holly I’m the anchor. I’m the tail.
410 Darlene So we’re trying to make a tight loop right there. So we start it in the middle.
412 Samantha You go over my left arm.
413 Darlene Right. This is you right there in that hand and that’s you in that hand.
415 Holly It crossed. I saw you do that.
416 Group laughter
417 Darlene Can you get through that with your whole body?
419 Samantha It’s really tight.
420 Darlene Can you get your whole bod in there?
421 Group laughter
422 Tabitha Maybe with a little help from her friends.
423 Holly There.
424 Group laughter
425 Samantha I’m not convinced that this makes a knot. That’s for sure.
427 Group OH.
428 Group laughter
429 Darlene Whoa. I have to follow you. Right?
430 Samantha You have to cuz-
431 Darlene Cuz I have to go through here.
432 Cassidy You’ve got to go through the hole too.
433 Darlene Oh my goodness.
434 Samantha Is this the hole you have to go through?
435 Darlene Yeah. Oh no.
436 Group laughter
437 Darlene We have a knot?
438 All YES!
439 Darlene Wow.
440 Cassidy I so would have quit that.

All the speakers made suggestions to complete a task of tying a knot. While it sounds simple in wording, it is not so simple when four people have to be involved. Through their previous attempts, the women decided that Holly needed to hold an anchor position to give the rope stability. Holly and Darlene provided the group with determination to complete the activity. Even though Holly was the anchor and was assumed a static role, she continued to voice encouragement as the others worked through the movements (Lines 415 and 423). Samantha and Cassidy both expressed their doubts (Lines
and 440); however, they continued with the activity despite their uncertainties. The group deliberated and the reality of tying a knot was accomplished.

The group also deliberated about the need for safety within a small group so that people would feel comfortable to talk. This notion appeared through several different activities and topics of conversation. Excerpt 5.1, presented previously, captured their deliberation regarding where it’s safe to talk. For Cassidy, she talks at work and it has proven to cause trouble. In attending the focal group, she opted to be more quiet and reserved so as to avoid causing trouble in the leadership-development program (Lines 1618-1623). Darlene expressed a different perspective in lines 1624-1627: “I actually have kind of the opposite. I keep my mouth shut at work. Because I don’t trust the people I work with.” The conversation continued for another seven turns incorporating Holly’s perspective into the deliberation. Holly suggested that it was challenging for pastors to feel safe at church, echoing Cassidy’s perspective.

The notion of safety arose again during Session 4. Holly had been sharing throughout the session about some challenges she was facing with the small group she was leading. Holly shared a book she was going to teach called Bait of Satan that deals with handling offenses. Holly stated, “I don’t think anybody can go any further until there’s safety” (Lines 2184-2188). The group fully agreed as shown in Excerpt 5.45.

**Excerpt 5.45: Session 1-Until There’s Safety**

2181 Holly  At this point in my group? I think this is probably (.) the most important thing I have to do. In the next week or two.
2183 Tabitha  Yeah.
2184 Holly  Is make this part really solid? Because I don’t think anybody can go any further until this
2187 Samantha  Especially with that book.
2188 Holly  Until there’s safety.
2189 Cassidy  Yeah.
2190 Darlene  'That’s true. It needs to be safe.'
2191 Holly  'Until there’s a safety area. There’s just no way' there will be any growth in it?
2193 Tabitha  Mmmm hmmm
The conversation continued from this point with each of the participants offering Holly advice on how to create a safe area for her small group so she could achieve the type of growth and conversation she was hoping for. The group used 42 turns to deliberate a reality of creating safety in a small group. Darlene suggested journaling so the people could privately share their ideas (Lines 2195-2204). Cassidy suggested dividing the group into gender-based sub-groups and to have those groups pray together (Lines 2214-2241). I suggested a teaching method of think-pair-share which allows everyone to talk at some point, but without having to talk in front of the whole group (Lines 2271-2298). Samantha suggested Holly create opportunities for the group to have fun together through games or other activities that would build trust (Lines 2306-2333). The group deliberated concerning the notion that people need to be able to talk and share in a small group. The small-group leader could use specific activities to help create a place of safety so that people would be willing to talk. Samantha summed it up in line 2332: “And if it’s fun. They might talk. And then they’ll keep talking.” The notion of safety within a small group was a recurring topic which the women deemed important to the overall success of small-group talk. As I have presented in this chapter, the women used their discursive practices to demonstrate their care for one another, ability to build and maintain trust, as well as maintain safety even through sharing personal vulnerabilities and challenges and differing viewpoints.

The group also discussed ground rules repeatedly. I introduced the concept of ground rules in Sessions 1, 4, and 8. For Session 1, I outlined four ground rules I proposed the focal group follow. In Session 4, I provided a handout which listed nine ground rules that could be used within a small group. In Session 8, the group developed ground rules as the first step of their deliberation process. Excerpt 5.46 captures the group’s discussion during their reflective activity. Holly reintroduces the concept of ground rules as she pondered using ground rules with a committee she chaired.
Excerpt 5.46: Session 1-Let’s Do Some Ground Rules

1713 Holly  So yeah. Ground rules. I wonder how offended they would be if I say "the ground rules for this meeting tonight are..."
1716 Darlene  You know what I’ve found is you do it together?
1717 Holly  How do you do that?
1718 Samantha  You do it there.
1719 Holly  Huh?
1720 Darlene  Do it together?
1721 Samantha  Develop them together.
1722 Darlene  Let's make some. Let's do some ground rules. What do you think are some of the important things?
1724 Holly  That's a good idea.
1725 Darlene  You know not to talk over each other. To agree to disagree? That's one we have. In one of my groups.
1728 Holly  Yeah.
1729 Darlene  It’s okay to disagree? (4.9) You get buy-in that way. If everybody helps you.
1731 Cassidy  I wonder about that though. Maybe I'll say some of that. Sometimes it's different like if you are just leading a group- it's not so important that you are the leader. You’re facilitating or making sure it happens. But when you’re the pastor? Or the WM's leader? It's like you are leading a group but there are some things that you’re the leader. You know what I mean? Like it's not you know "we are not gonna work this out and you vote on it. This is how it has to be." And that is part of conflict you always like- well you’re [Darlene] the same way. When you're the boss. You're the boss and you're in charge. It's like, "This I'll work with you on but this part is what we’re doing." That's where like then it's like I have to get ready for those cuz I'm ready to go to the other side too. And once I cross it. It's like if I'm going to be confrontive then I'm going to be confrontive.

In this exchange, the group did not come to a clear consensus, but they did introduce some important variables to consider. Darlene and Samantha advanced the idea of developing ground rules together as opposed to mandating them, as I did with the focal group (Lines 1716-1730). Cassidy suggested that the type of group and one’s position with that group would impact the use of ground rules. She identified leading a group compared to being a pastor compared to being a boss (Lines 731-1749).

The group furthered their understanding of ground rules in Session 4. I was lecturing on the handout of nine dispositions of deliberation I had provided to the group. I had just covered the idea of
Avoiding dominating a conversation when Darlene contrasted over-talking with the notion of silence.

Holly shared her struggle with silence in small groups. I also joined in briefly. Once again the group did not resolve the issue, but they were deliberating the reality of using ground rules in small groups.

**Excerpt 5.47: Session 4-Silence is Addressed**

2032 Darlene  In some in some groups I'm in? Silence is addressed. Because (2) and most? Well. Everyone pretty much that's in the group I'm in at work are all leaders. And so? They all talk. And they all want to talk. Talk talk talk talk talk talk talk. And so? (.) Uhm. I'm more of a sit-back-listen-to-people? And then when I given an opportunity I will speak up. But? That's just the way I was raised. And so I just let people talk before me. But that was something that was addressed. That silence is okay? If people don't want to speak to something? Or? Uhm. You could say that silence means agreement. As long as everybody agrees with that. Or? Silence is not okay. You need to say what you think. And if you want to pass then you say pass. But everybody has to have a voice. And so I've seen both. In the ground rules. In some groups I've been in.

2053 Holly  You see? I struggle with that? Cuz I've got a group for the most part is all really quiet? (.) I mean. I've got (.) my nephew will talk. He's probably- my niece and nephew are the most open to talking. But I've got this other young couple? That I mean? In the months we've been doing this? If I can get them to speak up at all. I know that I have really scored a point. And I. And that makes me wonder whether or not I need to say (.) put them in a position where they have to respond to something? I mean is that good for them? Or are they- Is that going to make them so uncomfortable? You know? I-

2068 Tabitha  I think it gets back to some of the community building things? Like you know you're talking about stuff that's current and really personal? Then I don't think I'd require people to talk. But if it's something they could have some distance from?

2075 Holly  That's a good idea.

2076 Tabitha  Then it may be good to push push a little. But it's not something that you know? Is gonna?

2079 Holly  Right.

2080 Tabitha  Strip them bare emotionally. So to speak. You've got to get your feet wet.

2082 Darlene  And sometimes people need to think about things before they talk about it. You know?

2085 Tabitha  Right.

2086 Darlene  And and maybe they are just processing it. And so they're quiet.

During Session 8, I provided the group instructions on the deliberation process. The first step was to establish ground rules. Excerpt 5.47 (presented above) presents part of their discussion. They
deliberated ground rules from line 666 to 680. The conversation was interrupted by a sidebar conversation in lines 681-700. Our conversation picked up again at line 700 and continued until line 760. The deliberation of ground rules involved all five speakers, 56 turns, and 95 lines. The group established five rules for their deliberation activity: 1) don’t get made at anyone (Lines 675), 2) honesty, given and accepted (Lines 702-703), 3) don’t take it personal (Lines 710-719), 4) explore all ideas (Lines 720-727), and 5) everyone contributes (Lines 728-748). The group did not always come to consensus regarding their representation of a reality; however, the women consistently deliberated various perspectives which exemplified their blended-space discursive practice.

One reality that the group deliberated was not introduced by me or the prescribed curriculum for the leadership-development program: handling having family members in your small group. I found this concept highly interesting as the women identified having family members in their small groups either as co-leaders or participants. In Session 1, when Darlene was describing the small groups she was leading, she noted that her mother was her co-leader. Neither Darlene nor I ever indicated having family members in one’s small group was a problem or challenge. However, at the beginning of Session 4, Holly made clear the challenge she was facing with having her parents attend her small group as well as other family members: “___ decided to come to my group... (Line 126)...but? You know? It’s an issue...” (Line 159). The deliberation of reality regarding family in small groups began in line 126 and continued for another 327 lines over 63 turns. These deliberations of reality tended to be some of the longer topics of conversation. The length could be attributed to the group’s exploration of multiple perspectives and all the speakers sharing personal insights.

Holly provided the group with some background to her issue with her dad attending the small group. The women then started offering her sympathy. Samantha offered, “I think it’s easier to deal with younger people, don’t you?” (Lines 257-258). Darlene graciously proposed the challenging dynamic of role reversal with parents. Excerpt 5.48 presents Darlene’s contribution to the deliberation.
Excerpt 5.48: Session 4—Silence is Addressed

313 Darlene There comes a point in life when you have to go from being the child of a parent almost to being the parent of your parent. And your relationship changes. And most of the time it’s because of healthy reasons. And things like that? But you’re doing it probably earlier than other people would? Because you’re doing it on a spiritual level.

322 Holly Yeah.

323 Darlene And that is a hard place to go. I know mom’s dealing with that. My mom and aunt? With my grandma? Because? She’s going downhill? With her mind. And she’s the child and they’re the adult. And it’s a role reversal that happens as you get older. It’s just a normal part of life.

330 Holly It’s so odd.

331 Darlene But you’re doing it in a spiritual sense? Which is a hard thing to do too.

333 Samantha Yeah.

334 Holly Yeah. It is. It really is...

Samantha and Holly both agreed with Darlene’s perspective. Several turns later Samantha conveyed her support and encouragement to Holly. Excerpt 5.49 presents Samantha’s contribution to the deliberation.

Excerpt 5.49: Session 4—Say Things in Love

375 Samantha I think you’re doing the exact right book though for this situation?

377 Holly I do too.

378 Samantha Because the book is going to talk so much about how to say things in love? So it’s going to help you but it’s also going to help him. I don’t know if you’ve read the whole book yet? But they have so many beautiful stories of David and Saul? And like different things like that. and so I think that? it’s going to be the perfect book for helping deal with that because it’s going to give you wisdom. But it’s also going to help him so then you can say “you know? remember? You take offense.” You know? I mean?

391 Holly Right.

392 Samantha It’s going to help you learn to say things in love? And help him receive it? So?

394 Holly Good. Yeah? That’s good. Well?

Throughout the 63 turns everyone contributed except Cassidy. However, toward the end of Session 4, Cassidy brought the group’s attention back to this deliberation (Lines 2378-2430). She shared about having a similar concern as her parents were moving to town. Cassidy pointedly asked Holly, “What do you do?” (Line 2398). Holly provided insights from her experiences in response to Cassidy’s
question. The discussion concluded with a suggestion of utilizing ground rules to set boundaries that would keep everyone safe to share in a small group. The group deliberated that having family in a small group was not a bad thing, but something that needed to be handled with care.

The group deliberated the reality of several issues. Some of the issues were introduced as a result of the leadership development curriculum. Other issues were contributed from the group member’s current experiences in leading small groups. Throughout the deliberations of reality, I offered ideas to address building community and creating ground rules so that there is a level of safety enabling everyone in a group to participate, regardless of any family relationships. During each of the deliberations highlighted in this section, all of the participants contributed to the discussion by both incorporating the curriculum teaching and their own experiences and knowledge of small group practices.

**Maintaining Appropriate Relationships**

Each speech community is comprised of people interacting. These people carry certain roles and responsibilities within the speech community. The spoken interaction of the group should maintain relationships within appropriate standards based on the speech community. Traditional classrooms have one teacher and a number of students. Students and teachers maintain appropriate relationships by using content-based language and by staying focused on the tasks assigned. To maintain appropriate relationships, the students acknowledge the authority and discursive power held by the role of the teacher. These relationships are based on a pattern of aloofness as teachers primarily focus on the task of covering the curriculum, as opposed to focusing primarily on developing relationships.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, friendship-based speech communities maintain appropriate relationships by ensuring solidarity. Group solidarity is primarily focused on sustaining relationship of friends; that is, relationships that are reciprocal and intimate (Coates, 1996). While a group of friends may focus on a physical or mental task, the task will always be the secondary objective
to ensuring solid relationships based in friendship, even if this means that individuals seldom disagree with one another.

Within the blended space of the focal group, elements of formality and friendship were both present. The group gathered for formal purposes: the leadership-development program. Yet, the curriculum focused on developing relationships in a small group setting so that group members felt safe to share and engage in more intimate conversations. The primary task of the leadership-development program was highly relational. Their talk maintained a space for building relationships as well as completing curricular tasks. The group activities were presented in Chapter 3. The group’s relationships both within and outside the leadership-development program were presented in Chapter 4. In the next section, I present the focal group’s relational work by examining their discursive practices of extending politeness and presenting personal information.

**Extending Politeness**

Politeness is often used to maintain appropriate relationships (Mills, 2003). In fact, I commented on the politeness of the focal group within the first ten minutes of the group’s recorded discourse: “We’re just going around the circle. I guess this is how we’ll get started. We’re a very polite group” (Lines 48-52). Later in the leadership-development program, the participants referred to our opening activity as being awkward. Through the practice of politeness, the group was able to develop their relationships so that they could work through tension and times of awkwardness.

I coded 22 turns in Session 1 as enacting politeness. There was little variation in the other sessions: Session 4 had 16 turns coded as enacting politeness, and 21 turns in Session 8. Enacting politeness occurred through extending hospitality, using common courtesies, and offering apologies. Before going into detail on these three categories of enacting politeness, I present Excerpt 5.50 from Session 1 which contains all three and will be referenced throughout this section. Hospitality is
emphasized with an *underline*. Courtesies are emphasized with a *bolded* font. Finally, apologies are *italicized* for emphasis.

**Excerpt 5.50: Session 1-Diet Pepsi**

89 Tabitha  
*I'm sorry.*

90 Darlene  
**Thank you.** You have no doorbell at your back door.

92 Tabitha  
Ohhh.

93 Darlene  
Otherwise I would have rung it.

94 Samantha  
We must have been chatting *too well.*

95 Darlene  
*Sorry you guys.*

96 Tabitha  
*It's fine.*

97 Cassidy  
*Your hair. * *It's pretty.*

98 Darlene  
*And you're sitting right here.*

99 Cassidy  
It's a different color. Isn't it?

100 Darlene  
Yeah.

101 Holly  
*It's pretty.*

102 Darlene  
**Thank you.** (4) hhhh. I'm ready.

103 Tabitha  
You all right? (1.5) Grab a pen. **You want something to drink?**

105 Darlene  
Water?

106 Tabitha  
I also have Diet Pepsi.

107 Darlene  
You do?

108 Tabitha  
Yeah. Shocker, isn't it.

109 Darlene  
What's the matter with you?

110 Tabitha  
I was being polite.

111  
Group laughter

112 Darlene  
**Well, thank you.** I'd love a Diet Pepsi. I didn't think you had any?

Excerpt 5.50 above captures Darlene’s late arrival. The excerpt opens as I acknowledge Darlene’s presence by offering an apology (Line 89). Darlene responds to my apology with a common courtesy of “Thank you” (Line 90). A few turns later Darlene offers an apology to the whole group (Line 95), and I respond with a courtesy (Line 96). Cassidy and Holly both greet Darlene with a courtesy by complimenting her hair (Lines 97 and 101). Darlene replies with another courtesy: “Thank you” (Line 102). I extend hospitality to Darlene in line 103 by offering her something to drink. The exchange continues for several lines finally concluding with Darlene offering another courtesy “Thank you. I’d love a Diet Pepsi” (Line 112). This excerpt captures the group involved in relational bonding. This conversation occurred as a sidebar in which the women disengaged from the community-building task.
Each session captured moments of the group exploring relational bonding through extending politeness similar to the excerpt above. Through this excerpt it is evident that the women all know one another, as introductions are never made. However, it is also evident that Darlene and I have a closer relationship, as I knew her drink preference of a Diet Pepsi and she knew that I rarely had soda in my refrigerator. This excerpt and those that follow, reveal that the women engaged in relational work as well as the leadership-development tasks.

As the leadership-development program was held in my home, I assumed the role of hostess. Extending hospitality was primarily my responsibility. The group met in the late afternoon and gathered around a dining room table. Coupling these factors with literature on teacher study groups that advocates for incorporating food into gatherings, I offered beverages and snacks at each session. For Session 1, both Holly and Samantha brought a beverage with them. Cassidy requested fruit juice and I was drinking water. Most of the turns coded for hospitality were related to serving beverages.

During Session 4, I had the group engage in reflective writing in the middle of the session. The weather was cooler so I offered hot beverages this time at line 944: “So I will put the teapot back on and get some more hot water? And do you want something to drink?” The group then discussed the reflective writing instructions for 23 turns when Cassidy and I returned to our hospitality conversation in Excerpt 5.51. Once again, turns of hospitality are emphasized with an underline and courtesies are a bolded font.

**Excerpt 5.51: Session 4-Hot Sounds Good**

989 Tabitha    Cassidy? Do you want something hot or something cold?
991 Cassidy    I want hot. Hot sounds good.
992 Tabitha    Do you want some coffee? Or do you want some tea? Or hot chocolate? Or apple cider?
995 Cassidy    Actually I think I’ll try that French Vanilla flavor. That sounds good.
...[24 turns]...
1027 Cassidy   Thank you.
1028 Tabitha   Holly? You want some more?
Holly
Will you nuke this? For a few seconds to reheat it? I just let it get cold. I’m focused on writing. Thank you.

Tabitha
Samantha? Are you good? Or do you want something?

Samantha
I’m good. Thank you.

Cassidy
Oh.

I extended hospitality in lines 989, 992, 1028, 1032, and 1046. Through these turns I talked specifically to Cassidy, Holly, and Samantha. Courtesies were returned in the form of “thank you” from Cassidy (Line 1027), Holly (Line 1031), and Samantha (Line 1034). Session 8’s hospitality segment occurred as we were transitioning from our community-building activity to our teaching activity. A lengthy conversation about food commenced as presented in Excerpt 5.52.

Excerpt 5.52: Session 8-Brownies

Tabitha
Let’s go back to the table. There’s good food there. Holly did you get something to drink?

Holly
No but I’d like something.

Samantha
I like that. Bribing us with chocolate. Like she’s preparing us for something.

Tabitha
The teakettle has hot water in it.

Darlene
That’s what I was wondering too when I walked in. Brownies?

Samantha
What are you going to do to us?

Darlene
Yeah.

Cassidy
I’ve sat everywhere in this room and always grab the same chair. Isn’t that funny?

Darlene
You shouldn’t have challenged her.

Samantha
What did I do? Oh I know. I shouldn’t have said anything huh? I’m sorry everybody. But do you still love me?

Darlene
We do.

Cassidy
For what?

Samantha
But I’m the one- She said I was the one who challenged her to think of something that we could collaborate about.

Cassidy
Oh yeah.

[4 turns]...

Samantha
We have chocolate.

Darlene
Chocolate always makes it all better.

Tabitha
That’s what I figured.

Holly
She’s bribing us.

Tabitha
With chocolate?

Holly
Yeah.

Tabitha
No I’m feeding you carbs and sugar.

Holly
Yeah. Well first she frayed our nerves.
Tabitha I figured you might need comfort food.

And now she’s going to try to soothe them.

I figured. Okay so Samantha had asked to get more specific on collaboration. So I started thinking about what kind of process you would need to go through to actually do a collaboration.

In this excerpt, hospitality is extended in lines 509 and 515. I simply informed Holly that there was hot water in the teakettle. With this information, Holly helped herself to a beverage. The group started teasing me about why there were brownies. Our snacks up to this point could have been considered relatively healthy. The group was justifiably skeptical when they saw brownies and pretzels. Holly summed up their perspective in lines 547 and 449: “Well first she frayed our nerves and now she’s going to try to soothe them.” Interestingly even through the criticism was directed at me, it was Samantha who apologized (emphasized in italics) to the group for asking for more practice on doing deliberations (Lines 524 and 529).

Most of the group’s apologies were very brief like those presented in Excerpt 5.50 and 5.52. Apologies were offered out of simple courtesy such as found in Excerpt 5.50. Other apologies were offered to minimize a possible negative perspective as in Excerpt 5.52. Toward the end of Session 8, Samantha, Darlene, Holly, and I exchanged apologies in Excerpt 5.53. While only Holly’s apology used the phrase “I’m sorry” (Line 1396), Samantha’s turns, and mine, were both apologies offered to the whole group. The apologies are italicized for emphasis. In this way, the group minimized a possible negative perspective of individuals and the group as a whole.

**Excerpt 5.53: Session 8-Our Fault**

1395 *Samantha* I don’t know that we’re going to get done.
1396 *Holly* I’m sorry that’s my fault.
1397 *Darlene* That’s alright.
1398 *Samantha* It’s kind of all our fault. That knot took us a long time.
1400 *Tabitha* Well. I had a wrong expectation to expect that something very complicated that I have not been able to figure out in the last nine months is going to get solved in half an hour.
Excerpt 4.53 above reveals that the group was bonding as Holly took personal responsibility stating that it was “my fault” and Samantha quickly reiterated that it was “all our” fault (Line 1398). An argument could be made that the group had bonded so that they could take collective responsibility. The group was able to maintain positive relationships and bond by apologizing and using common courtesies. The common courtesies mostly included the use of “thank you” and “you’re welcome.” Through extending politeness the group maintained a space for relational bonding. The politeness strategies of hospitality, courtesy, and apology were all used to assist the group in maintaining positive regard for one another. Most of these politeness strategies occurred as sidebar conversations or within activity transitions. In most cases, leadership-development tasks were not at the forefront during the excerpts of politeness.

**Presenting Personal Information**

The group also showed their relational work as they exchanged personal information. As people communicate with one another, they are constantly making choices about the level of personal information one is willing to share with the others in the speech community. Tracy (2002) constructs an argument for the role of identity-work in everyday conversation: “Identity-work refers to the process through which talk makes available to participants and observers who the people doing the talking must be” (p. 7). Identity-work is accomplished through the choices people make about how to talk and their preexisting identities impacting their talk. Additionally, Tracy (2002) outlines the notion of “relational identities, which refers to the kind of relationship that a person enacts with a particular conversational partner in a specific situation” (p. 19). In the case of the focal group, the specific situation is the leadership-development program sessions and the conversational partners are the five women of the group. By examining how the women presented personal information, I recognized one prominent discursive feature that seemed to allow the women to continue to bond relationally yet explore differing perspectives as they completed leadership-development program tasks: hedges.
Friendship groups focus much attention on maintaining their friendship-based relationships through their interactional practices, especially making use of hedges (Coates, 1996). Hedges are words or phrases that soften the directness of one’s words (Tracy, 2002) and allow one to “avoid saying something definite” (Coates, 1996, p. 152). Specific words and phrases of hedges were provided in Chapter 4. In this section, I provide excerpts of the focal group talk to demonstrate the possible use of hedges as an above-the-sentence practice in which the women were able to define their relationships. First, I present an overview of hedges within the focal group’s talk. Table 5.7 shows each speaker’s total turns per session and the number and percentage of turns that contained at least one hedge.

Table 5.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th>Session 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turns</td>
<td>% Turns w/H</td>
<td>Turns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for Session</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>764</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, hedges were used in at least one third of all the turns (34.6%). Hedges were used by all the speakers in the focal group. I had the highest percentage of turns with hedges for all three sessions, with an overall average of 48.4%. In Session 1, the other participants’ turns with hedges ranged from 23.3% up to 32.3%. In Session 4, there was an increase in the number of turns with hedges, ranging from 32.4% up to 53.7%. In Session 8, turns with hedges ranged from 24.5% up to 48.9%.
I also looked at the activity in which hedges were used to determine if one activity seemed to generate more hedges. As the focus of a speech community, whether task or relational, can shape the discursive practices, I thought it worthwhile to explore the hedges used within specific focal group activities of community-building, teaching, and reflection. Tables 5.8, 5.9, and 5.10 present details of the analysis of turns with hedges within these activities.

Table 5.8

*Participant Turns with Hedges within Community-Building Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th></th>
<th>Session 8</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turns</td>
<td>w/H</td>
<td>% T</td>
<td>Turns</td>
<td>w/H</td>
<td>% T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tab</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>343</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.8 reveals some interesting details about the use of hedges within community-building activities. I had fewer turns than the other participants; however, my turns with hedges average was often the highest. The only exception was during Session 4 when 57% of Darlene’s turns contained hedges. Session 4 had the highest use of hedges within community-building activities. The community-building activity in Session 4 encouraged the women to share personal information through the use of narratives by telling about the small group each was leading. In order to complete the task, individuals had to make decisions about how to disclose personal information. It appears the women used hedges to mitigate personal impressions.
Table 5.9

Participant Turns with Hedges within Teaching Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Session 8</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turns</td>
<td>w/H</td>
<td>% T</td>
<td>Turns</td>
<td>w/H</td>
<td>% T</td>
<td>Turns</td>
<td>w/H</td>
<td>% T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tab</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.9 reveals that I had the highest use of hedges within teaching activities. I had the highest number of turns, but also had the highest percentage of hedges. Coates (1996) found that women in friendship groups would use hedges to avoid playing the expert. This may account for the high use of hedges on my part; however, it wasn’t a conscious choice. Session 4, once again, had the highest use of hedges within teaching activities. During Session 4, the women were also asked to reveal personal information about positive and negative traits of conversations they have been involved in which may account for number of hedges utilized. It is very difficult to infer whether the task or the group’s relational work were contributing factors to frequent use of hedges.
Table 5.10

**Participant Turns with Hedges within Reflection Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th></th>
<th>Session 8</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turns w/H</td>
<td>% T w/H</td>
<td>Turns w/H</td>
<td>% T w/H</td>
<td>Turns w/H</td>
<td>% T w/H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tab</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.10 provides details on the use of hedges within reflection activities. Cassidy had the highest use of hedges during her turns for all three sessions, ranging from 38% to 50%. Interestingly, although Session 4 had the highest use of hedges for both community-building and teaching activities, within reflection activities, the use of hedges was smallest for Session 4 even though the reflection discussions tended to reveal personal information. Session 8 had the highest use of hedges within reflection activities. Both Cassidy and Samantha had at least 50% of their turns containing hedges in Session 8. This was much higher than any of their previous uses of hedges. In contrast, none of Darlene’s turns in Session 4 contained hedges. This is the only time no hedges were recorded for a speaker within the three primary group activities. Upon further examination, Darlene was asking questions and responding to a thread of conversation in which Cassidy was sharing personal information. Darlene was not sharing any personal information, which might explain her lack of hedging.
Table 5.11

*Participant Averaged Turns with Hedges by Activity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community-Building</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tab</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.11 combines each participant’s use of hedges within different activities. I hedged the most during teaching activities at 54% overall and the least during reflection activities at 33%. Cassidy hedged the most during reflection activities, which coincides with her increased level of participation and personal disclosure within the reflective discussions. Overall, the consistent portrayal of the focal group’s use of hedges is that hedges were used in all three activities, by all five participants. With the one exception of Darlene’s hedge-free turns in Session 4, hedges were used in at least 18% of all turns regardless of the type of activity. This indicates that hedges were a consistent feature of the focal group’s talk.
Table 5.12

*Topics by Activity by Session Containing Hedges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th>Session 8</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community-Building Topics</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB Topics w/Hedges</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Topics w/Hedges</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Topics</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Topics w/Hedges</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% T. Topics w/Hedges</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Topics</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Topics w/Hedges</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% R. Topics w/Hedges</td>
<td>*64%</td>
<td>*66%</td>
<td>*90%</td>
<td>*75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reflection topics without hedges were also coded as sidebars which technically were not reflective in nature.

When I examined the quantification of hedges and topics, I was astounded by some of the group patterns. The majority of the topics contained hedges. I also found that most sidebar conversations were hedge-free. Reflection activities, once sidebar topics are removed, have a 100% rate of topics with hedges. If hedges were used to mitigate personal impressions, then it makes sense that the reflective discussions contained such a high rate of hedges as these discussions were primarily about sharing personal information. Many of the teaching activities encouraged the women to share personal information as a part of the task they were to complete. The community-building activities in Sessions 1 and 4 encouraged the women to disclose personal information, but in Session 8, it was a non-personal disclosure task that they completed.

It appears that hedges were used at a much higher rate when the women were sharing personal information. The excerpts below demonstrate the use of hedges when not disclosing personal information followed by the use of hedges when providing personal information. Longer turns also
tended to have multiple hedges. I provide these contrasting pairs of excerpts from each of the three activities, starting with a community-building activity. Hedges will be bolded for emphasis.

**Excerpt 5.54: Session 8-Did It Work?**

186 Darlene  Did it work?
187 Cassidy  You gonna have to saw me in half.
188 Holly  Okay. But your arms have to stay regular?
189 Darlene  They don’t cross your arms?
190 Holly  No because that’s how the loop has to happen. It has to happen with all
192 Darlene  Now if you two- Need to go. One of you needs to go across there and then under.
194 Cassidy  What about you?
195 Darlene  And then go under. Right there.
196 Cassidy  How is that helping?
197 Darlene  Go under.
198  Group laughter
199 Darlene  But see? You’ve got this.
200 Samantha  Yup.

**Excerpt 5.55: Session 4-Younger People**

257 Samantha  **I think** it’s easier to deal with younger people. Don’t you?
259 Holly  I do. We do. We’ve got several younger- **well**? They’re all younger except for Howard and me? And Vanessa Ingles comes. **And so.** And Vanessa’s awesome. **You know?** She’s **really** a good stablility and she’s **really** good for that too. **So** it will be good. She missed last Sunday. But?
267  Group laughter
268 Holly  She’s going to wonder what’s going on? **So**? Yeah. **And so** I **really** need. The learning that we’ve been doing on how to allow people to say things that are **kind of?** Not **really** confrontational? But **kind of**
273 Tabitha  Yeah we’re going to get into some stuff today on conversation.
275 Holly  How to deal with that. I **really** need that tool now.

The community-building Excerpt 5.54 was free of hedges. The women used a direct approach to communicate their ideas. However, nothing personal was being disclosed in the excerpt. In Excerpt 5.55, hedges were used in nearly every turn. Holly was the primary speaker and was sharing about a challenge she had been facing in leading her small group. In line 268, Holly took a personal risk by disclosing that she needed to learn how to handle confrontation within her small group. By using hedges, an indirect approach was utilized. An indirect style using hedges or other mitigation markers are commonly used
when navigating sensitive topics such as revealing a personal inadequacy (Tracy, 2002). In this case, the sensitive topic was Holly drawing attention to an area she perceived as a deficiency in her leadership with her small group. In both of these excerpts the group was focused on completing a specific task, yet they managed to complete the task as well as engage in relational work of sharing personal information.

Many of the focal group’s teaching activities also encouraged disclosing personal information. In Session 4, the teaching activity that followed the community-building discussion asked the women to share characteristics of good and bad conversations. In the next excerpts hedges were used as the women revealed personal information about their experiences with handling confrontational conversations.

**Excerpt 5.56: Session 4-Good Confrontational Conversations**

1409 Samantha Um. I’ve had a lot of good confrontational conversations. And I think probably um one of them was I was prepared for them. And so that makes it good. And also um shared meanings is a big deal in my? Among the people that I work with. Cuz so often good conversations turn bad because somebody misunderstood somebody? And so if you have shared meanings and you say “what do you hear that I’m trying to say to you.” Often you’ll get something totally different and you can correct it. And it’s not like they live for live with it. And get mad at you. Or whatever. But they come and they- you can talk about it? And (.) I don’t know? (7.4) Good conversation usually have someone where people are teachable. In confrontation anyway. They are teachable and not-so it the opposite of defensive. You know? Cuz it depends on the kind of people you work with? But usually the easy one’s are the people that are teachable. (7)

Samantha shared some generalities from her experiences with confrontational conversations that she considered good conversations. In light of the fact that Holly disclosed her leadership deficiency in this area, Samantha may have used the hedges to show sensitivity to the diversity of experience in the group, yet still provide information from her personal experiences. Once again, dual work happened as the group focuses on the task as well as their interpersonal roles and relationships.

A direct approach occurred when Darlene and I were trying to arrive at a shared meaning of the word “stressful.” Samantha had introduced the concept of “shared meaning” (Excerpt 5.56). The next
excerpt is hedge-free, but the full topic of conversation contains hedges in multiple speakers’ turns.

Even though Darlene and I were both sharing personal information, hedges did not appear during these lines, but hedges were present both leading into and transitioning away from this thread of conversation.

**Excerpt 5.57: Session 4-My Gifts (Expansion of Excerpt 5.3)**

| 1515 Tabitha | No. That’s one of my gifts. |
| 1516 Darlene | And I do. [Mind confronting people] |
| 1518 Cassidy | That’s awesome. |
| 1519 Darlene | It is. One of your gifts. But it’s not one of mine. But it is something I have to do. And it is stressful. |
| 1522 Tabitha | I find. If if this idea that you explained as stress turning to something positive? To me that’s energizing. That’s not stressful. |
| 1526 Darlene | It’s stressful before hand? And going into it. |
| 1528 Tabitha | But sometimes you don’t know going into it? You don’t know until you’re in the middle of it. |
| 1531 Darlene | That’s why it’s stressful. |

The focal group participants were able to vacillate between direct and indirect conversational approaches. Cassidy’s response, in line 1518 above, indicates that the group was not disrupted by the more direct conversation between Darlene and I. Cassidy joined in the conversation and in one turn employed twenty-one hedges. During her turn she was disclosing personal information, which she mitigated by using hedges. The hedges are emphasized with a bold font.

**Excerpt 5.58: Session 4-Those Are the Worst**

| 1532 Tabitha | You don’t know until you’re in the middle of it. Like all of a sudden a conversation can be going along. And everything is fine. And all of a sudden something happens. |
| 1536 Cassidy | See. Those are the worst for me. (.) If I know someone’s going to be bad, then I’m mentally prepared for it to be bad. But when I’m in the room and I thought everything was cool? And then was not cool? I hate that. Like. Even if it has nothing to do with me. If it’s a board meeting or uh I mean a staff meeting? And someone else is having issues over there. I’m like “oh. I should have stayed home today.” But it it’s not- I don’t like to be unprepared for (.) what? Or like going up the house or whatever. Like you know you are going up there? And it’s going to be confrontation. And I would have like rather called in sick. You know there is nothing about it that I want to do that. Cuz I just don’t I don’t know. I don’t know that I’ve had any confrontations that would- I think |
I walk away from them. Like. At least until the issue’s been resolved. But I think I process it for so long that I think it’s not really resolved for me. (4.6) Cuz my emotions won’t be done with a conversation until probably about a week after the conversation.

1563 Darlene Yeah.

Cassidy was able to share an experience which supported Darlene’s perspective of stressful conversations. Cassidy may have utilized a high number of hedges as she was disclosing personal information or because she was providing a perspective which contradicted the facilitator of the group. The use of hedges in this case, may have allowed the women to navigate their roles and relationships while still expressing their individual perspectives and experiences.

**Excerpt 5.59: Session 8-It Takes Forever**

2106 Darlene I wrote about that because the group's I've been involved with at work? It takes forever. Obviously to get ground rules. But it just takes a long time to get anything done because. There is no trust. People are out for their own benefit? In the thing. Whatever the thing may be. And I just thought our group is so far ahead. I mean. Considering the amount of stuff we got done was incredible. In the amount of time we got it done.

2117 Tabitha Forty-five minutes.

2118 Darlene And I've been in lots of groups where we are trying to brainstorm ideas and work through a process. Just like this. And it took. It took eight hours one day. And we didn't get anything accomplished. But that's because there was so many coming together and there's no trust. They're not. We're not a true group. We are coming together for a common goal? But we're not. We don't have trust. So? I was impressed. With our group? (2)

2129 Tabitha Me too. I’m proud of all of you.

2130 Samantha But I think if we’d have had more people? It would have been a lot harder too. Having five people is a lot. Seems like it would be a lot easier than if we had ten.

Excerpt 5.59 occurred during the reflective activity toward the end of Session 8. Darlene, Samantha, and I contributed to the conversation. My turns were hedge-free, but both Darlene and Samantha’s turns contained hedges. Darlene’s may have contained hedges as she disclosed personal information during her turn. Samantha’s turn may have contained hedges as she was introducing another perspective into the conversation.
For the most part, reflective discussions contained hedges. However, within the activity, I coded topics that were hedge-free, but they were also coded as sidebars and were not actually reflective in nature. I provide one example of a topic that is slightly reflective below in Excerpt 5.60. This conversation happened more as a sidebar than a reflective discussion.

**Excerpt 5.60: Session 4-I’m Struggling**

1036 Cassidy I’m done.
1037 Tabitha Alright.
1038 Holly Wow. I can’t even think of one. I’m struggling with one of them?
1040 Cassidy Good?
1041 Holly Yeah. A good one?
1042 Holly Group laughter
1043 Holly You can always remember the bad ones. Don’t you?
1045 Cassidy Yeah.

While completing the leadership-development tasks, the group also seemed to be aware of their relationships, roles, and need to balance tasks and relational work. Personal information was shared about their experiences leading small groups, marriages, family, and challenges. The leadership-development tasks were designed to elicit personal information, but also allow women to opt out of sharing. For the most part, the group was able to disclose personal information within the tasks by utilizing hedges to mitigate personal impressions. The group also utilized politeness strategies of hospitality, courtesies, and apologies to engage in relational work. After a review of this description of the focal group, I determined that as a blended-space speech community, the focal group maintained appropriate relationships through a process of relational bonding in which both the task and relationships were given attention.

**Conclusion**

The focal group’s above-the-sentence discursive practices can be characterized as having a blended-space speech community. While elements of formality and friendship were evident, the focal group’s talk did not easily map onto either formal or informal speech community discursive practices. I examined four discursive practices that may be characterized as above-the-sentence in speech
communities: 1) managing the conversational floor, 2) enacting discursive power, 3) offering representations of reality, and 4) maintaining appropriate relationships.

The focal group managed their conversation through a facilitated conversational floor. As the facilitator, I was the only one in the group to set the agenda, determine activities, and make choices about how much time was spent on each activity. At any time, every participant had equal access to engage in the discussion. The speakers all participated in every activity, some more than others indicating they had access to the facilitated conversational floor. The participants cooperated with the facilitation by asking clarifying questions, offering relevant comments, or providing minimal responses of agreement to signal their involvement in the conversation. The blended-space, facilitated, conversational floor for the focal group was achieved through cooperation of the speakers and adherence to the leadership-development program curriculum.

Secondly, I examined how the focal group enacted discursive power. In characterizing the focal group as a blended space, the group enacted a distributed discursive power. As the facilitator, I took the primary responsibility for ensuring at that all the speakers were given access to the discussion and invited to talk. However, the other participants also invited others to join the conversation by asking questions, encouraging a speaker to expand her thoughts and, by discussing their turn-taking. I also examined which speakers were initiating topics of conversation. In this aspect, the focal group also enacted a distributed discursive power as all five speakers initiated topics. While the speakers’ participation and topic initiation were not equal, no one speaker dominated the majority of turns or topics. The focal group as a blended-space speech community enacted distributed discursive power.

Third, I offered a description of the focal group’s blended space regarding offering representations of reality. In formal speech communities, individuals frequently offer competing ideas of a situation with the goals of discrediting the other speaker and convincing listeners that one speaker’s reality is truth. Friendship groups as speech communities tend to co-construct their ideas of reality. The
focal group can best be described as deliberating reality. I presented several instances from the transcripts to demonstrate how the group was able to incorporate the teaching from the curriculum and their own knowledge and experiences to deliberate a reality of leading a church-based small group.

The final above-the-sentence discursive practice I examined for the focal group addressed how the speech community maintained appropriate relationships. As a blended-space speech community, the focal group used their talk to complete the leadership-development program tasks and engage in relational work. The women started the group as casual acquaintances and ended the group with tighter bonds. The relational work was accomplished by completing the leadership development tasks together and through relational work of extending politeness and sharing personal information. I maintained my role as the facilitator of the group, but also felt like I developed better friendships with each one in the group. The blended space provided an opportunity to both engage in relational work and focus on completing the leadership-development program tasks.

Overall, the focal group is best described as a blended-space speech community. Table 5.13 captures the full spectrum of speech communities by characterizing the formal, blended, and informal above-the-sentence discursive practices. In the next chapter, I focus on turn-by-turn discursive practices to continue the description of the focal group’s speech community.
Table 5.13

**Above-the-sentence Discursive Practices for the Focal Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managing the Conversational Floor</th>
<th>Enacting Discursive Power</th>
<th>Offering Representations of Reality</th>
<th>Maintaining Appropriate Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal – “Institutional”</strong></td>
<td><strong>Asymmetrical Talk:</strong> One person/position has designated &amp; legitimized responsibility &amp; obligation over talk to determine who can talk, when, and on what topics</td>
<td><strong>Competing:</strong> Speakers use persuasion to convince listeners of their reality as well as attempt to discredit speakers voicing an alternative account</td>
<td><strong>Relational Aloofness:</strong> Talk maintains roles by using technical language; being task-oriented takes highest priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Courtroom Classroom</strong></td>
<td><strong>Symmetrical Talk:</strong> Speakers are regarded as equals and will avoid playing the expert in order to maintain the equality</td>
<td><strong>Deliberated:</strong> Challenges were presented, the group incorporated facilitator’s teaching and their own knowledge and experiences to arrive at a reality of concepts</td>
<td><strong>Relational Bonding:</strong> Talk maintains space for relational bonding as well as task completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blended Space:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Distributed Talk:</strong> Facilitator takes primary responsibility to ensure that everyone responds; all participants may invite others to talk or initiate topics</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Relational Solidarity:</strong> Talk maintains solidarity through consideration, and sensitivity; maintaining relationships takes highest priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focal Group</strong></td>
<td><strong>Facilitated:</strong> One person sets the agenda, activities, and time spent on each activity; all participants have equal access to engage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal – “Friendship”</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Co-Constructed:</strong> Reality is co-constructed through the dynamic interaction of the speakers and listeners and can result in contradictory statements, yet be accepted by all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 6 – ANALYSIS OF TALK: TURN-BY TURN DISCURSIVE PRACTICES

The previous chapter presented above-the-sentence discursive practices of managing the conversational floor, enacting discursive power, offering representations of reality, and maintaining appropriate relationships. In Chapter 6, I present a finer-detailed description of the turn-by-turn discursive practices to further address the research question: What is the nature of the talk among the members of the focal group?

Discursive practices are the conversational patterns people use as they engage in spoken interaction (Tracy, 2002). Common turn-by-turn discursive practices, defined in Chapter 2, were compared on a continuum between a formal and informal speech communities (see Table 6.1). I located turn-by-turn discursive practices in the transcripts by looking at adjacency-pairs. Adjacency pairs refer to pairs or extended pairs of turns that are functionally joined. Typical adjacency pairs include a greeting followed by a reply or a question followed up with an answer (Tracy, 2002).

Table 6.1

Turn-by-Turn Discursive Practices (repeated presentation of Table 2.2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formal – “Institutional”</th>
<th>Blended Space</th>
<th>Informal – “Friendship”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responding to</td>
<td><strong>Required Responses:</strong> Question asked</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Optional Responses:</strong> Questions are asked for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>requires an answer to that question; answers</td>
<td></td>
<td>myriad and complex purposes; questions do not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>must conform to acceptable response norms</td>
<td></td>
<td>require answers so that respondents are free to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>answer or deflect questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing Repetition</td>
<td><strong>Superfluous:</strong> Use of repetition by a speaker is viewed as redundancy or insecurity</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Fundamental:</strong> Repetition used to maintain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>interpersonal solidarity, signals agreement and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>involvement, and expresses group voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering Minimal</td>
<td><strong>Absent Discursive Power:</strong> recognize</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Access to Discursive Power:</strong> signals participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>authority; convey agreement; polite resistance; constrain anger &amp; frustration</td>
<td></td>
<td>and involvement; offer encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlapping Turns</td>
<td><strong>Interrupted Turns:</strong> error in judgment; way to compete for the right to speak; maintain proper distance of institutional roles</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Jointly-constructed Turns:</strong> Turns were continued and the group would complete each other’s utterances show involvement; maintain close relationships by talking for one another and saying the same thing at same time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The turn-by-turn discursive practices presented in this chapter are primarily derived from an examination of adjacency pairs. Throughout this chapter I provide specific examples and descriptions of prevalent discursive practices as they occurred in the turn-by-turn sequence of the focal group’s talk including: 1) responding to questions, 2) utilizing repetition, 3) overlapping turns, and 4) offering minimal responses. The focal group’s discursive patterns will be presented to describe the level of formality of the talk, as I explore the concept of a blended space. I begin by examining the adjacency pairs of question followed by the response.

**Responding to Questions**

In this section, I present examples of question/response adjacency pairs. Questions are a common occurrence in talk whether in institutional contexts or more “mundane” conversational contexts (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 149). Formal contexts often have explicit constraints on the type of questions that can be asked, the form of questions that can be asked, as well as prescribed types and forms of responses that are permissible (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). The questions in institutional talk are primarily informational. The information sought is either to provide the questioner with new information or to test to respondent’s knowledge. In the latter case, the questioner already knows the answer (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998).

On the other end of the formality continuum, questions in friendship talk are primarily focused on interactional goals such as conversation management and maintaining solidarity (Coates, 1996). Coates (1996) noted that in the women friendship group talk utilized questions to check in with other speakers, invite others to join in the talk, initiate and develop topics, reorient the conversation, encourage speakers to continue talking, check that communication is working, confirm a speaker has been understood correctly, and offer a rhetorical thought to conclude a topic. Coates (1996) also found that a single question could serve multiple purposes.
The focal group, enacting elements of both formality and informality, also used questions. Questions occurred in nearly 15% of the total turns for the focal group. To understand the utility of questions and the responses the questions garnered, I present information on the turn-by-turn discursive practice of responding to questions below. First, I describe the questions, focusing on the types of questions and how the women responded. Second, I describe questions as they occur within interactional turns and questions within the three primary activities.

Questions

Questions were used by all the speakers in their talk. Speakers asked questions to get clarification of activity procedures. Questions were asked as an inquiry to obtain more information. Questions were asked to prompt participation. Rhetorical questions were also offered to the group.

Table 6.1 identifies the percentage of turns coded by type of question and by session to highlight changes from the first session to the last as well as the percentage of total questions as compared to the total turns within a session. Following the table, I present excerpts from the transcripts to demonstrate the types of questions used within the focal group.

Table 6.2

Types of Questions by Session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th>Session 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarification of activity procedure</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiries for more information</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompting participation</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
<td>&lt;1.0%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All questions/total turns</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions coded as “Clarification of activity procedure” represented 18.6% of the questions for Session 1, 9.0% for Session 4, and 7.0% for Session 8. Excerpts 6.1 and 6.2 provide examples of questions that were asked to clarify an activity’s instructions. The excerpts present the adjacency pair. The first
turn of the pair is giving instruction. The second turn of the pair is the question. The lines with questions are italicized for emphasis. Excerpt 6.1 occurred when I was giving the group instructions on our first activity. Holly asked a question to clarify the instructions. After Darlene arrived, I was once again explaining the activity when she asked a clarifying question in response to the instructions, which is presented in Excerpt 6.2:

Excerpt 6.1: Session 1-Like Our Fingerprints

21 Tabitha But in the circle? We can put things that all of us share in common. But everybody has to share it in common in order for it to go into the circle.
24 Holly So this only has to be unique to the five of us? It doesn't have to be unique? (.) Like our fingerprint.

Excerpt 6.2: Session 1-I Have to Put Something on My Line?

137 Tabitha And on our line we have to put things that are unique. Like I'm the only one who's single. So I got to put single on my line.
140 Darlene Okay. And I have to put something on my line?

In Session 4, I gave the group instructions for a reflection activity. I asked them to write about a time they were involved in a conversation in which they learned something and also remembered it as a good conversation. Then I asked the group to write about a bad conversation. Cassidy, Darlene, and Holly each asked questions to help understand the activity as shown in Excerpt 6.3. In Excerpt 6.4, both Cassidy and Samantha asked more questions to clarify the activity instructions. All of the participants asked questions to clarify activity procedures:

Excerpt 6.3: Session 4-Learning Something?

947 Cassidy But? Okay? Something? But it has to be where we were supposed to be learning something?
950 Darlene Like a class or an actual conversation?
951 Tabitha Think of a conversation? That was a really good conversation.
953 Cassidy Ooh. When Pastor got his hearing aids?
954 Group laughter
955 Holly Could it be something practical like your mother teaching you how to make baked rice? Or does it have to be a conversation about? I mean?
Excerpt 6.4: Session 4-Highlights

972 Cassidy  Like you did it wrong? So. Do you want us to tell you like the whole story? Or just the situation? Or what do you want to know?

976 Tabitha  Get the highlights in your journal. Get the highlights.

978 Samantha  The highlights and why it was good and why it wasn’t good?

During Session 8, I provided the group instructions for an activity in which they needed to tie a knot in a rope as a group. Samantha and Holly both asked clarifying questions as they responded to the instructions in Excerpt 6.5. Once the group began experimenting to complete the activity, further questions were asked as shown in Excerpt 6.6:

Excerpt 6.5: Session 8-Are You Sure?

38 Samantha  We all have our own piece of rope?

39 Tabitha  Alright. So I think I know how to do this right.

41 Holly  Are you sure this can be done?

Excerpt 6.6: Session 8-Can You Let Go?

100 Tabitha  To pull it. You know. Tighten it up.

101 Samantha  You need a knot right there?

102 Holly  Yeah.

103 Tabitha  In between-

104 Cassidy  Okay. Can you let go?

105 Darlene  No. You can’t let go.

106 Tabitha  Right. You’re part of the rope.

107 Samantha  Let’s just do one and see what we have to do. Will that work? That’s what we have to do but with our bodies? Right?

Excerpt 6.6 captured three questions that were asked to clarify the instructions of the activity. Interestingly, I, as the facilitator, did not answer the questions. Instead other members of the group assumed the facilitation role by answering the questions about the instructions of the activity. In line 101, Samantha asked “you need a knot right there?” To which Holly responded with a confident “yeah.” In line 104, Cassidy asked “can you let go?” Darlene quickly responded “No. You can’t let go.” I reinforced Darlene’s statement in line 106. Finally, in line 107, Samantha transitioned the questioning from clarifying activity procedures to using questions to get information from others in the group. Asking questions to clarify activity procedure was evident in the three primary group activities. I take
this type of question to mean that the participants were attempting to understand and fully participate in each activity. Their questions indicated that they were seeking consensus on the steps to follow. Through their use of clarifying questions, the group demonstrated their politeness and compliance with the activities of the group.

Inquiry questions were another common type as the women questioned and responded to each other. These questions were intended to solicit information from a speaker. Questions coded as “Inquiry for more information” represented 65.9% of the questions for Session 1, 52.3% for Session 4, and 48.8% for Session 8. The excerpts presented below represent extended adjacency pairs. The first turn is a preface, establishing the main thought. The first turn of the pair is the inquiry for more information. The second turn of the pair is the response to the inquiry. The lines with questions are italicized for emphasis. Excerpts 6.7, 6.8, and 6.9 provide examples of inquiries for more information to clarify what was being shared. In these instances, the person uttering the preface did not provide enough information for the group to understand fully her idea. An inquiry was requested and then followed with more information:

**Excerpt 6.7: Session 4-Both**

457 Darlene We had Sunday night group start and Junior Bible Quiz start back up again.
459 Samantha *Both on Sunday night?*
460 Darlene No. Sunday morning and Sunday night.

**Excerpt 6.8: Session 4-I’m Struggling**

1038 Holly Wow, I can’t even think of one. I’m struggling with one of them.
1040 Cassidy *Good?*
1041 Holly Yeah. A good one.

**Excerpt 6.9: Session 4-Lack of Focus**

1175 Darlene Somebody can’t stay focused. (5.7) Lack of focus. (3.6)
1177 Tabitha *Somebody in the group? Or the person in charge?*
1179 Darlene The person in charge.
The group also used inquiry questions to obtain more information from a person to extend the thread of conversation. During Session 1, the group was attempting to determine things they had in common and things that were unique. Cassidy introduced a uniqueness of living in many states. In line 366, I asked Cassidy a question to gain more information. Holly asked a similar type of question in line 368. The questions often resulted in obtaining information that was more specific and extended the thread of conversation:

**Excerpt 6.10: Session 1-Four states**

364 Cassidy  
365 Holly  
366 Tabitha  
367 Cassidy  
368 Holly  
369 Cassidy  

A few moments later, Samantha shared about some of the challenging roadways she had ridden by bicycle. Darlene and I both asked questions to get more information in Excerpt 6.11. Darlene’s question in line 414 prompted a longer response from Samantha. The inquiries extended the thread of conversation:

**Excerpt 6.11: Session 1-The Whole Loop?**

410 Samantha  
412 Tabitha  
413 Samantha  
414 Darlene  
415 Samantha  

The next excerpt, 6.12, is longer as it has a sequence of adjacency pairs used as inquiries to obtain more information. In line 1617, Samantha asked Cassidy a question. Cassidy then asked Darlene a one word question “really?” and Darlene expands her thoughts:
Excerpt 6.12: Session 1-Trust is Harder for Leaders (repeated presentation of 5.1)

1614 Cassidy  Oh. Just two things I just noticed. I don't know I could be wrong but I think trust is harder for leaders than for regular people.

1617 Samantha  That's why you're so quiet?

1618 Cassidy  But. Um. I talk a lot less after I work all day cuz I talked all day long. So it's nicer to sit and be quiet. (2.4) You learn at work that if you talk too much you get in trouble anyways.

1622 Group laughter

1623 Cassidy  So I shut up. Normally I would talk a lot. (3.2)

1624 Darlene  I actually have kind of the opposite. I keep my mouth shut at work.

1626 Cassidy  Really?

1627 Darlene  Because I don't trust the people I work with.

1628 Cassidy  Mmm hmm.

1629 Darlene  Cuz I've done little things to (. ) see if they're trustworthy and they're not and I actually feel safer here. So I talk more. (2.9)

Session 1 provided many examples of this type of inquiry question. The pattern was also evident in the nature of the talk in later sessions. In Session 4, Holly, Cassidy, and Samantha all asked inquiry questions to obtain more information from others in group. In the following excerpt, Darlene was sharing about two of the small groups she led:

Excerpt 6.13: Session 4-Permission

687 Darlene  Yeah. It's the Bible Quiz that's going to be a little harder? I think this year in figuring out what to say if they do get to have a home school Bible Quiz team. Then we have to figure out as coaches how to support our kids through that and you know? The loyalty to the church and to the kids that they coached last year and why are they not coaching.

696 Samantha  Who gives them permission to do that?

697 Darlene  May Brooks

698 Samantha  Oh.

699 Holly  So has it been granted? Or is there just a process that they're going through now?

701 Darlene  It's the process. They've been written the letter and?

703 Cassidy  To May?

704 Darlene  Yeah. But you know? As state coordinators we were asked. You know. What's your opinion. Well. That's a sticky situation?

In Excerpt 6.13, Darlene was relaying an experience about a challenging situation with her small group. Samantha asked a question in line 696. Holly followed up with another question in line 699. Cassidy jumped into the conversation with a question in line 703, asking for clarification on what
Darlene was sharing. The inquiries posed provided an opportunity for a speaker to clarify what she was saying and also elaborate on her thoughts. Inquiry for more information was the most commonly used form of question and response for the focal group. I believe the women demonstrated their interest in one another by inquiring for more information from the group. As this was the most commonly posed type of question, it appears that the group used their discursive practices skillfully to solicit more information from speakers and extend threads of conversation.

Questions used to prompt participation were discussed in Chapter 5 within the above-the-sentence discursive practice of “Inviting Others to Talk.” Questions to prompt participation represent an overall average of 19.3% of the turns coded as questions. I present a few excerpts in this section to showcase how this type of question appears within the adjacency pair. In each excerpt below, the first turn in the pair is the question prompting participation. The second turn of the pair is the response. In some cases, one person’s question garnered responses from more than one speaker. The prompting participation questions are italicized for emphasis:

**Excerpt 6.14: Session 1-Get Started**

35 Tabitha So what do you think? Want to think of things you all have in common first? Would that help get you started? (.)
38 Holly That would be easier I think.
39 Samantha Okay. We’re all female.

**Excerpt 6.15: Session 1-Your Group?**

564 Tabitha Your group?
565 Darlene My group? Is adults with lots of kids.

**Excerpt 6.16: Session 1-Anything Else?**

1680 Tabitha Anyone else? Anything else? (4.3)
1681 Darlene I’ve never seen ground rules used in a non-business uh meeting. But I really like them.

**Excerpt 6.17: Session 4-Start Girls’ Night?**

891 Tabitha Samantha. Do you know when you’re going to start your Girls’ Night?
893 Samantha Probably not this Tuesday? Probably next Tuesday.
Some of the prompting participation questions were asked of specific speakers, such as in Excerpts 6.15 and 6.17. At other times, the prompting participation questions were posed to anyone in the group. Questions posed to the whole group could garner a response from more than one person as shown in Excerpts 6.14 and 6.18. By examining the turn-by-turn discursive practice evident in adjacency pairs, it is possible to describe patterns of how the group responded to questions. I believe the women invited others into the conversation by asking questions in order to distribute the conversation. From the first session, the women remarked about talking too much or noting when someone was talking too little. The questions to prompt participation, served as a strategy for them to regulate their participation.

The final category of questions capture the group’s use of rhetorical questions. By their nature, rhetorical questions are not posed with an expectation of an answer. Only one rhetorical question was offered in Session 1. The use of rhetorical questions increased during the leadership-development program. By Session 4, 13.6% of the questions asked were rhetorical. The use increased again in Session 8 to 26.3% of the questions asked. This increase in use of rhetorical questions may be one indicator that the group was engaging in exploring multiple perspectives. In the excerpts below, I provide the preface turn, the rhetorical questions, and the next turn. In some cases, the next turn introduces a new topic of conversation. In other cases, the next turn was laughter. Laughter was a typical response to the rhetorical questions; however the group did not attempt to answer the rhetorical questions:

**Excerpt 6.19: Session 4-Learning Something? (repeated presentation of 6.3, abbreviated)**

951 Tabitha Think of a conversation? That was a really good conversation.
953 Cassidy Ohh. When Pastor got his hearing aids?
954 Group laughter
Excerpt 6.20: Session 4-A Bad One?

963 Tabitha Right a bad one. Like I never want to do that again.
965 Samantha That would be a conversation with my husband?
967 Group laughter

Excerpt 6.21: Session 8-The Same Chair

520 Cassidy I've sat everywhere in this room and always grab the same chair. Isn't that funny?
523 Darlene You shouldn’t have challenged her.

Excerpts 6.19 and 6.20 present rhetorical questions followed by laughter. In Excerpt 6.21, the rhetorical question did not receive a response that specifically addressed the question posed. The next turn in line 523 introduced a new topic of conversation.

In other cases, I coded questions as rhetorical when the speaker was engaged in wondering. The question asked did not really need a response, but the group often responded to provide affirmation of the speaker’s wonderings:

Excerpt 6.22: Session 8-Really Little

359 Holly How are you guys gonna get through that loop?
361 Cassidy Only if you’re really little.

Excerpt 6.23: Session 8-I Have to Follow You

429 Darlene Whoa. I have to follow you. Right?
430 Samantha You have to cuz-
431 Darlene Cuz I have to go through here.

Excerpt 6.24: Session 8-All I Want to Do is Go Home

1047 Samantha So from my perspective on Sunday afternoon all I want to do is go home and get ready for Cleansing Stream? Not go? You know what I mean?
1051 Holly Yeah.
1052 Samantha And so. You have to figure out. There’s two different types. But then I know the importance of it. So it’s not that I don’t want to?
1056 Holly Mm hmm.
1057 Samantha It’s (.) I don’t know? So it just seems like there would be maybe even more than two kinds of group leaders. Perspectives.
The final excerpt presented, 6.24, captures Samantha sharing. She used a rhetorical question of wondering “you know what I mean?”, “So it’s not that I don’t want to?”, and “I don’t know?” during her three turns. Holly offered short responses of agreement to Samantha’s rhetorical questions. I believe the women used rhetorical questions for several purposes including exploring multiple perspectives and to solicit encouragement or agreement. The excerpts above indicate that both encouragement and agreement, especially through the use of laughter, was a common response to rhetorical questions. This was another means by which the group demonstrated their care and concern for one another.

The focal group asked questions to clarify activity instructions, to inquire for more information, to prompt participation, and to offer rhetorical thoughts. By asking questions, the speakers signaled their involvement in the conversation, let the other speakers know that more information was acceptable to share, invited people to speak, and posed open-ended thoughts. Through all these discursive practices, I surmised the women were demonstrating interest in one another as well as concern for ensuring everyone had opportunity to be involved in the conversation.

**Location of questions.**

Questions appeared in all four categories of turns: 1) continuation, 2) mid-turn change, 3) new idea, and 4) response. These categories of turns were defined in the description of the analysis in Chapter 4. Continuation turns represent when a speaker picks up on her last turn as if others had not injected any comments. Mid-turn changes represent when a speaker will incorporate more than one turn category; such as, a turn starts as a continuation and then a new idea is presented before the end of the turn. Turns coded as new idea represent any time a new topic of conversation was offered. Response turns directly react to the previous turn and thereby extend the topic of conversation. Questions account for an average of 15% of the total turns. Table 6.2 accounts for the distribution of turns coded as questions by turn category across the three sessions transcribed.
Table 6.3

*Questions by Turn Category by Session*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th>Session 8</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuation</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-turn Change</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Idea</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>66.2%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions used during mid-turn changes slightly decreased across the sessions. The limited use of mid-turn change indicated to me that the group tended to follow the current topic of conversation. Questions posed to introduce a new idea also decreased across the three sessions, representing 48.5% of questions in Session 1, 37.1% in Session 4, and dropped to 20.8% in Session 8. I believe that the questions used to introduce new ideas dropped as the women’s topics of conversations lengthened. Another explanation for this change could be attributed to the type of activities that were employed. Inversely, questions used to respond increased across the three sessions, representing 37.3% of turns in Session 1, 44.3% of turns in Session 4, and 66.2% in Session 8. Overall, the most common use of questions was to introduce new ideas or respond to another person.

I also examined the use of questions in the primary group activities, including community-building, teaching, and reflection activities. Table 6.3 compares the type of question with the activity. Questions occurred most often in reflection activities, although questions were used in all the activities by all the participants. I found this intriguing as the reflection activities tended to have the smallest number of turns, yet questions occurred in over 25% of the turns, a much higher rate than the overall average.
Table 6.4

Questions by Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community-building</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarification of activity procedure</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiries for more information</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompting participation</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Questions/Total Activity Turns</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 6.3 reveals, the four types of questions were used within all three activities. The use of questions appears to be a means for the group to ensure that everyone was encouraged to participate and respond to the questions posed to the whole group. I demonstrate this point by viewing an extended excerpt that occurred toward the conclusion of a teaching activity: Excerpt 6.25.

In this excerpt, I posed a question to the group as a whole. This introduced a new topic of conversation. I did not leave this topic until each speaker in the group responded. Through this manner, the group was encouraged to respond to questions. However, some speakers provided more elaborate responses and others had very brief responses. My questions, both the topic question and follow-up questions to reiterate the topic, are italicized for emphasis. The responses are shown in bolded text:

**Excerpt 6.25: Session 1-Concerns**

1490 Tabitha  *So my last one says concerns. Anybody?* I know we have concerns with Cassidy having her back to the camera. She’s gonna-

1493 Holly    *Are you shy?*

1494 Cassidy  *Oh, I guess it depends on how you define shy. About some things.*

1496 Holly    *Yeah.*

1497 Tabitha  *And you’re okay having your back that way?*

1498 Cassidy  *Yeah it’s great.*

1499 Tabitha  *Okay. Any other concerns? Concerned about what you write?*

1501 Holly    *No. Mine will most likely be listing. It’s just easier for me to do it. More of a write out- but if you don’t care?*

1504 Tabitha  *No I don’t care. If you want*

1505 Holly    *If they’re full thoughts as long as they make sense?*
If your reflection is a picture? That works for me too.
I have a tendency to be kind of a note- I don’t like to write out a whole big sentence. I just kind of make you know? So as long as you can understand what that little phrase means? You’re okay with it?
Yeah.
Cool.
Do you have any concerns?
Nope.
You’re just excited? Aren’t you?
I already learned a whole bunch.
Group laughter
I’m telling you. That just made my- yeah. That’s good.
Samantha. Any concerns?
No I don’t think so.

I asked the question about having concerns four times in this excerpt (Lines 1490, 1499, 1516, and 1523). Holly provided the most detailed response by engaging in several exchanges of turns. Darlene and Samantha both offered short, but definitive responses (Lines 1517 and 1524). The higher percentage of questions in Session 1 may be attributed to my needing to ask each individual the same question in order to have all respond. Whereas, by Session 8, the group most likely knew they were all supposed to respond so only one question was needed.

A similar sequence of questions used to encourage responses occurred in a community-building activity in Session 4. I had asked the women to share about what was going on within their small groups. The responses were much more elaborate in that each person’s total response occurred over a series of exchanged turns. However, some responses were again more detailed and extensive than others. Both Holly and Darlene shared at length about their groups. The question is emphasized with italics and the response to the question is bolded:

**Excerpt 6.26: Session 4: Our Small Groups**

So I just thought we’d talk about where our small groups are at? To start with?

Okeedokee.

Well. I need prayer. Big time.
Holly continues to share about her group from line 126 until line 454; 329 lines in total. All five women engaged in this conversation, asking Holly questions that encouraged her to continue sharing or provide more information about what was happening in the small group she was leading. After Holly was finished sharing, Darlene shared about her group. Darlene’s sharing also occurred over an extended period from lines 457 to 864; 408 lines in total. Once again, all the women were asking questions encouraging Darlene to share more details. With Cassidy, I presented the question again, but this time made it specific to her small group:

Excerpt 6.27: Session 4: How’s Your Sunday School Class Been Going?

869 Tabitha  How’s your Sunday School class been going?
870 Cassidy  Ah. It’s good? Bible Quiz started so you lose a good chunk of your kids. But? It’s good? May Brooks was there last week?

Darlene and I both asked Cassidy questions to obtain more details. The full exchange was short compared to the previous two exchanges, only 20 lines in total from lines 870 to 889. The final person who needed to respond to the original question I posed was Samantha. Excerpt 6.17, presented previously, captures the question I asked specifically to Samantha and her response. Samantha had not offered to share because her small group had not started yet; therefore, she did not have a response to the original question. Once that information was obtained, I shared briefly about a small group I was leading and then transitioned the group to the next activity.

Through the use of questions and encouraging all the speakers to respond, the full group was invited to participate in each activity. The high percentage of questions used to inquire for more information was a key means for encouraging speakers to share more details and participate in the conversations within each of the activities. However, the speakers were never criticized or belittled when their responses were brief or lacked details. Instead, the speakers used questions to gently elicit more information. Through this discursive practice the group once again appeared to be showing their care and concern for one another, thereby demonstrating an atmosphere of safety and trust.
Overall, questions were used consistently in all three activities. Questions could be used whether a person was continuing a turn, introducing a new topic, or responding to another speaker. Additionally, questions were used to clarify activity instructions, inquire for more information from another person, or used as a rhetorical device. Ranging from 11.5% in Session 4 to 20.4% in Session 8 of total turns, questions seemed to be a prominent feature of the focal group’s talk.

When I examined the continuum of formality, I could not easily correspond the focal group’s use of questions to either formal or informal practices of responding to questions. Formal speech communities require the person addressed to respond to the question in a specific manner. The excerpts presented above indicate that participants could offer a single word response or engage in a longer exchange of over 400 lines of transcript. Within informal speech communities, the speakers have no obligation to respond to questions, responding is optional. Once again, I did not readily find evidence of this optional responding practice in the focal group.

The focal group’s speech community turn-by-turn discursive practice for responding to questions may be best described as a blended space. Various types of questions were asked. When responses weren’t immediately forthcoming, speakers were invited to participate as the facilitator and other speakers used additional questions to encourage each one in the group to respond. While not every participant needed to respond to every question, there were instances when all were expected and then at times were gently encouraged through the use of questions to respond. For the focal group, the blended space discursive practice of responding to questions is characterized as encouraging responses.

Utilizing Repetition

Repetition, like questions, is a common discursive practice in speech communities. The function and utilization of repetition may be very different depending on the formality of the speech community. The formal speech communities of courtrooms and classrooms historically have maintained a more
negative outlook on the function and utilization of repetition. For the most part, repetition in a formal speech community is referred to as a single-speaker repetition (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1988). Single-speaker repetition occurs when one speaker will repeat a word or phrase multiple times within the speak turn. The formal speech community views this discursive practice as being redundant or conveying insecurity (Cameron, 2001). The function and utility of repetition in a formal speech community can be viewed as superfluous.

The most informal speech communities, friendship groups, have a much different outlook on the function and utility of repetition as a discursive practice. Coates (1996) identifies a high use of multi-speaker repetition at use in her friendship group talk. The women tended to repeat words, phrases, concepts, themes, and grammatical structures as a way of maintaining interpersonal solidarity, signal agreement, demonstrate involvement in the conversation, and express a group voice (Coates, 1996). In the case of women talk within a friendship group, the function and utility of repetition was fundamental to their speech community.

The focal group, as a speech community enacting elements from both formal and informal discursive practices, also utilized repetition. Single-speaker repetition and multi-speaker repetition both occurred within the focal group’s talk. However, as I am focusing on the turn-by-turn discursive practices, I have chosen to restrict my description of repetition for the focal group to the multi-speaker variant. By describing the turn-by-turn discursive practices of multi-speaker repetition, I present an account of utilizing repetition within the possible blended space of the focal group.

Coates (1996) identified four levels of repetition: lexical, semantic, syntactic, and thematic. Additionally, phonetic repetition may also be used in friendship talk (Tannen, 2005). In my analysis of the focal group’s talk, I examined lexical, semantic, and syntactic repetition. Excerpt 6.28 (repeated from Chapter 5) provides a good example of the use of repetition as a turn-by-turn discursive practice for the focal group. All three levels of repetition are identified in this excerpt.
Lexical repetitions involve a second speaker repeating the exact single word or exact word phrase. In lines 82 and 84 (italicized), the phrase “like strawberries” is repeated. Semantic repetitions involve a second speaker repeating the same meaning, but uses different words. Lines 75, 76, and 77 (bold) demonstrate semantic repetition. The women are congratulating themselves on their progress. They use different words, but the meaning and intention was consistent. Syntactic repetition involves repetition of grammatical structure. The grammatical patterns (underlined) originated in line 74 when Holly stated “We all have cars.” Cassidy used the same grammatical structure to offer her next two suggestions in line 78, “we all have jobs” and line 79, “we all help raise kids.” Lexical repetitions are emphasized with italics. Semantic repetitions are emphasized with a bolded font. Syntactic repetitions are emphasized with an underline:

Excerpt 6.28: Session 1-We all have cars (repeated presentation of Excerpt 5.2)

72 Tabitha What are you thinking?
74 Holly We all have cars. (4)
75 Cassidy There you go.
76 Samantha Good job.
77 Tabitha Alright we are making progress now. (3.8)
78 Cassidy We all have jobs. (15.4)
79 Cassidy We all help raise kids. Cuz you help raise your sister’s kids.
81 Tabitha Laughing
82 Samantha It's true. (9.3). Uhhmm. (2.5) Does anyone not like strawberries?
84 Tabitha I like strawberries.
85 Samantha You like strawberries?
86 Holly Yeah, I do.
87 Samantha Okay.
88 Group laughter

Through these varied uses of repetition, the focal group’s talk reveals rhythmic patterns that create a feeling of conversational coherence and may indicate that the repetition was purposeful.

Table 6.4 below demonstrates the frequency of the types of repetitions in the group’s talk. Lexical repetition was the most frequently used form of repetition at 49% overall. Syntactic repetition was the least commonly used type of repetition at 5% overall. I added a fourth type, synchronous, to account for instances where more than one speaker says the same thing at the same time. When the
group all laughs, I coded it as synchronous repetition. However, there were other instances when more than one speaker said the same thing at the same time. To describe the use of repetition for the focal group, I present excerpts demonstrating these four types of repetition below.

Table 6.5

*Type and Usage of Repetition by Session*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th>Session 8</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lexical</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchronous</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, I present examples of lexical repetitions. Although most of the repetitions only involved two speakers, I will present examples where three or more speakers were involved so as to emphasize how repetition was used as a turn-by-turn discursive pattern of the focal group’s talk. The word or phrase repeated will be italicized for emphasis:

**Excerpt 6.29: Session 1-Nurse**

150 Darlene *Nobody else is a nurse?*
151 Tabitha *Nobody else is a nurse.*

**Excerpt 6.30 Session 1-Married in Kindergarten**

198 Cassidy *How long* have you been married?
199 Darlene *Seventeen years. (3.6) Seems like a long time.*
200 Group laughter
201 Holly *Has it been that long?*

**Excerpt 6.31: Session 1-Redhead**

339 Cassidy *What are you writing? Natural redhead. Yeah.*
340 Holly *Natural redhead. Yeah.*
341 Darlene *How do you know nobody is not a natural redhead?*
**Excerpt 6.32: Session 1-Read It**

767 Tabitha  So you’ve read it?
768 Cassidy  I’ve read it.
769 Holly    I haven’t read it.

**Excerpt 6.33: Session 8-Progress**

331 Tabitha  You guys are making really really good progress.
333 Samantha We are?
334 Holly    We are?
335 Darlene  We are?

The next excerpts show how lexical repetitions can be layered or expanded throughout a sequence of turns. The three speakers all used the word “go,” but in different combinations. Darlene stated “go back” in line 122. Samantha responded with “go back” and added “through there” for a complete phrase of “go back through there” in line 124. Holly responded to Samantha by stating “go through there.” The word “go” was used six times in the three-turn exchange:

**Excerpt 6.34: Session 8-Go Back Through There?**

122 Darlene  You step across. And then we need to go back this way. And go-
124 Samantha Go back through there?
125 Holly    You need to go through the loop? Go through there. I’m glad that’s you guys. Go ahead.

A similar use of repetition occurred a few lines later, once again using the word “go.” Darlene and Holly both used the word “go.” Holly and Samantha both used the word “cross.” Darlene and Samantha used the words “and then” and “underneath.” Samantha and Holly used the words “you guys.” Darlene put in a slight variation by using the phrases “these guys”:

**Excerpt 6.35: Session 8-Go Underneath**

161 Darlene  And I’m going to go-
162 Holly    You and I need to cross-
163 Darlene  And then we go underneath.
164 Samantha Underneath. So you guys need to cross first. And then Holly or you to go
166 Holly    Well we need to cross all the way to you guys because it’s gotta go all the way to that rope. So you need to come over too.
169 Darlene  And then these guys-
These examples are fairly straightforward. The word or phrase was initially spoken and the next speaker used the same word or phrase in her turn. By using repetition, an idea was developed by the group, not just an individual. The next excerpt occurred in Session 4. Four of the women were involved in using repetition as they carried on a conversation to determine how to complete a reflective writing task. Repeated words are emphasized with italics:

**Excerpt 6.36: Session 4-Something**

933 Tabitha  I actually want us to think about the best learning part- the conversation where you really learned *something*. The best one. And then a time you were in a group? And you guys *were supposed to be learning something*? But it was just a flat out bad *conversation*. So the two extremes. Really good and really bad. So we’re actually *going to* journal about that? First.

942 Samantha  Oh dear. What are we *going to-*

943 Holly  Ooohh. I hope I can think of one?

947 Cassidy  But? Okay? *Something?* But it has to be where we *were supposed to be learning something*?

950 Darlene  Like a class or an actual *conversation*?

951 Tabitha  Think of a *conversation?* That was a really good *conversation*.

953 Cassidy  Ooh. When Pastor got his hearing aids?

954  laughter

955 Holly  Could it be *something* practical

I introduced the word “*something*” in line 935, using it twice during my turn. Cassidy repeated the word “*something*” twice during her turn in line 947. Cassidy echoed an entire phrase: “*were supposed to be learning something.*” Holly used the word “*something*” during her turn in line 955.

Additionally, in this excerpt the words “*going to*” and “*conversation*” both introduced in my opening turn were repeated by other speakers. All of the repetitions in Excerpt 6.36 originated with my opening turn in line 933.

The women’s discursive practices revealed a pattern of repeating one another’s words. The excerpts above demonstrate the simple ways repetitions were used as well as some of the more complex ways in which lexical repetitions were performed. Overall, 49% of repetitions were coded as lexical. The frequency of repetitions and that all the women engaged in this practice indicated to me
that they were listening closely to one another. This close listening is another way the women demonstrated their interest in one another.

The next series of excerpts demonstrate semantic repetition. Semantic repetitions occur when a responding speaker conveys the same or a similar meaning but utters different words. However, the semantic repetitions often make use of one or more of the same words. All of the excerpts presented occurred in adjacent pairs of turns. In the excerpts below, the semantic repetitions will be indicated in a bolded font. When words are the same, italics will be used for emphasis as in the previous section on lexical repetition:

**Excerpt 6.37: Session 1-Good**

240 Samantha  
241 Holly  

240 Samantha  | Well *good*.  
241 Holly  | *Oh good*.  

**Excerpt 6.38: Session 1-Never Again**

529 Darlene  
530 Tabitha  

529 Darlene  | Todd *came once*.  
530 Tabitha  | He *came once* and then said “never again.”

**Excerpt 6.39: Session 1-Workbooks**

704 Holly  
709 Samantha  
710 Tabitha  

704 Holly  | Well? My group is about eight people. And we’re doing (. ) um (. ) Bevere’s Drawing Near? We I we do the DVD. And there are a couple of different ways to do it. *They didn’t want to do the workbook themselves*. So?  
709 Samantha  | *It’s too much work*.  
710 Tabitha  | *Nobody wants to do the workbooks*.  

**Excerpt 6.40: Session 1-Quiet Group**

1674 Holly  
1676 Cassidy  

1674 Holly  | So. I need to work on that with my group. *Cuz they are a quiet group*.  
1676 Cassidy  | *They don’t like to talk?*

In many instances, the speakers used semantic repetition to convey agreement. I believe the women used this discursive practice of semantic repetition to voice their perspectives and indicate their participation without disrupting a speaker. This is the most frequent use of semantic repetition that I found in my data. Sometimes only one person responded, but in other instances, multiple participants
used semantic repetitions to convey their consensus. The six excerpts that follow present semantic repetition used by all five speakers within the focal group:

**Excerpt 6.41: Session 1-Okay, Alright**

1488 Holly      Okay.
1489 Darlene    Alright.

**Excerpt 6.42: Session 1-Me too**

1040 Samantha   My opinion is conflict.
1041 Holly      Me too.
1042 Cassidy    I agree.
1043 Darlene    Sure. It’s a tough one.

**Excerpt 6.43: Session 1-He’s Sweet**

554 Holly       He’s so sweet.
555 Tabitha     He is really sweet.

**Excerpt 6.44: Session 1-That’s What I’m Thinking**

1048 Holly      Leadership. That’s what I’m thinking. Leadership.
1049 Darlene    That’s what I think too.

**Excerpt 6.45: Session 4-Weird**

204 Samantha    Weird.
205 Holly       It’s weird.

**Excerpt 6.46: Session 4-Stuck**

289 Tabitha     You’re kind of stuck. Aren’t ya? With that kind of prayer?
291 Holly       I’m telling you. I’m really stuck.

The third type of repetition is syntactic. Syntactic repetition was the least common form of multi-speaker repetition for this group. When a syntactic repetition occurred, it frequently followed a pattern of pronoun, verb, and then a noun. Like semantic repetitions, specific words also tend to repeated. By matching grammatical structure, the women were able to perform a more complex form of repetition in their talk. Excerpt 6.47 reveals Samantha initiating a grammatical structure and then Darlene and I both repeating the structure as we completed our turns in this thread of conversation.
**Bold/italics** is used below to indicate the **pronoun**, **italics** to indicate the **verb** and **underlined/italics** to indicate the **noun**:

**Excerpt 6.47: Session 1-Africa**

180 Samantha  I've been to **Africa**. Anyone else been over there?
181 Holly  Cool.
182 Tabitha  I have not been to **Africa**. (3.6)
183 Darlene  I've seen it **on a map**. (1.5)
184 Tabitha  I've watched the **Survivor that took place in Africa**.
186  Group laughter
187 Darlene  I know **someone who's lived in Africa**.

The syntactic repetitions tended to appear when the group was engaged in brainstorming as a part of a teaching activity. In the next example, Excerpt 6.48, the group was sharing ideas. Darlene mirrored the grammatical structure I used to share my idea. I emphasized the repetition by using italics. The first grammatical phrase is **italicized**, the second grammatical phrase is **bold/italics**, and the final grammatical phrase of the thought is **underline/italics**. The subsequent excerpts are shown following this sequence:

**Excerpt 6.48: Session 4-Tell Me More**

1469 Tabitha  Another thing I **wrote was** "someone says tell me more. (2) About your idea. Or explain that to me? I don't understand or. Interesting. Tell me more." I love to hear those words come out in a conversation. Not necessarily from the person who's supposed to be facilitating? But? Just because you know that then people are engaged.
1478 Darlene  Or when **somebody says** "So what I hear you saying is this." And they have it correct. Or? If they don't have it correct. They can say "No. That's not what I meant. What I'm trying to say is" You know. Something else. So that you are both on the same page? In the conversation.

**Excerpt 6.49: Session 4-Cannot See Each Other**

1592 Cassidy  The worst thing I can think of is the phone. I guess eye contact or the space you're in? There's a huge difference. For me. If I'm comfortable with a conversation or not. Is what environment are you in? The phone is like the worst place cuz you **cannot see each other**.
1599 Samantha  Can't **read each other**.
**Excerpt 6.50: Session 4-Tired**

1190 Samantha They're tired. (2) When people are tired. The conversation doesn't go as well. *if it's late at night*. Or. They're tired.

1193 Darlene *If you're in a group situation*. Someone tried to dominate the conversation. And they make it about...

1204 Cassidy Well mine is like? *If um people talk*. They knock you down first. (.) To level the- Then you might as well not talk to me.

**Excerpt 6.51: Session 8-The Goal**

800 Holly *But is the goal ultimately the education of the leaders?* (2) I mean at the meeting. Ultimately the goal is education so are their alternative ways of educating?

804 Tabitha Okay.

805 Samantha *But is the goal also relationships*.

In other instances, the syntactic repetition was used to disagree or correct the first speaker’s utterance. The use of the grammatical structure may have helped the group develop and maintain the conversational coherence of their talk even when disagreements or corrections occurred. The examples below reveal that the disagreements were well-received and did not disrupt the overall flow of the conversation:

**Excerpt 6.52: Session 4-Major Trick**

1744 Holly If I could just get my mind to shut down? That would be a major trick. *I wish somebody could teach me that?*

1747 Tabitha Well. *I'm not going to teach you that*. Cuz I'm not there.

1749 Holly Okay.

**Excerpt 6.53: Session 4-Dead Silent**

1897 Cassidy I hope so. It was dead silent. It was like. *No one talked?*

1899 Tabitha Yeah. But. At least *nobody yelled* back?

1900 Cassidy No. I don’t. No. I don’t think she would.

**Excerpt 6.54: Session 8-A Month**

2166 Cassidy *For one month?*

2167 Samantha *For half a month*. Yeah. But that doesn’t mean. We could make it work. Especially if it was. I’m up for it. It might be a little hard. That’s all.
In a few other examples, the syntactic structure reinforced the participants’ encouraging support of one another. The speakers were able to convey encouragement for another speaker by mirroring the grammatical structure as shown in the next excerpts:

**Excerpt 6.55: Session 8-Through a Loop**

179 Holly I had a feeling there was going to be someone going through a loop.
181 Samantha I can go through a loop.

**Excerpt 6.56: Session 8-That Was**

445 Darlene Wow. That was a lot of work.
446 Samantha That was good.

After examining the use of repetitions by the focal group, I then compared the group’s use of repetition to the continuum of formality of speech communities. In formal speech communities, utilizing repetition is generally viewed as superfluous. Within informal speech communities, utilizing repetition is viewed as a fundamental practice. Coates (1996) noted that the use of repetitions helps the conversation to be coherent, allows the participants to show solidarity, and indicates that they are closely monitoring the conversation.

Like the friendship group talk, lexical, semantic, and syntactic repetition were all evident in the talk of the focal group. In contrast to friendship talk, utilizing repetition in the focal group talk seemed to provide a means for the group to disagree and correct one another. The focal group’s use of repetition does not fully conform to informal talk practices. Therefore, I contend that the focal group’s use of repetition is characteristic of a blended space. Within the blended space of the focal group, the variety of uses of repetition appears to be purposeful to both build a group voice yet also maintain independent thought. Through the use of repetitions the participants incorporate previous speaker’s word choices, ideas, and grammatical structures into their own utterance formation. In this manner, utilizing repetition was an important and purposeful turn-by-turn discursive practice for the focal group.
Offering Minimal Responses

Minimal responses are brief utterances of a few words that convey a single meaning (Coates, 1996). Minimal responses tend to be grammatically incomplete sentences. The minimal responses generally do not provide more substantive information to the conversation. Responses such as yeah, mhm, that’s right, okay, nope, yep, wow, and awesome were coded in the focal group’s talk as minimal responses.

Minimal Responses are evident in both formal and informal speech communities, but the interpreted intentions of the minimal responses are very different. Research on formal speech communities interpret offering minimal responses as a means of recognizing authority or conveying agreement with one in authority (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998), and offering polite resistance to one in authority or constraining anger or frustration with one in authority (Mills, 2003). In these cases, only those absent discursive power or institutional authority are the one’s offering minimal responses.

According to Coates (1996), minimal responses occur more frequently in a collaborative floor typical of friendship talk. In a collaborative floor, speakers need a variety of tools to indicate that they are participating in the conversation without competing for the right to speak. When minimal responses are used in this manner they tend to be well-placed, as they “come at the end of a chunk talk” (Coates, 1996, p. 144). Minimal responses can also be used to signal encouragement or agreement of what a speaker is saying. In these cases, the minimal responses will once again be strategically located immediately following clauses or phrases. One speaker will seamlessly interject a minimal response in the midst of another speaker’s utterance. In an informal speech community, these moves are viewed as a signal of speaker participation within a collaborative floor, thereby indicating discursive power is present for all the speakers.

My analysis of minimal responses revealed that it was a common discursive pattern for the talk of the focal group. As the above-the-sentence practices reveal that discursive power was distributed
among the participants, I felt that the minimal responses would be more indicative of friendship group talk. The majority of the turns coded as responses were statements uttered that connect to the previous speaker’s turn. I identified 368 (74.8%) response turns that were statements in Session 1, 392 (80%) in Session 4, and 645 (79.2%) in Session 8. The majority of these statements were minimal responses. Nearly 37% of the total responses were identified as minimal responses: 44% in Session 1, 39% in Session 4, and 27% in Session 8.

All of the participants used minimal responses during the three sessions analyzed. Table 6.5 summarizes the turns coded as minimal responses. Holly was the most frequent user of this discursive practice with an overall average of 41% of the minimal response turns. The other four participant’s use of minimal responses ranged from 13% to 20%. Examples of participant’s use of minimal responses are presented below.

Table 6.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimal Response (MR) Turns by Participant by Session</th>
<th>Individual MR Turns/ Total MR Turns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Session 4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the ultimate purpose of a minimal response within an informal speech community is for a speaker to indicate that she is participating in the conversation, I coded the minimal response turns to reveal specific outcomes: convey agreement, disagreement, and encouragement. Additionally, some of the minimal responses were exclamations or courtesies. A few of the turns I coded as neutral because
I was unable to determine from the context if the minimal response was agreeing or disagreeing with previous speaker. I also coded the turns that were only laughter as a minimal response. Table 6.6 summarizes the frequency of the minimal responses for each purpose category. Each category is discussed in more detail below.

Table 6.7

**Minimal Response (MR) Outcomes by Session**

| Purpose Category | Session 1 | | | Session 4 | | | Session 8 | |
|------------------|-----------|--:| |-----------|--:| |-----------|--:|
|                  | MR Turns  | % of MR | | MR Turns  | % of MR | | MR Turns  | % of MR |
| Agreement        | 69        | 33%     | | 86        | 45%     | | 152        | 70%    |
| Disagreement     | 12        | 6%      | | 2         | 1%      | | 2         | 1%     |
| Encouragement    | 24        | 11%     | | 7         | 4%      | | 5         | 2%     |
| Exclamation      | 16        | 7%      | | 17        | 9%      | | 9         | 4%     |
| Courtesy         | 1         | <1%     | | 3         | 2%      | | 3         | 1%     |
| Neutral          | 14        | 7%      | | 8         | 4%      | | 6         | 3%     |
| Laughter         | 79        | 37%     | | 63        | 33%     | | 40        | 18%    |

The table shows that turns of laughter represented a large percentage of the minimal response turns from 18% to 37%. However, minimal responses to convey agreement were the primary category dramatically increased from Session 1 to Session 8: 33% to 70%. Like repetitions, the discursive practice of minimal responses was a means for the women to demonstrate that they were building consensus. Agreement minimal responses included words such as *ahuh, alright, mmhmm, yeah, yes, yup, okay, kay, sure, right,* and *that’s true.*

During the opening activity of Session 1, the women were asked to identify things they shared in common and that were unique to each person. In some instances, minimal responses conveyed speakers’ agreement. The excerpts below present examples of the use of minimal responses to convey agreement. The minimal response agreement turns are *italicized* for emphasis:
Excerpt 6.57: Session 1-Females

39 Samantha Okay. We’re all female.
40 Cassidy Okay.
41 Holly Very good.

Excerpt 6.58: Session 1-Like to Read

165 Holly So does everybody like to read?
166 All Yeah.

Excerpt 6.59: Session 1-Attend The Church

242 Tabitha Oh. We all attend The Church
243 Darlene Ahuh.

Excerpt 6.60: Session 1-Hair Color

341 Darlene How do you know nobody is not a natural redhead?
342 Group Laughter
343 Tabitha I don’t think so. (laughing). That’s not usually a hair color that gets covered up.
345 Darlene That’s true.

Excerpt 6.61: Session 1-Godly Heritage

396 Darlene Oh. That’s right. So we all- Here what? Okay. We all have a Godly heritage (.) at least for a while.
399 Cassidy Ahuh.

Excerpt 6.62: Session 1-Recumbent Bikes

425 Holly I’d need one of those big tractor seats. You know?
427 Darlene Yeah.
428 Holly Then maybe it would be comfortable. Can you see me on a tractor seat. That would be good for me.
430 Darlene One of those sitting bikes? You know. Where your legs are out in front of you?
432 Holly Yeah.
433 Samantha Is it called recumbent? Yeah. Recumbent.

Excerpt 6.62 captured a discussion Samantha started about riding a bicycle through a national park. Holly made a comment about needing a tractor seat on a bicycle if she was to ride. Holly ended her turn with a question: “you know?” Darlene voiced a simple “yeah” of agreement in line 427. Darlene
picked up the general thread by suggesting another type of bicycle, again ending her turn with a question. Holly then voiced agreement, repeating the same word used by Darlene: “yeah.” The pattern of question followed by a “yeah” continued into the next turn, except Samantha took on the roles of both the question-asker and minimal-responder in line 433: “Is it called recumbent? Yeah. Recumbent.”

Like Excerpt 6.62, the speaker sometimes chose to respond to a question with a minimal response of agreement. While the response does convey agreement, no other information was offered to continue the conversation. Frequently, the speakers would have to ask another question or offer further comments to obtain more information.

Excerpt 6.63 occurred midway through Session 4. The women had been asked to write in their journals. The conversation occurred when a couple of participants had finished writing and were waiting for others. Cassidy, Holly, and I had been talking for a few minutes when Darlene joined our conversation by asking a question directed to Cassidy. Once again, the minimal response line of agreement is italicized for emphasis:

**Excerpt 6.63: Session 4-Women’s Retreat**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Turn</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1098</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Are you going to Women’s Retreat?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1099</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1100</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>That’s good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1101</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yeah. It’ll be good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1102</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>And being younger. It’ll be good to go with a group of other people your own age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1104</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yeah. I’ve got a nice group? But I have a blast with- actually sometimes I miss people like in their fifties? And sixties? Again. They’re so in a different spot. There’s none of this stuff when you’re hanging out with- you know what I mean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1110</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ahuh.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cassidy used the pattern of a minimal response word of agreement, “yeah,” at the start of each of her turns in Excerpt 6.63. It was not until her third turn in line 1104, responding to the original question posed by Darlene in line 1098, that Cassidy expanded her response to provide the group more information. In her first turn at line 1099, Cassidy simply stated “yeah.” In her second turn, Cassidy
started with a “yeah,” and then repeated Darlene’s use of the word “good”: “yeah, it’ll be good” (Line 1101). In Cassidy’s third turn at line 1104, she once again begins with “yeah,” but then elaborated on attending the Women’s Retreat. This excerpt ended with another question and minimal response of agreement. Cassidy commented “you know what I mean?” to which I responded “ahuh” (Line 1110). My minimal response conveyed agreement, but also allowed Cassidy to continue sharing.

The group also used a pattern of asking questions and answering with a minimal response of agreement during teaching activities. In Session 8, the group was engaged in a deliberation activity when the following sequences occurred in which a question was asked and a minimal response of agreement was voiced in response. The excerpts reveal that the group was very verbal, speaking their agreement rather than just giving a head nod:

**Excerpt 6.64: Session 8 – Everybody Agree**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>899</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Does everybody agree with that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>901</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Yep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>902</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Mm hmm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Excerpt 6.65: Session 8-Difficult to Follow**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1380</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>So does that capture it? Difficult to follow when used to being the leader?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1382</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1383</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1384</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Mm hmm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Excerpt 6.66: Session 8-Move On**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1391</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Okay. Are we good with this? So we can move on to developing alternatives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1393</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Mm hmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1394</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Mm hmm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Excerpt 6.67: Session 8-Subgroups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1568</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>I had the same idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1569</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>You did too?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1570</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1571</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>So?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1572</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Cuz I would make them smaller.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
217

1573 Tabitha       Did you think of other sub-groups? Ways to cate- Ways to subgroup?
1575 Darlene       Hmm mm. Those were the two I thought of.
1576 Holly         Well. How about just the types of the cell groups? Even?
1578 Tabitha       Okay.
1579 Holly         You know you have cell groups that are built on educational things. And cell
groups that are built on just social?
1582 Darlene       Yeah.
1583 Holly         And the interaction in those is totally different. (5.5)
1585 Tabitha       Yeah. And we have (2.6) And I would add a third category on there? The
ones that are task-oriented?
1588 Holly         Mmm hm.
1589 Tabitha       They meet to do something very specific
1590 Samantha      Like the quilters.
1591 Tabitha       Yeah. Like the quilters or like the choir? They meet to prepare to sing on
Sunday morning?
1594 Cassidy        Sure.
1595 Tabitha       Yeah.

Excerpt 6.67 contains several examples of questions followed by a minimal response of
agreement: lines 1570, 1578, 1582, 1588, 1594, and 1595. By using minimal responses, all of the women
seemed to indicate their participation in the conversation. Even though not all the speakers voiced new
ideas, by agreeing to ideas that were shared, the speakers were able to demonstrate their participation.

The final examples I present of using minimal responses of agreement happened when a
speaker shared an idea and others in the group signified their listening by offering minimal responses. In
these instances, the minimal responses allowed multiple speakers to indicate their participation yet
permitted a primary speaker to finish her thought. Excerpt 6.68 occurred in response to a question
Cassidy asked at the conclusion of a narrative conveying a negative experience she had encountered in
one of her small groups: “how do you prepare for that?” The minimal responses are italicized for
emphasis:

Excerpt 6.68: Session 4-Ground Rules

1853 Tabitha       I think part of is- we talked about this the very first week. About having
ground rules?
1856 Cassidy        Yeah.
1857 Tabitha       And um. That taking time with your group to either give them ground rules?
Or create ground rules with the group. I think? Especially when you've got
the same group of people that have to meet all the time. And be in the
same space with each other? And it just gives them some guidelines. Of tact? Uhm. For one. And also it helps get to the good end? More often than the than the 9 (.) shocking end. "O::kay. What do we say now?" Cuz a lot of times when something's thrown out like that? It's just a conversation ender?

1870 Darlene Mmmmm Hmmm
1871 Holly Yes.
1872 Samantha That's right.
1873 Tabitha And then it's a matter- It's just shut down. And you- you tell a joke and you move on to something else?
1876 Darlene Mmm hmmm.
1877 Tabitha Cuz (.). You (.). Cuz (.). You- Sometimes you don't need everybody in the room? To (.). deal with something that just happened.

In Excerpt 6.68, I offered an idea and all the other participants, Cassidy (Line 1856), Darlene (Line 1870), Holly (Line 1871), and Samantha (Line 1872), voiced minimal responses of agreement. Samantha and Holly voiced their responses at the same time as indicated by the half-brackets. The participants’ minimal responses were mostly well-timed, coming at the end of specific thoughts. In this manner, all the women were able to participate in the conversation yet allowed me to continue sharing my idea. Similar instances occurred in Session 8 when Samantha was sharing her perspectives on attending small-group leadership trainings at the church:

**Excerpt 6.69: Session 8-From My Perspective**

1033 Samantha Do you think we should make it group leaders who normally attend. And group leaders who don't? Or group leaders who want to build relationships and group leaders who don't. Or group leaders? Or something like that. I'm one who has gone to one. I'll just be honest. And usually it's not because I don't want to build relationships. It's because I'd like a break. And I'm not gonna get my kids out of bed. To go to church at nine in the morning. Cuz I do that every day. And for it's like? You know what I mean?

1046 Holly Yeah.
1047 Samantha So from my perspective on Sunday afternoon all I want to do is go home and get ready for Cleansing Stream? Not go? You know what I mean?
1051 Holly Yeah.
1052 Samantha And so. You have to figure out. There's two different types. But then I know the importance of it. So it's not that I don't want to?
1056 Holly Mm hmmm.
1057 Samantha It's (.). I don't know? So it just seems like there would be maybe even more than two kinds of group leaders. Perspectives.
1060 Darlene Mmm hmmm.
1061 (3.5)
Excerpt 6.70: Session 8-Only Real Involvement

1284 Samantha Or even people who aren't. Like this is their only real involvement.
1286 Darlene Mm hmm.
1287 Samantha Cuz I mean? (2.6) We're around people at the church all the time. But there are some people? The only time they come to church is on Sunday morning. And they don't have any relationships with anyone in the church. And they would like to? Or like you know the people who feel really lonely?
1295 Holly Mm hmm.
1296 Samantha And so for them? It's an awesome thing to?
1297 Holly Mm hmm.
1298 (3.5)

In both of these examples, Samantha served as the primary speaker. The only interjections from other speakers were minimal responses of agreement. The minimal responses were well-timed coming at the end of logical phrases. It is clear by the lengthy pauses of over three seconds each at the conclusion of these excerpts that the women were allowing Samantha ample time to fully share her ideas. Minimal responses were a discernable pattern of talk for this group. The women were able to manage their participation in the conversation by skillfully voicing minimal responses.

Conveying agreement was the most common purpose of using a minimal response. However, there were a few instances when disagreement was conveyed through a minimal response such as me neither, no, nope, and uh-uh. In these cases, clarification was sought regarding specific information. In Session 1, Holly posed: “I’ve been married twenty-four years. Has anybody else?” The group gave a choral response of “no” (Lines 193-195). In Excerpt 6.10 (presented previously), Cassidy posed: “I lived in four states. Has anyone else?” Holly responded with a simple “no.”

The group also used minimal responses as a way to offer a speaker encouragement. Words such as cool, good job, that’s good, very good, it’s alright, and there you go were all used to encourage other speakers. The use of minimal responses to convey encouragement declined throughout the eight sessions. In Session 1, 11% of minimal responses conveyed encouragement. By Session 8, only 2% conveyed encouragement. To illustrate minimal responses of encouragement, I draw on previously presented excerpts. The minimal responses of encouragement are italicized for emphasis:
Excerpt 6.71: Session 1-We all have cars. (repeated presentation of 6.28)

72 Tabitha What are you thinking?
74 Holly We all have cars. (4)
75 Cassidy There you go.
76 Samantha Good job.

Excerpt 6.72: Session 1-Females (repeated presentation of 6.57)

39 Samantha Okay. We’re all female.
40 Cassidy Okay.
41 Holly Very good.

Excerpt 6.73: Session 4-Women’s Retreat (Repeated Presentation of 6.63)

1098 Darlene Are you going to Women’s Retreat?
1099 Cassidy Yeah.
1100 Darlene That’s good.

In these three excerpts, Cassidy, Samantha, Holly, and Darlene all conveyed encouragement through a minimal response. Using minimal responses for encouragement was a way for the group to recognize when speaker had taken a risk by sharing, and reward that risk with an encouraging word. This pattern is frequently found in classrooms as teachers comment “good job” to students (Nystrand, et al., 2003).

So far, in this section, I have presented examples of minimal responses used to convey agreement, disagreement, and encouragement. Another category of minimal responses offered by the focal group was used to convey surprise or dismay. I coded these as exclamations. The exclamations used by the focal group included oh my goodness, holy cow, oh my, oh man, oh great, and wow. The next few excerpts occurred in Session 1 as the women were looking for characteristics that were unique to the individual. As the women were sharing about their lives, several exclamations punctuated the conversation. In Excerpt 6.74, first Holly (Line 203) and then Darlene (Line 212) used the exclamation “oh my goodness” to convey their surprise. The minimal responses used as exclamations were italicized for emphasis:
Excerpt 6.74: Session 1-Married in Kindergarten (repeated presentation of 6.30)

198 Cassidy How long have you been married?  
199 Darlene Seventeen years. (3.6) Seems like a long time.  
200 Group laughter  
201 Holly Has it been that long?  
202 Cassidy You're not very old.  
203 Holly Oh my goodness.  
204 Cassidy You must have gotten married in kindergarten.  
205 Darlene Yeah! We did.  
206 Group laughter  
207 Tabitha Just about. You looked like it.  
208 Darlene No, Todd did. Todd looked like it.  
209 Holly How old were you?  
210 Darlene I was (.) two weeks from twenty.  
211 Holly Oh, honey. I've got you way beat. I was only seventeen.  
212 Darlene Oh my goodness.

Excerpt 6.75: Session 1-Holy Cow

285 Holly And then the three boys. Lana and Pierce are only. They're the same age for two weeks. I got pregnant with Pierce when I was four months. When Lana was four months old.  
289 Cassidy Holy cow.  
290 Holly So. Four kids in five years. And then a hysterectomy. Laughter.

Excerpt 6.76: Session 1-Crazy

403 Samantha I've been. I've biked over Going to the Sun highway.  
405 Darlene Oh my goodness. You're crazy.  
406 Holly Oh.  
407 Darlene Put crazy on that line.  
408 Group laughter.  
409 Darlene Oh my.

Excerpt 6.77: Session 8-Through the Hole

429 Darlene Whoa. I have to follow you. Right?  
430 Samantha You have to cuz-  
431 Darlene Cuz I have to go through here.  
432 Cassidy You've got to go through here too.  
433 Darlene Oh my goodness.  
434 Samantha Is this the hole you have to go through?  
435 Darlene Yeah. Oh no.  
436 Group laughter  
437 Darlene We have a knot?  
438 All YES!  
439 Darlene Wow.
There were 41 turns coded as minimal responses of exclamation. Their exclamations seemed to be very polite, as is consistent with their identification of being involved in church ministry. As indicated in the excerpts above, bursts of laughter also occurred in close proximity to the exclamation. The next section will describe the patterns of laughter used as minimal responses.

Laughter was another type of a minimal response used by the focal group. Whenever laughter occurs, it is always in response to a speaker’s utterance (Coates, 1996). Through sharing in laughter, participants indicated they were contributing to the conversation. Session 1 had the most laughter in it, with 16.2% of the total responses coded as laughter and 37% of the minimal response turns. When a speaker joined in the laughter, she was signaling her participation in the conversation. Laughter was a response to utterances of teasing or joking, enthusiasm or excitement, agreement or sympathy, and as a way to convey nervousness or to ease tension. I accentuated the lines of group laughter with italics in the excerpts below.

From Excerpt 6.12, the group responded to Cassidy’s statement with laughter. In their laughter, they conveyed an agreeing sympathy:

1618 Cassidy But. Um. I talk a lot less after I work all day cuz I talked all day long. So it’s nicer to sit and be quiet. (2.4) You learn at work that if you talk too much you get in trouble anyways.

1622 Group laughter

This happens again in Session 8, taken from Excerpt 5.4. The group responded with laughter to show their agreeing sympathy:

Excerpt 6.78: Session 8-We’ll help

156 Cassidy We’ll help each other.

157 Group Laughter

In Session 1, the group responded with laughter to Darlene’s excitement:

Excerpt 6.79: Session 1-Excited

1518 Tabitha You’re just excited? Aren’t you?
Darlene: I already learned a whole bunch.

Group laughter

Shortly following the discussion of concerns in Session 1, group laughter occurred. The first instance of laughter in Excerpt 6.80 (Line 1567) came as a way to release tension. The second instance of laughter (Line 1569) responded to Darlene joking sarcasm. These two exchanges are presented in Excerpt 6.80:

Excerpt 6.80: Session 1: Time to Reflect (repeated presentation of 5.7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line 1566</th>
<th>Tabitha</th>
<th>Now is your time to reflect.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L 1567</td>
<td>Group laughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 1568</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>I have a concern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 1569</td>
<td>Group laughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As similar combination of laughter to diffuse tension and respond to teasing sarcasm happened during a reflection activity in Session 4. Excerpt 6.81 presents the laughter-filled exchange:

Excerpt 6.80: Session 4-I Used to Like This Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line 1006</th>
<th>Cassidy</th>
<th>I used to like this class.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L 1007</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>I know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 1008</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>(laughing) I heard that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 1009</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>I’m skipping next time. No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 1010</td>
<td>Group laughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 1011</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>I’m with you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Session 8, while the group was trying to tie a knot, Darlene instigated a teasing comment. The exchange culminated with shared laughter in Excerpt 6.81:

Excerpt 6.81: Session 8-We Did It Wrong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line 141</th>
<th>Darlene</th>
<th>Okay Miss Boss. Did we get it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L 142</td>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>Here’s your sample.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 143</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Oh my goodness. We didn’t get it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 144</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>We did it wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 145</td>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>We did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 146</td>
<td>Group laughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Excerpt 6.83, an abbreviated version of Excerpt 5.2, from Session 1, presents how laughter helped to ease the tension. The group seemed to be feeling very awkward getting started in their activity and conversation:

**Excerpt 6.83: Session 1-Strawberries (repeated presentation of Excerpt 5.2)**

82 Samantha It's true. (9.3). Uhmmm. (2.5) Does anyone not like strawberries?
84 Tabitha I like strawberries.
85 Samantha You like strawberries?
86 Holly Yeah, I do.
87 Samantha Okay.
88 Group laughter

In Session 8, the group began an activity to establish ground rules for their deliberation. The conversation had some awkward moments eased by laughter. After several exchanges, Holly stated in line 681 “how long are we allowed to stay?” Her inference was that it was taking so long to figure out the ground rules she was concerned that they would be at my house a long time to complete all the deliberation activity steps. The group instantly responded with laughter. This laughter helped to ease their tension with the activity. Through their laughter, the women signaled their participation in the conversation.

The previous several pages have demonstrated the use of minimal responses in the group’s talk. Minimal responses occurred during community-building activities, teaching activities, and reflection activities. Minimal responses were used to convey agreement, disagreement, and encourage other speakers’ risk-taking. Their minimal responses were well-timed, coming at the end of natural breaks in an utterance. These well-time interjections allowed the conversation to flow with ease. A speaker could take a longer time sharing an idea when the other participants used minimal responses to indicate their listening and continued assent for the person speaking. The patterns of minimal responses of the focal group seem very similar to those indicated by Coates (1996) for informal friendship groups.

Nearly one-third of all the turns were minimal responses. All the women in the group, including the facilitator, used minimal responses to signal their participation in the conversation, by conveying
agreement, disagreement, encouragement, exclamations, and offering laughter. Each of the speakers had indicated their access to discursive power and used their turns to offer minimal responses. After examining minimal responses, I found that the focal group was mostly characteristic of a friendship group speech community. Although the focal group contains elements of both formal and informal speech communities, in the case of minimal responses, the focal group employed the same pattern of utilizing minimal responses as informal speech communities by indicating that they all had access to discursive power.

The turn-by-turn discursive practices meld together presenting a picture of the focal group’s atmosphere of safety and trust that is built and maintained through their discursive practices of asking one another questions to invite further discussion, using repetition to show coherence and attention to one another, and offering minimal responses to indicate participation without hindering other speakers from sharing ideas fully. The next feature of the focal group’s talk is overlapping turns. Many minimal responses and the use of repetition were also evident in the overlapping talk.

**Overlapping Turns**

When people talk, sometimes their turns will overlap, so that more than one person speaks at a time. Within more formal speech communities, overlapping turns is discouraged; the turns are considered to be interruptions resulting from a judgment error in timing (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). Speakers in institutional talk will interrupt another person in order to gain the right to speak. Frequently, the person being interrupted will stop talking even though his/her thought was not completed. In this manner, the interrupted speaker will defer to the one who is exercising more authority by violating the one-person-speaks-at-a-time discursive practice. The person with more discursive authority can use an interruption successfully to silence others. The reverse would be absurd. Imagine a fourth grade student interrupting his teacher in order to correct her vocabulary. As the student has less discursive authority than the teacher, this interruption would be an extreme violation of acceptable classroom discursive
practices. Through the use of interruptions, a speech community is able to maintain the institutional roles and the discursive practices available to those with differing roles.

The talk of a friendship group does not have the same goal of maintaining distance between those with and without discursive power. Instead, the group uses talk to maintaining close relationships by talking for one another and saying the same things at the same time. Within friendship groups, overlapping talk is a primary means by which a group jointly-constructs turns (Coates, 1996). With jointly-constructed talk, multiple speakers meld their utterances together to form complete thoughts.

Through my analysis, I found the focal group’s talk also contained patterns of jointly-constructed talk. To demonstrate how the focal group’s talk is jointly constructed through their overlapping turns, I present excerpts of the transcript in three ways: 1) melded, 2) speaker change, and 3) complete transcript. The melded version of an excerpt shows a complete thought without indicating the number of turns or speakers involved. The speaker-change version of the excerpt indicates with the symbol // when a new speaker and therefore a new turn starts. The final version of the excerpt contains the transcription conventions utilized for this data set. Examining the melded versions demonstrates how some ideas in the conversation were jointly constructed by multiple speakers:

**Excerpt 6.84: Session 8-Go Under (Melded version)**

I think you have to go under under this and up to the top. Is that right?

**Excerpt 6.84: Session 8-Go Under (Speaker Change version)**

I think you have to go // under // under this and up to the top. Is that right?

**Excerpt 6.84: Session 8—Go Under**

59 Darlene       I think you have to go
60 Samantha      under
61 Holly         under this and up to the top. Is that right?

In Excerpt 6.84 above, the melded version reveals one coherent utterance was voiced. One has to review the transcript version in order to understand that Darlene, Samantha, and Holly were involved
in creating this one utterance. For another example, I present Excerpt 6.85. Again, I will provide the excerpt in three ways: 1) melded, 2) speaker change, and 3) complete transcript:

**Excerpt 6.85: Session 4-Shouldn’t Do That (melded)**

And like praying for patience. Yeah. You shouldn’t do that. You shouldn’t do that. You should never pray for patience. Because the lessons that come are just too hard.

**Excerpt 6.85: Session 4-Shouldn’t Do That (speaker change)**

And like praying for patience. // Yeah. You shouldn’t do that. // You shouldn’t do that. // You should never pray for patience. Because the lessons that come are just too hard.

**Excerpt 6.85: Session 4-Shouldn’t Do That**

919 Tabitha And like praying for patience-
920 Darlene Yeah. You shouldn’t do that.
921 Samantha You shouldn’t do that.
922 Tabitha You should never pray for patience. Because the lessons that come are just too hard.

Once again, three speakers are involved to create one thought. Coates (1996) states that “this level of collaboration can only be achieved when speakers pay extremely close attention to each other” (p. 119). The women seem to be speaking with one voice, seamlessly connecting their turns. In this section, I present two ways in which the group demonstrated how they were closely monitoring each speaker’s contribution to the conversation: 1) continuation of turns and 2) completion of other’s utterances. Both of these discursive practices occur in conjunction with overlapping talk.

**Continuation of Turns**

It appears that many of the speaker’s turns were interrupted as the turns were incomplete. However, the conversations for the most part did not feel abrupt, awkward, or disconnected due to interruptions. Some turns were incomplete because the speaker quit talking and did not finish the thought. Some turns were incomplete because another speaker started talking and the original speaker stopped talking.
In this section, I will focus on these instances where a speaker continued her thought across multiple turns as other speakers interjected their own utterances in the middle of the originating speaker’s thought. I coded these as continuation of turn. Table 6.7 shows the number of turns coded as a continuation. Many of the continuations occurred during the sharing of a narrative.

Table 6.8

*Continuation Turns by Participant by Session*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuation</th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th>Session 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turns</td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>Turns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I identified many of the turns as continuations: Session 1-14.4%, Session 4-22.5%, and Session 8-10.4%. There does not appear to be a discernable pattern regarding the number of continuation turns, just that they occurred. The highest percentage of continuation turns occurred in Session 4.

A closer examination of the turn-by-turn interaction of the group clarifies ways in which a speaker was able to continue her thoughts through multiple turns due to the overlapping nature of the group’s talk. I present a few examples to demonstrate the group’s discursive pattern of having an incomplete turn, allowing other speaker comments, and then the original speaker continuing her thought in another turn.

During Session 8, the group was enacting a deliberation about best practices for small group leadership development. By this time, the group was enacting consistent rules for turn taking: other participants were welcome to interject minimal responses, comments, questions, or laughter. The
following five excerpts reveal how each participant enacted the focal group’s turn-taking rules when overlapping talk occurred. Often the originating speaker simply continued with her train-of-thought or incorporated the interjecting speaker’s comment into her next turn through a repetition. In Excerpt 6.86, Holly was the originating speaker. I used a minimal response at a natural break in Holly’s speaking. Holly continued and ended her train-of-thought with “you know?” (Line 887) indicating that others were welcome to continue commenting:

**Excerpt 6.86: Session 8-The Basic Idea**

880 Holly I like the basic idea of the relationship building part. Because I think you're more likely to get people to work on the general goal by working through relationship instead of starting at the educational end.

886 Tabitha Mm hmm.

887 Holly You know?

The conversation continued as shown in the next excerpt (6.87). For this excerpt, Cassidy was the originating speaker. Once again, I interjected minimal responses twice (Lines 891 and 894). Cassidy continued her thought over three turns, in effect answering the question she rhetorically posed:

**Excerpt 6.86: Session 8-Disappointed**

888 Cassidy It’s really easy to be disappointed if you’re shooting for hundred percent participation?

891 Tabitha Yeah.

892 Cassidy For anything. That would be really tough to come up with very often.

894 Tabitha Right.

895 Cassidy I think anytime you add a number? Just about. You're destined to be disappointed. One way or the other. You know what I mean?

A few lines later, Samantha was the originating speaker. As in the previous excerpt, I interjected two minimal responses as shown in Excerpt 6.88. Removing the turns of interjected minimal responses leaves one continuous train-of-thought:

**Excerpt 6.88: Session 8-In Theory**

904 Samantha So in theory we could say developing community among small group leaders by having a higher average attend the meetings? Or? But? Are meetings the- it almost seems to me that if we don’t- the meetings are not thee- the meetings don’t have to happen.
Tabitha: Right.
Samantha: It sounds to me like you are open to other ideas besides those meetings every month. Every other month.
Tabitha: Right.
Samantha: So it's not necessarily how we get people to this meeting? But if there's another idea out there to develop community among small group leaders than that's okay?

In the next excerpt, Darlene was the originating speaker. I interjected a minimal response of agreement. In this case, I interjected in the middle of Darlene’s utterance. Yet, Darlene did not indicate anything was wrong and continued speaking, despite the overlapping talk:

Excerpt 6.89: Session 8-Oversight

Darlene: I think they should be included as stakeholders because (.) they are (.) part of the leadership
Tabitha: Alright.
Darlene: of the Connection Ministry itself. (.) Or oversight.

In the fifth excerpt, I was the originating speaker. Darlene interjected a minimal response at a natural break of my utterance. This turn-taking pattern continued regardless of who was the originating speaker. Throughout these overlapping turns, the speakers were able to demonstrate their attention to the conversation and indicate participation with minimal responses:

Excerpt 6.90: Session 8-Avoid Burnout

Tabitha: My second reason for really wanting to really do something with the leaders is to avoid burnout. Because our church has a history of sucking in people? And draining every last bit of life out of them? And then we spit them out.
Darlene: Mm hmm.
Tabitha: And that's. (. ) If you are really really hardy stock? You survive. Otherwise you don't. Um. And that's culturally a part of doing ministry in our church.

In other instances, the whole group interjected laughter in the midst of one speaker’s train-of-thought. The laughter often caused the originating speaker to pause in her utterance and resume talking after the laughter had subsided. This discursive pattern of overlapping turns was found in the three sessions analyzed and for all five of the speakers:
Excerpt 6.91: Session 1-Where’s Her Video Camera?

1389 Darlene I would have to agree with that. Because I didn’t even think about it for an hour. When we were done with that little thing. And then I went oh yeah where’s her video camera?
1393 Group laughter
1394 Darlene So I didn’t even think about it until then. But I’ve been in her Sunday school class.

Excerpt 6.92: Session 1-Talk Too Much

1618 Cassidy But. Um. I talk a lot less after I work all day cuz I talked all day long. So it's nicer to sit and be quiet. (2.4) You learn at work that if you talk too much you get in trouble anyways.
1622 Group laughter
1623 Cassidy So I shut up. Normally I would talk a lot. (3.2)

Excerpt 6.93: Session 4-Priority List

903 Tabitha Well. I just wanted to take some time to get caught up? Because once groups get started again? Things can take on a whole different- your priority list? Sometimes can change?
908 Group laughter
909 Tabitha Like you experienced? “Okay I really need to know about now. It didn’t seem quite so important before.” But it’s kind of everywhere.

Excerpt 6.94: Session 4-Dull Class

926 Holly Are you going to teach about how to teach a dull class today?
928 Group laughter
929 Holly This is the lesson I want to hear.

Excerpt 6.95: Session 8-Just So You’re Aware

30 Holly If you’re trying to feed me through a loop of arms
32 Group laughter
33 Holly This is going to be really not a good thing.
35 Group laughter
36 Holly Just want you to know that. Just so you’re aware.

Excerpt 6.96: Session 8-With the Right Group

2093 Samantha With the right group of people.
2094 Group laughter
2095 Samantha Not like Darlene's group.
The focal group was able to maintain a free flowing conversation despite the overlapping turns because of the discursive practices of utilizing minimal responses including sharing in laughter. Each speaker was able to continue her thoughts, even if it happened over the course of several turns due to interjections or laughter from other participants. Because of this practice, I believe the group was able to maintain an atmosphere of safety in which speakers were able to share their thoughts, give and receive encouragement, and even disagree with one another. The use of continued turns allowed the group to have a highly interactive conversational style. The focal group’s continuation of turns was most similar to the turn-taking found within informal speech communities.

**Completion of Other’s Utterances**

Conversations are riddled with incomplete sentences, improper grammatical structures, and ill-formed thoughts. In this section, I present the second discursive practice used by the focal group in response to overlapping talk: utterance completion. Sometimes a speaker will solicit help from others in the conversation to provide her with the right word. Other times an attentive participant will complete another person’s thought, anticipating the words to come.

First, I offer excerpts that demonstrate typical examples of how the women completed each other’s sentences. Second, I show how the women used questions to complete another’s thought. Third, I present excerpts in which a speaker asked others for help selecting a word to complete her thought. Finally, I present excerpts in which the sentence completions were corrected by the thought originator.

The first excerpt below occurred in Session 1. Samantha offered a word completing Holly’s thought. Holly showed her agreement with the word choice by repeating the word “convinced”:

**Excerpt 6.97: Session 1—Really Convinced**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>230</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Yeah. Well. But I don't recommend it. I don't think I would for my kids unless I was really really convinced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>233</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>re:::ally convinced.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next excerpt occurred in Session 8 at the beginning of the group’s time together. Members were working through a team-building exercise. They used their words to reason through the task. In the excerpt, Darlene started the thought, Samantha interjected the word “under,” and Holly repeated the word “under” and finished the thought. In line 63, Darlene voiced her agreement regarding how the other two speakers had completed her utterance:

Excerpt 6.98: Session 8—Go Under (repeated presentation of 6.83)

59 Darlene I think you have to go  
60 Samantha under  
61 Holly under this and up to the top. Is that right?  
63 Darlene Yeah.

Later in the session, as the group was reflecting on the activity, the following excerpt occurred. In this instance, Cassidy began a thought and Darlene completed it. On her next turn, Cassidy completed her thought with the a similar idea to Darlene’s. Holly’s turn further elaborated the main thought Cassidy initiated:

Excerpt 6.99: Session 8–It Was a Trick

488 Cassidy It’s good to not have somebody let you quit. I guess that’s a good thing. Even though it’s frustrating. Or to know that there is a solution. I was beginning to think that  
493 Darlene it was a trick.  
494 Cassidy That it was just to see how long we’d do it for. Yeah  
496 Holly Before we said it can’t be done.

Essentially, the thought was heard as one sentence: I was beginning to think that it was a trick—\textit{that it was just to see how long we’d do it for before we said it can’t be done}. Yet, three voices were involved to make the complete thought. The woman appeared to be utilizing discursive practices of jointly-constructed turns as they overlapped their turns by completing each other’s thoughts.

The next two excerpts are examples of how questions may be used to complete thoughts, once again indicating jointly-constructed utterances. Holly had several pauses in her utterance. I suggested a
sentence completion, but offered it as a question to seek Holly’s consent that I was providing a correct word choice. Holly voiced her assent in line 65:

**Excerpt 6.100: Session 1-Feels Good?**

62 Holly Yeah. I'm fairly certain. (. ) My spirit feels (. ) um (. )
64 Tabitha Feels good?
65 Holly Yes.

Another form of using a question occurred when the utterance originator does not complete a thought, but used an up-tone indicating a question. In this manner, the other speakers are invited to participate in completing the speaker’s utterance:

**Excerpt 6.101: Session 8-Choose a Side**

976 Tabitha Once you call for a vote. You expect people to?
978 Cassidy Choose a side.
979 Tabitha Choose a side. That can lead you into very sticky waters that you may not recover from.

**Excerpt 6.102: Session 4-Push Your Buttons**

1224 Darlene People who are confrontational just to get a rise out of you. Who?
1226 Cassidy Push your buttons.
1227 Darlene Yeah. Push your buttons.

Another sentence completion occurred when the original speaker asked for help when seeking the right word. During Session 1, Samantha had been sharing about some long bicycle rides with her family. Holly and Darlene both voiced their need for a different type of bike when the following exchange occurred. Darlene described the type of bicycle, but could not remember the correct term. Samantha provided the answer:

**Excerpt 6.103: Session 8-Recumbent Bikes (repeated presentation of 6.62)**

428 Holly Then maybe it would be comfortable. Can you see me on a tractor seat. That would be good for me.
430 Darlene One of those sitting bikes? You know. Where your legs are out in front of you?
431 Holly Yeah.
433 Samantha Is it called recumbent? Yeah. Recumbent.
The second excerpt on using questions to complete an utterance occurred at the end of Session 8. The group was supposed to be writing in their journals, when Samantha shared an incomplete thought. This is a longer excerpt as there were several turns in which the speakers offered word-choice suggestions to Samantha. Cassidy and I both offer suggestions, but in this case we never fully arrived at a completed thought:

Excerpt 6.104: Session 8–Awards

2015 Samantha I thought of another thing. Is have awards. Having like a a reward or I can’t think of the word I’m looking for?
2018 Tabitha Door prizes?
2019 Samantha No not door prizes like
2020 Tabitha Recognitions
2021 Cassidy Certificates of completion or something
2022 Samantha Like
2023 Tabitha Did you hear what Cassidy said?
2024 Samantha Yeah. Like certificates
2025 Tabitha Of completion
2026 Samantha Like I’m thinking of whichever group leader’s attend their group will get this. It’s not an award but like a
2029 Cassidy Motivator?
2030 Samantha Like a motivator in some way. Or something like that. Yeah. Just another idea
2032 Tabitha Okay.
2033 Holly If a group leader comes every time you get a pizza party? That would be a great motivation.
2036 Samantha Some kind of. Award’s not the idea. Something.
2038 Tabitha To appeal to those who are competitive?

The previous examples demonstrate different ways in which the women completed one another’s thoughts. Excerpt 6.104 was an unsuccessful sentence completion as we could not help Samantha find the right word. However, there were some instances in which the sentence completions were a little off. The first example occurred in Session 1. I was explaining ground rules for our group to follow, when Samantha offered a sentence completion that was a little off. I did not outwardly disagree with her, but I replaced her word with my own choice. In previous examples, the originating speaker would repeat the suggested word and therefore convey tacit agreement:
Excerpt 6.105 Session 1-Interruptive

1156 Tabitha So either the- These are the rules I've proposed. The first one is no interrupting. Now of course as women that's kind of hard cuz our discourse style is very

1160 Samantha Long.

1161 Tabitha Interruptive. We like to interrupt each other.

Later in Session 1, Holly was speaking and Cassidy tried to complete her thought. Cassidy and Holly both spoke at the same time but provided very different ideas. Yet, Holly seemed to have heard Cassidy's statement and agreed with the offered idea as evidenced in line 1704:

Excerpt 6.106: Session 1-I Thought...

1697 Holly Ground rules was good. I thought about that because I'm doing (.) I have a WM's meeting coming up next week and it's just a lot of change. And I thought "Oh man, does this I"We need ground rules." I

1703 Cassidy 1

1704 Holly Oh man. I'm not kidding you. Cuz you know? We don't all agree? I mean I need- I'm gonna read the chapter on conflict first thing.

These excerpts could be interpreted as errors in utterance completion; however, the women frequently incorporated the utterances into their turns or continued the conversation without disruption. The typical sentence completions occurred much more frequently and often contained repetitions. Because the women tended to overlap their speech, finish each other’s sentences, and interject comments and questions, it seems natural to have a few anticipations miss the mark.

In characterizing the focal group members’ overlapping turns, two common discursive practices were found: 1) continuation of turns, and 2) completion of thoughts. The speakers would continue a thought across multiple turns as others in the group offer comments, questions, or laughter. The focal group also used a pattern of completing one another’s thoughts. These discursive practices of overlapping talk indicate the focal group was jointly-constructing their turns, much like informal, friendship talk.
Within formal speech communities, overlapping turns cause disruptions to the talk. By overlapping and thereby interrupting another speaker, speakers can complete for the right to speak. The person who quits talking gives up the right to speak. There was little evidence of competitive speech in the focal group’s talk.

As I examined the transcript of the focal group, I was struck by the degree to which their talk seemed to be jointly constructed. To this point, I have described discursive practices that lend to the focal group being characterized as a blended-space speech community in which elements of both formal and informal speech communities were evident. However, with the discursive practice of overlapping talk, the focal group appears to function like an informal friendship group: thoughts were continued through multiple turns and group member’s completed one another’s sentences. Coates (1996) notes that the jointly-constructed talk of friendship groups is a means by which participant’s show involvement in the talk and maintain close relationships by talking for one another and saying the same words as the same time.

I was intrigued by the finding that the focal group’s turn-by-turn discursive practices of minimal responses and overlapping turns worked together to integrate multiple speakers into a conversation in a similar manner to informal, friendship talk. Up to this point, all the discursive practices I examined clearly indicated a blended-space speech community. I am uncertain of the relevance of this finding; however, I think it is interesting that despite the formal elements of the leadership-development program that for minimal responses and overlapping turns, the focal group functioned like a friendship group. I wonder if these two discursive practices are more indicative of female talk and not merely informal groups.

**Conclusion**

The focal group has been described in this chapter based on the turn-by-turn discursive practices. I examined adjacency pairs to understand how the group’s talk was shaped from speaker to
speaker and turn to turn. Four areas of discursive practices were presented including 1) responding to questions, 2) utilizing repetition, 3) offering minimal responses, and 4) overlapping turns.

The focal group used questions to clarify activity procedures, clarify what a speaker had shared, seek more detailed information from a speaker as a way to extend the conversation, prompt participation, and pose rhetorical questions. The focal group did not require participants to respond to questions like a formal speech community; however, participants were encouraged to respond through teasing, prompting questions, and personal invitations. Unlike an informal group where friends are able to freely answer or deflect questions, within the focal group, the members all worked to ensure that each one had an opportunity to respond to questions. In this respect, the focal group may be characterized as a blended space in which participants were all free to ask a variety of questions and were encouraged to respond to posed questions.

The focal group also utilized repetition as a discursive practice. The repetition served multiple purposes including bringing coherence to talk, provided participants a way to convey agreement, disagreement, or encouragement. In formal speech communities repetition is often considered superfluous. In contrast, within friendship talk, repetition is considered fundamental to maintaining interpersonal solidarity, signal agreement and involvement, and express a group voice. The focal group’s discursive pattern regarding repetition exists in a blended space between formal and informal. The blended space can be characterized and utilizing purposeful repetition. I believe this purposeful repetition provided a means for the group to express consensus and still explore differences.

These first two discursive practices conform to the blended space I have been characterizing throughout the analysis both in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. However, the final two discursive practices do not as easily align with this pattern. The focal group offered minimal responses and had overlapping turns. For both of these practices, the focal group did not follow the patterns of formal speech communities. When I compared the focal group discursive practices to research on friendship talk, I was
not able to distinguish any difference. In regards to offering minimal responses and overlapping turns, the focal group functioned like an informal speech community.

The focal group offered minimal responses to signal participation in the conversation by offering minimal responses of agreement and disagreement, encouragement and exclamations, and laughter. This use of minimal responses is possible because all of the speakers have access to discursive power. Having access to discursive power obligates a speaker to indicate her participation in the conversation. Minimal responses and laughter provide a means for a speaker to demonstrate her participation.

The focal group also made use of overlapping turns to jointly construct thoughts within their conversation. The group responded to overlapping turns by continuing their thoughts even though other speakers have interjected questions, comments, or laughter. The turns were continued and the group would complete each other’s utterances to show high levels of involvement in the conversation. The women also were able to maintain close relationships by talking for one another and saying the same thing at same time. Table 6.8 summarizes the turn-by-turn discursive practices discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 provided a higher-level analysis of the talk of the focal group. The above-the-sentence discursive practices include 1) managing the conversational floor, 2) enacting discursive power, 3) offering representations of reality, and 4) maintaining appropriate relationships. The focal group’s above-the-sentence practices characterized a blended space in which the group 1) has a facilitated conversational floor, 2) enacted discursive power by distributing their talk, 3) deliberated their representations of reality, and 4) used talk to explore relational development.

The analysis has focused on a description of the nature of the talk for the focal group. I have described the talk based on a continuum of formality. The analysis resulted in describing the focal group as a blended space for six of the eight discursive practices. The final two discursive practices were characteristic of informal, friendship groups. In the next chapter, I will explore possible implications regarding discursive patterns within a blended space as well as the potential for teacher professional
development utilizing an inquiry stance to explore group discursive practices based on a framework of formality which incorporates the blended-space characteristics presented in the last two chapters.

Table 6.9

**Turn-by-Turn Discursive Practices for the Focal Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formal – “Institutional”</th>
<th>Blended Space</th>
<th>Informal – “Friendship”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responding to Questions</td>
<td><strong>Required Responses:</strong> Question asked requires an answer to that question; answers must conform to acceptable response norms</td>
<td><strong>Encouraged Responses:</strong> Various types of questions were asked; when responses weren’t forthcoming participants encouraged responses</td>
<td><strong>Optional Responses:</strong> Questions are asked for myriad and complex purposes; questions do not require answers so that respondents are free to answer or deflect questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing Repetition</td>
<td><strong>Superfluous:</strong> Use of repetition by a speaker is viewed as redundancy or insecurity</td>
<td><strong>Purposeful:</strong> Repetition served multiple purposes including bring coherence to talk, conveying agreement, disagreement, or provide encouragement</td>
<td><strong>Fundamental:</strong> Repetition used to maintain interpersonal solidarity, signals agreement and involvement, and expresses group voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering Minimal Responses</td>
<td><strong>Absent Discursive Power:</strong> Minimal responses recognize authority; convey agreement; polite resistance; constrain anger &amp; frustration</td>
<td><strong>Access to Discursive Power:</strong> Signals participation in the conversation by offering minimal responses of agreement and disagreement, encouragement and exclamations, and laughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlapping Turns</td>
<td><strong>Interrupted Turns:</strong> Error in judgment; way to compete for the right to speak; maintain proper distance of institutional roles</td>
<td><strong>Jointly-constructed Turns:</strong> Turns were continued and the group would complete each other’s utterances shows involvement; maintain close relationships by talking for one another and saying the same thing at same time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 7 – BLENDED SPACES IN EDUCATION

My journey began with optimism as I endeavored to explore the potential of conversation-based professional development. After encountering many obstacles of locating a group of public school teachers, I continued my search for an appropriate site for my study. Through my volunteer work at a local church, I discovered an interesting and relevant site for my research. The alternative education setting of the church-based small group leaders resulted in the formation of the leadership-development program and the subsequent analysis of the focal group's talk. I felt that I had designed a program, based on relevant literature, which would provide an environment in which professional learning could occur through conversation-based activities.

I had hopes of fashioning an atmosphere where safety and trust could develop and where the participants would be able to engage in “authentic” or “good” conversation (Clark, 2001, p. 177). Clark (2001) heralds this type of atmosphere as a necessary condition for “good conversation” (p. 172). Through his research, Clark (2001) characterizes authentic conversation as groups of teachers “making sense of and articulating our own experiences, implicit theories, hopes, and fears, in the intellectual and emotional company of others whom we trust” (p. 177). However, Clark’s research is limited in terms of its implications for the design and implementation of teacher study groups, as he claims that “good conversation resists the bounds of definition” (p. 177). In order to further explore the nature of “good conversation”, these characteristics must be articulated. I believe the analysis of the focal group’s talk provides insight into the discursive practices that support conversation in which the participants feel safe to explore and learn both professionally and relationally. The examination of the focal-group’s talk will add to the collective knowledgebase regarding teacher study groups, complementing Clark’s initial findings by making more explicit the characteristics of good conversation. The blended-space discursive practices may provide a framework for designing, facilitating, and analyzing conversation-based teacher professional development.
As I listened to the transcripts of the focal group’s talk, I was pleased that their conversation seemed to exemplify the same conversation traits Clark (2001) advocates; however, I sensed that there was more to learn from their talk. Something special seemed to have taken place with this group. There were overall impressions I had of the group, such as their care and respect for one another, their empathy, compassion, and camaraderie even though there were many moments of awkwardness and discomfort. I marveled in Session 4 when the group shared in tears and laughter with Holly as she presented a challenge she was facing in her small group. I realized I needed to look beyond the structure of the program and activities and a mere examination of what they talked about to a more systematic, linguistic analysis of how they were talking. I hoped that by examining their linguistic moves, I would find a lens in which to more clearly articulate how this group of teachers shared their experiences, ideas, and feelings in a safe and trusting collaborative group.

In analyzing the transcripts, I found ample evident that the focal group was fertile ground for investigating discursive practices. The group made use of structural elements of formal speech community characteristics but could not be described as engaging in the kinds of talk associated with institutional settings. The group seemed to function discursively in a manner more similar to informal friendship talk, yet it was not an informal group. My analysis of their talk and an exploration of this conversation space that was simultaneously formal and informal, yet not quite either one, resulted in a framework for characterizing the nature of talk that can happen within liminal education spaces such as teacher study groups. The turn-by-turn discursive practices I traced included encouraging, responding to questions, utilizing purposeful repetition, demonstrating access to discursive power through offering minimal responses, and jointly constructing turns by means of overlapping talk. The above-the-sentence discursive practices included managing a facilitated conversational floor, enacting discursive power through distributed talk, deliberating representations of reality, and engaging in relational bonding in addition to task-completion. These discursive practices of the focal group’s blended-space speech
community were detailed in Chapters 5 and 6. In this chapter, I will take a step back from the fine-grained analysis to discuss broader insights and possible implications for those working with conversation-based professional learning endeavors. Specifically, I suggest implications for 1) designing, 2) facilitating, and 3) conducting action research for conversation-based professional development groups.

Before I offer my ideas on research implications, a few caveats are warranted. Most research endeavors have some limitations, as does this project. The women in the group had many cultural similarities. They were all white, middle class, traditional family-oriented, interested in personal improvement, as well as established leaders at a single religious institution. These cultural similarities influenced their discursive practices and may not be generalizable or replicatable to groups with differing cultural characteristics and institutional structures. As small group leaders, the women were inclined to engage in more conversationally based group activities which provided a good fit for the professional development design used for this study. While specific discursive practices were identified to characterize a blended space, further research incorporating more cultural and institutional variability is warranted. Practitioners and researchers utilizing the findings of this paper should take these cautions into consideration due to these limitations.

**Designing Blended-Space Professional Development**

My initial design for the leadership development program utilized structured activities to generate more informal forms of conversation, as I believed the type of talk experienced by Coates (1996) female friendship groups was the type of conversation people would desire to experience. However, the apparent downside to informal talk is that it tends to avoid contradiction of individual ideas, which does not support a learning agenda. Through my research, which focused on characterizing the blended space, my ideas for designing professional development underwent transformation. In this
section, I offer my suggestions for those who may opt to design a blended-space professional development group.

Conversation within blended spaces may provide the best environment for teachers, facilitators, and leaders to explore possibilities, rules, activities, and maybe even a place to engage in “play” with professional considerations (Vygotsky, 1933). Vygotsky suggests that play is a purposeful activity in which individuals redefine situations, objects, and meaning. Through play, individuals are able to use their imaginations to conceive and experience possibilities that have previously been constrained: “[one’s] greatest achievements are possible in play—achievements that tomorrow will become his average level of real action” (Vygotsky, 1933, p. 21). I now conceive of designing professional development as creating professional playgrounds in which teachers can use blended-space discursive practices to explore possibilities in a social context marked by safety and risk-taking. For the readers’ consideration, I address two elements regarding designing conversation-based professional development: 1) identifying and understanding possible structural elements and 2) integrating informal discursive practices.

When designing a professional development group, it will be helpful to identify and understand possible structural elements and how those elements may constrain or enhance a blended-space professional playground. For example: Are those in your group going to be from a single institution or from a variety of organizations? Within each organization, there are often prescribed expectations and rules (roles?) that may impact the participant’s experience and ability to play professionally. A professional development group comprised of teachers from multiple organizations will need to clearly identify these expectations, as differing ways of teaching, learning, and professionalism may otherwise end up competing for legitimacy. Similarly, playgrounds often contain slides. Some slides are high and steep, while other slides are short and close the ground. An individual’s comfort level with risk may restrict which slide one plays on. Yet the slides are still available for all to consider and possibly
experience. The advantage of a blended-space professional development group is clearly seen when teachers explore possibilities through exposure to things that are familiar, as well as through exploration of other varieties.

The literature on conversational-based professional development presented in Chapter 3 and my own experience designing, facilitating, and researching the leadership development group indicates that the environment is crucial. A designer’s logistical decisions will influence the environment. Logistical considerations include the location for a group to meet, the time of day for a group to meet, the frequency of group meetings, the number of people in the group, and whether those people are there voluntarily. My group met at a private home. This decision was made partly to convey informality, but also to minimize extraneous noise due to the need to record the talk. Meeting in a coffee shop, diner, or other casual community gathering place may also convey informality and structurally help provide a blended-space. In contrast, meeting within the formal institutional structure may be the most convenient option, but there may be constraints due to the furniture arrangements, possible interruptions by other colleagues and students, and an ever-present reminder of the organizational expectations which might hinder creating a context of professional exploration and play.

The day of the week and time of the day a group meets may shape who is able to participate. I have participated in groups that met during a shared prep period, during lunch, before school, and after school. Each of these groups attracted different individuals as teaching and personal obligations impact schedules. For example, my leadership-development group deliberated how to integrate leadership-development for all of the church’s small-group leaders. We were unable to find a single time in which all leaders were available. I have encountered the same challenge in schools, as after-school professional development activities were consistently missing the teachers who also coached as athletic practices are immediately after classes. These structural elements need to be identified and understood
when designing professional development groups in order to maximize the availability of the targeted audience and work toward blending formal and informal interactional structures.

The size of a group should also be considered in regards to the potential impacts. To convey a more casual conversational style, limiting the number of participants may be helpful. My research revealed that most topics of conversation only involved two speakers. Very few topics, and only the longest topics, involved all five speakers. The possibility of involving ten or fifteen speakers into one topic of conversation is unlikely based on the discursive patterns I found. However, there may be opportunities to subdivide a group of nine teachers into three groups and therefore achieve higher levels of individual participation in the talk. The more speakers involved, the more work it will be to encourage participation from each person.

The final logistical consideration I suggest when designing a professional development program that provides opportunity for blended-space discursive practices is addressing the concept of voluntary or mandatory participation. The alternative education setting for my research only utilized volunteers and therefore voluntary participation seemed the only option. Clark (2001) recommends voluntary participation in order to maximize teachers’ participating in the conversation. Yet, Grossman, et al. (1999) used impressed volunteers within their conversation-based professional development and eventually achieved the type of conversation they were striving for. An administrator can mandate attendance, but participation in talk is always voluntary. My research indicated that the whole group used discursive practices to encourage one another to participate in the conversation. The group members managed their conversation and levels of interaction through these invitational and encouraging discursive practices. I believe these practices were related to their voluntary participation. A designer may need to consider activities and discursive practices that will continue to develop a context of exploration for everyone, even those who are not as inclined to jump into a conversation or professional play.
In addition to the institutional and logistical considerations mentioned above, the role and responsibilities of the facilitator are essential in creating a blended-space professional development program. The facilitator maintains the formality of the group, yet must broaden the environment to create a space in which informal conversational practices and professional play may occur. The facilitator needs to play on the professional playground with the other teachers, not just patrol the periphery, and blow the whistle when someone gets out of hand. In designing blended spaces for professional-development purposes, I would look for someone who is able to reinforce structures and rules that maintain safety, but also take professional risks and lead a group of teachers into a playful exploration of possibilities in regards to teaching, learning and building relationships. I discuss specific implications for facilitating blended-spaces in a later section.

Designing a professional playground may involve identifying and understanding structural elements and their possible effects. In this section, I have presented implications from my experience and the literature related to designing a group based on a single or multiple organizations, logistical considerations including location and setting for group meetings, time, frequency, size, and voluntariness. Additionally, I offered recommendations regarding the role and responsibilities of a group’s facilitator. These structural elements are important; however, it is also necessary for a blended-space professional development designer to integrate more informal discursive practices.

Educational institutions exemplify more formal discursive practices. Yet, research indicates that collaborative discussion also results in learning outcomes (Sawyer & Berson, 2005). I believe integrating more blended-space and informal discursive practices will help ensure that small-group play is elevated to an acceptable professional activity. As a group of teachers explore ideas, they may need to violate the formal discursive patterns of one person as the expert, absolutes, and limited concepts of acceptable responses. Integrating more informal discursive practices may allow a group to explore possibilities beyond the constraints of reality. The informal practices possibly create a space in which a group may
attend to cultural discursive differences, experiences, and ways of learning. While my group was culturally very homogenous, I believe allowing for more informal discursive practices will open space for diversity as on the playground people of all ages, levels of experience, and diverse interests can interact, find commonalities, and play together.

When designing a blended-space professional development program, I recommend utilizing activities that allow for more informal discursive practices. In this way, the formal components as embodied by the activities are consistent with blended-space discursive practices. In reflecting on the activities I used in my leadership development program, I can now identify the activities which did not support more informal discursive practices. I opted to have the women record their thoughts in a reflective journal. These activities seemed to disrupt the conversation and cause discomfort within the group. The reflective journaling activity stifled conversation and group exploration as participants were asked to reflect and write individually. The silence that ensued was often uncomfortable. The women demonstrated their reluctance to abandon their group conversation, for these quieter, individual moments of introspection. While I find reflective journaling a worthwhile professional and learning activity, it did not support the more informal discursive practices which fashioned the environment of exploration and professional play. Imagine asking children in the midst of a fun game on the playground to go sit under a tree and contemplate what they have learned. The children would bear expressions of dismay and disappointment at being isolated and disrupted. I believe the women in my leadership development program conveyed these same ideas discursively each time I asked them to engage in reflective journaling activities. I recommend designers consider activities that fully support blended-space discursive practices identified through this research. I offer some activities in the next section on facilitating blended-space professional development groups.

Designing professional development is a challenging endeavor. Professional development educators have engaged in much trial and error, experienced unpredicted successes and challenges, and
continue to build a knowledgebase on effective practices for ongoing teacher learning. The suggestions I offered integrated previous researchers’ experiences and theories, along with a lens for reflecting on my own design attempts. Designing professional development which integrate blended-space discursive practices may achieve a playground in which novice and experienced professionals alike may “always be above his age, above his daily behaviors…as though he were a head taller than himself” (Vygotsky, 1933, p. 25).

**Facilitating Blended-Space Professional Development Groups**

The role of the facilitator was mentioned previously as an essential design consideration. Based on my research on discursive practices within a blended-space leadership-development program (as well as my experience as the facilitator of the group), I offer the following thoughts regarding facilitation strategies. In this section, I direct my attention specifically to those desiring to facilitate similar blended-space discursive groups, whether those groups are comprised of small-group leaders, teachers, or business professionals.

First off, facilitators must take time and effort to get to know those in the group. Facilitators will benefit from getting to know their group members through asking questions of individuals and through group activities. The knowledge gained may be instrumental in handling group conflict, establishing safety, and encouraging risk-taking. A facilitator may opt to engage in private conversation with each group participant or have this information revealed through a group sharing activity. At a minimum, I recommend that the following questions be addressed: Who is in the group? What are their significant and defining characteristics that will be evident in the interactions? Why are they there? What is each individual seeking by participating in the group? What is each person’s style of sharing personal information and experiences and engaging in conflict? With this information, a facilitator may skillfully utilize discursive practices to encourage participation in a way that is accommodating to each individual.
Group activities should be designed to not only explore professional topics, but also address interpersonal relationships so that the facilitator and the group members get to know one another. Participating in a group is premised on social interaction. It is a relational activity. Blended-space speech communities utilize discursive practices to engage in relational bonding as well as complete professional tasks (see Chapter 5).

I found facilitating a blended-space professional development group was much like being on a playground teeter-totter. At one end sat the need for professional development tasks; at the other end sat the need for relationships. As facilitator, I sat in the middle. My challenge was to achieve reasonable balance in which neither the professional development tasks nor relational bonding dropped to the ground, yet both were held up for development. I offer the following conversation-based activities that seemed to support both relational bonding as well as engaging in discussion of professional topics, thereby supporting the concept of maintaining a professional playground in which the facilitator gets to know those in the group.

I recommend an activity in which the group will construct a shared purpose for professional development group. Once some level of comfort and safety has been established, I would encourage the group to share their individual motivations for participating in the group. These motivations may be diverse or consistent. The outcome of the discussion is to arrive at a shared purpose for the group that incorporates individual needs and a collective focus. For my group, I utilized this type of activity during our first session, but not as the first activity. After focusing on getting to know one another, including personal and professional background and experiences, I provided an overview of the proposed curriculum for the leadership-development program. Five topics were presented. I selected the first two topics the group would explore. Then I asked the group to share their preference on the third topic we would explore. The group came to consensus quickly to explore the notion of conflict. This shared purpose for the professional-development group became the ultimate justification for everything we did.
in the group. We explored the topics of community and conversation, as these notions provided a foundation for handling conflict in small groups. The shared purpose united the group and, I believe, helped the participants continue attending the group week after week, despite busy schedules and conflicting obligations.

It seemed that my most successful activities for generating conversation that balanced the need to relational bonding and professional concepts came when I invited the women to share their personal experiences leading small groups or working with other professional groups. This type of activity kept professional needs in focus, yet provided opportunity for sharing of personal insights, characteristics, and preferences. At these times, it seemed that we arrived at the heart of the matter, revealing feelings of inadequacy balanced with sharing key moments of success. A facilitator cannot force someone to share, yet creating a context which allows for revealing slips as well as successes maintains a place in which diverse ideas can be imagined and explored. By sharing personal experiences, participants were able to identify with the experience or imagine what one would do if encountered with a similar situation.

I also employed several activities that used inventories to initiate specific topics of conversation. The validity of the inventory was not important to me, as the purpose was to generate conversation. One inventory asked the women to respond using a Likert scale to indicate the degree of risk each statement exemplified. We disclosed our answers to each statement. By visually noting the results on a board for all to see, we gained a sense of the group’s comfort with taking risk and in which situations, both personal and professional. After this conversation about risk, the group was able to attend to individual differences with care as well as encouraging some risk-taking. The inventory provided a tool for engaging in conversation around a sensitive topic and provided another mechanism for getting to know one another better. I believe other inventories may be used to initiate conversations regarding sharing individual experience and arriving at an understanding of the group as whole.
As part of a facilitator’s role is to help a group explore different possibilities on the professional playground, I found it helpful to use activities that varied the degree of personal risk required within each activity. The group I worked with for this research project overall was hesitant to engage in risk, except for me. To be sensitive to the risk-taking characteristics of the group, I would offer conversation topics that were less risky, followed by activities that required more risk. For example, I asked the women to share a favorite childhood memory of school. This was a relatively safe task, as the individual was allowed to share a positive or successful event from the far past. However, maintaining this low level of risk in sharing can result in conversations becoming banal. To vary the risk, I also invited the women to share about a recent small-group experience. Sharing current experiences was more risky, as the listeners could form negative assessments about the individual sharing. I was amazed when the first person to share set a pattern for revealing challenges in leading conversations in small groups and asked the group to explore ways to help her overcome the challenges. By varying the degree of risk, the women were able to share safe and disclose potentially negative aspect of their leadership abilities. Through these conversations the women were able to imagine alternate scenarios, solutions, and outcomes.

While there are many possibilities for developing activities that will help facilitators know their groups, the final suggestion I offer involves creating ground rules. The concept of establishing ground rules was discussed in Chapter 3. In the first group meeting, I provided my group with four ground rules to manage our conversation. During the last meeting, we collaboratively generated ground rules to manage our deliberation activity. Discussing ground rules and collaboratively developing ground rules may help establish a context for safe exploration. Similarly, children playing tag often determine where the boundaries are and which tree is home base. These become the rules to govern the play. The same is true for conversation. A group can determine ground rules to determine what comments are within safe boundaries, which moves are not allowed, and agreed-upon terms of participation. Additionally,
taking time to make the conversational rules explicit allows the responsibility for enforcing the rules to be shared among the group, instead of solely residing with the facilitator.

I also have learned some specific discursive moves I now use as a facilitator to help connect individual personal information with the more formal aspects of professional development. While these moves are not new, I have come to understand their effectiveness in new ways through my analysis of discursive practices in the focal small group. Sawyer (2004) has worked with teachers to utilize an acting technique of improvisation to more effectively respond to individuals as they engage in learning conversations. For teachers and facilitators, improvisation encourages a conversation outside of the formal script and absolute control of the teacher. Sawyer presents a few techniques that will enhance one’s ability to engage in improvisation: offer agreement, recognize individual characteristics, listen, and avoid stepping outside of a participant role. Through these techniques, Sawyer offers facilitators a means for connecting individual contributions to the current education focus. Gutierrez and colleagues (1995 & 1999) developed a framework that also encourages teachers to abandon their formal scripts and instead use language to connect with students’ individual cultural contributions to a classroom conversation. I advocate for utilizing specific discursive practices of utilizing repetition, inviting others to talk through direct questions, and mirroring when sharing personal information as strategies for connecting individual contributions within learning activities.

When facilitating a group conversation, I suggest utilizing repetition to convey that the facilitator is listening attentively to the contributions of the group members and connect the personal word choices with the professional agenda. I did not understand the benefits of repetition until I had completed the close analysis of this group’s talk (repetition was presented in Chapter 6). When challenging a person’s ideas, utilizing repetition offers a softer approach in which the person will hear their own words and be more likely to hear what follows. For example, in Excerpt 6.52 Holly stated “I wish somebody could teach me that” (Line 1744). I repeated her words while incorporating my denial of
her request: “I’m not going to teach you that. Cuz I’m not there” (Line 1749). Holly simply responded with an “okay” conveying her acceptance of my denial. At other times, when I didn’t utilize repetition of participant’s word choices or grammatical structure, I found myself defending my point, rather than connecting with individual’s contributions (see Excerpt 5.3: Session 4-It’s Stressful). I found that lexical and syntactic repetition the most useful for connecting with an individual’s comments.

As I reflected on my data analysis, I also discovered that my invitations to participate in the conversation were more successful when I directed a question to a specific person. When I extended invitations to participate to the group as a whole, it was difficult for Cassidy to respond as she tended to take more time to think before speaking. Samantha was more uncomfortable with silence and would often respond quickly, thereby preventing anyone else from participating. These are two very individual personal characteristics that I needed to understand in order to facilitate group conversation in which everyone was able to contribute. Each time I extended invitations specifically to Cassidy, she was able to respond because the others in the group remained silent and provided Cassidy the time she needed to think before speaking. Through directing my question to a specific person, I was able to help distribute the participation of the group and make room for everyone to participate. This strategy allows a facilitator to connect with individual styles of participation and ensures that everyone is allowed to participate in the professional play—despite differences in assertiveness.

Another discursive strategy I gleaned from my analysis is to mirror or match experiences shared by the group members. Through this process, a facilitator may be able to connect personal insights with professional lessons. For example: Holly shared her challenge of getting people in her group to talk. Each participants offered a mirroring experience acknowledging a similar experience and an offered an activity that successfully encouraged people to speak. When I added to the conversation, offering a specific teaching method, I matched the pattern of acknowledging the problem and conveying through an experience a specific activity. The process of mirroring and matching became a discursive strategy by
which individual experiences were legitimized and the group was able to imagine and explore the viability of a variety of solutions to one challenging situation.

The discursive moves allowed me as the facilitator to connect the individual features with professional content. Utilizing repetition of words and grammatical structure, inviting specific individuals to contribute their ideas to the conversation, and matching and mirroring individual experiences that were shared may be discursive strategies facilitators can employ within group conversation to help maintain a blended-space connecting informal personal sharing and formal professional tasks.

My final insight into facilitating blended-space professional development groups is related to conversation management. Conversation management within a blended-space is not solely the responsibility of the facilitator. It must be distributed to all the participants. Conversation management and distributed talk were both discussed in Chapter 5. This can be very challenging for some facilitators as it may be precarious to let others have control of the course of the conversation. I do not claim to be an expert in this area, but my research and reflection on facilitating this group have provided insight into key moments of good conversation. I distinctly remember one occasion in Session 8. I was so caught up in the conversation, I realized that Samantha had assumed the role of ensuring the group followed the steps of the deliberation model and I had completely forgotten to record the group’s ideas on the flip chart. Although I seemingly abandoned my role as the facilitator in this situation, I believe it was one my finest moments. The group had learned the deliberation model sufficiently to explore facilitating a deliberation. The conversation achieved the natural flow that only comes when everyone in the group is actively working to manage the conversation. There were no awkward pauses. In this instance, the group was fully engaged in playing out possibilities on a professional playground.

Facilitators need to resist the pattern of commenting after each participant’s response or question. For the focal group’s talk, my turns represented an average of 27% of the turns (participation patterns were outlined in Chapter 5). I had to work diligently to resist the need to speak after each
comment. As I read transcripts from classroom discourse, I have noticed a consistent pattern of teachers tending to talk after every comment. If the goal is to allow adults to engage in exploration of professional possibilities, the group needs to take responsibility for participating in and managing their conversation. A facilitator must find ways to create space for this to happen.

Facilitators may also benefit from utilizing minimal responses. Minimal responses were discussed in Chapter 6 as a means for indicating participation and listening without taking over a conversation. A facilitator’s use of minimal responses will convey to the participants that their comments are being heard and considered as well as open the conversational floor for others to contribute. Nearly 37% of the focal group’s talk was minimal responses. I recommend a facilitator utilize minimal responses at a slightly lower pace than the overall rate. This recommendation is based on my experience facilitating groups, reflection on my research findings, and instinct. I believe facilitators have an obligation to offer substantive comments, yet also alter the pattern of speaking after every participant’s turn. For the focal group, I only contributed 14% of the minimal responses. My personal goal is to have my minimal responses increase so that the other speakers have more access to contribute substantive comments. In this particular group, an equal distribution of minimal responses for five people should have been 20%. My minimal responses were well below this rate.

Lastly, I would recommend that facilitators give people time to think before asking them to respond. While I did not conduct a systematic analysis of pauses for the focal group’s talk, this was an area I had to consider while facilitating the group due to Cassidy’s propensity to need time to think before responding. Facilitators can make this need for silence explicit by stating, “Take a few moments to think of your response to this situation. You may jot down your ideas so you’ll be prepared to share, if you like.” Silence as an acceptable component of group talk may also be achieved as facilitators resist the need to prompt responses. Facilitators need to become comfortable with longer moments of
thoughtful silence. If participants become disturbed by the silence, they may be more inclined to help manage the conversation or share their ideas.

While examining facilitation was not the focus of this study, the findings indicate discursive practices that characterize a blended-space speech community. It is vital that facilitator’s discursive practices align with a group’s blended-space professional development talk. Strategies of getting to know your group through individual questions and sharing activities, connecting personal contributions with professional ideas, and allowing a group access to managing the conversation are some possibilities for facilitators to explore using with their own groups. The focal group contained specific cultural similarities, values, and interests that influenced their discursive practices. By learning the peculiarities of the group and attending to these distinctions, I believe I was able to adequately facilitate the group and propose suggestions to be considered by other facilitators of conversation-based professional development groups.

**Examining Discourse within Blended-Space Professional Development Groups**

The insights I gleaned from the process of my analysis also point to the potential of professional development educators and small-group leaders advancing their understanding of important discursive practices within their own blended-space speech communities. In my own experience as a professional development educator, I have primarily focused on integrating relevant topics and meaningful activities into my professional development endeavors. While these actions have been important, I now believe there is also tremendous value in adopting an inquiry stance to understand the important ways in which participants are talking. In the section that follows, I offer a rationale for examining discursive group practices, suggest a process for research, and explore possible inquiries based on insights from my analysis of the focal group’s discursive practices.

Facilitators may find it useful to adopt an inquiry stance towards the talk happening in their own groups. The framework I presented in Chapters 5 and 6 provides a starting point for examining the
formality of the discursive practices for a group’s interaction. As the facilitator or designer, one may have assumptions regarding the appropriate level of formality depending on the design decisions and the facilitator’s approach to the group. However, until the group’s talk has been examined, it may be difficult to clearly articulate the degree of formality for the speech community. When a group has awkward moments, expresses discomfort, engages in conflict, or lacks full participation, it indicates that something is going on that may need to be addressed. I now understand that the participants’ perception of a group’s formality and the actual degree of formality may not align. This may result in disconnects that lead to the potentially negative instances identified. A facilitator conducting an examination of the formality of a group may gain insight into possible areas of disconnect and make strategic decisions to address the situation. An examination of the discursive strategies as they may exemplify the formality of a group is a feasible approach to understanding the particular blended-space speech community a professional development group fashioned.

Additionally, examining the discursive strategies may help a facilitator determine if the blended-space and subsequent discursive practices are aligned with the professional and relational goals of the group. Coates (1996) with her informal group found that the women shared many personal narratives as a means of conveying opinions, values, and philosophies. A facilitator hoping to stimulate personal narratives of teaching and learning may need to create a more informal speech-community. Comparing a group’s talk with the framework and discursive strategies I’ve identified for the focal group’s blended-space speech community may be a great starting point for aligning professional development goals with discursive strategies that support those goals.

Determining what to research and developing a rationale for a specific inquiry is the first step. The next step would be to select the process by which to engage in the inquiry. While I recorded, transcribed, and meticulously analyzed three sessions of talk, this approach may not be practical, nor feasible, for those in the midst of facilitating a teacher study group. However, it may be reasonable for a
practitioner to examine their group’s talk by focusing on one particular discursive practice. As language-in-use is complex, I recommend recording a group’s talk, although it may be possible, with some practice, for a keen observer to capture the features of talk one is hoping to examine. If talk is recorded, you will need to gain consent from group members to ensure proper research protocols are followed. I recommend sharing the purpose for the recording is to be able to review and reflect upon the talk that occurred in order to formulate improvements regarding the facilitation of the group. Stating the specific discursive strategy that is the focus of the examination may result in altered interactions.

After recording a group’s talk, begin by listening and making notes regarding key features. If I were researching participation patterns, I would start by noting each speaker as the turns unfolded. Depending on the discursive strategy examining, it may be necessary to transcribe the recordings in order to better analyze the data. The level of transcription needed will be based on the discursive strategy one is examining. With the help of an observer, it may be possible to simply take notes on the patterns of interaction under examination. This method may be less time-consuming, but may also be less accurate, as so much can happen simultaneously within group conversation. I offer some possibilities for practitioners to consider below.

I suggest that practitioners analyze the nature of the conversational floor for their professional development groups, as I believe it is a good indicator of the degree of formality for a speech community. An initial means of characterizing the conversational floor is to examine participation patterns. Participation patterns will let one examine who is talking, how often, and how much. For example, in a more singular floor the facilitator will tend to speak between every speaker. In a facilitated floor, I found that as the facilitator my talk represented about one-third of all the talk. In a collaborative floor, the turns tend to be more equally distributed so that one person does not monopolize the talk. It is important to look at participation across the full length of a group’s session of talk and not just one topic of conversation. From the example of the focal group, I discovered that a single topic of
conversation generally involved two speakers. Only the longest topics of conversation integrated all five speakers.

It might also be useful to examine participation across sessions. This would provide a means to analyze who is participating during specific types of activities. However, this assumes that there are consistent types of activities from session to session. The potential of an activity-focused analysis of participation may reveal a specific speaker’s interest and/or comfort with specific activities. For example, had I examined this for my group during our early sessions, I would have realized that Cassidy shared more during reflective activities, and, conversely, Samantha shared the least during our reflective activities. I could have used this information to offer more specific invitations to share with Samantha during reflective activities. Having examined the participation patterns of a group’s conversational floor, a facilitator would be better equipped to enhance future conversations.

Another discursive practice that may provide insight into a group’s talk would be an examination of question and response patterns. Once again an inquiry stance to unpack the discursive practices may involve recording talk or having an observer assist with capturing notes of the talk. An inquiry into questions may examine who is asking questions, what types of questions are being asked, and if hedges are used when asking questions. Examining questions may provide insight into how a group is working to include all speakers in the conversation, extend a topic of conversation, or introduce new topics of conversation.

Examining questions is only one part of the adjacency pair. Facilitators may gather additional insight into a group’s talk by analyzing participants’ responses to questions. For example, an inquiring facilitator may want to note questions that go unanswered, the use of minimal responses as a reply to questions, or the responses that generated longer sharing of one’s personal knowledge and experiences. It might also be interesting to determine which speaker tends to respond more frequently to a facilitator’s questions and who responds more readily to other speaker’s questions. Examining the
responses may help a facilitator understand what types of questions prompt the nature of conversation one is hoping to achieve.

Narratives and discursive practices that occur during the telling of a narrative are another possible area of inquiry. Coates (1996) found that when female friendship groups share narratives, their discursive practices may change so that longer turns and more hedges are used. She also found that the women tended to mirror one another’s stories, taking similar risks and levels of personal disclosure. For the focal group and our structured activities, I did not feel that I had enough data in the three sessions analyzed to draw any conclusions related to narratives, as only one of the group activities during the three sessions analyzed specifically encouraged the women to share narratives from their experiences.

In order to analyze narratives further, I believe I would need a larger data set. I would want to look at the style of narratives shared within activities specifically designed to elicit narratives in order to compare with narratives that appeared spontaneously within the talk. The turn-by-turn discursive practices presented in Chapter 6 would be a good place to start an examination of discursive practices to determine if, like Coates’ (1996) conclusions, the discursive practices changed during the telling of a narrative. Additionally, I think it may be informative to examine the level of risk and personal disclosure offered within a narrative. I believe this may help a facilitator understand how a group is demonstrating safety and trust. I have not analyzed any of the focal group’s talk related to risk or personal disclosure, but I feel that in looking at narratives, it may be a useful element to examine. The narratives could be analyzed to understand their structure, form, and common characteristics which could be compared with Riessman (1993).

I think it may also be interesting to explore how the nature of the group may impact the telling of narratives. Following the leadership-development program, Cassidy shared with me individually that she noticed an increase in her participation in the talk during the two sessions that Holly was missing. Upon further reflection, Cassidy determined that because Holly had children in the ministry Cassidy was
overseeing, she felt reluctant to share any of her challenges and risk looking negative in front of a parent. In this case, the roles of two group members outside the focal group had a direct impact on narratives. This notion may result in an informative inquiry, especially as it pertains to groups which reside within a singular educational setting and the group members would be more likely to have broader roles within the institution.

As seen in Chapters 5 and 6, the continuum of formality characterizing discursive practices--including formal, blended, and informal speech--may serve as a framework for facilitators’ inquiry into their own group’s talk. Whether one examines the above-the-sentence practices such as the nature of the conversational floor or turn-by-turn practices such as question and response patterns, insight can be gleaned by analyzing a group’s talk. My own experience and this paper reveal the depth of information that can be ascertained when one takes time to reflectively examine a group’s talk.

The focal group’s talk at the heart of this research endeavor provides a means for designing, facilitating, and researching conversation-based professional development group. In this chapter, I offered a metaphor of a professional playground as an ideal possibility for engaging teachers in both professional and relational development. Design decisions and facilitation practices will be vital to establishing a context in which teachers may use conversations to be able to take risks, explore possibilities, and imagine teaching and learning in different manner or context. Sawyer (2001) eloquently explains: “The more we improvise—the more we respond creatively and contingently to everyday situations—the better we will get at creating conversations” (p. 177). I suggest that professional development educators create places in which teachers may be able to use their unique personalities, experiences, and creativity to improvise within blended-space professional development groups.
Further Studies

The focal group and its discursive practices offer one example of talk within a blended space. Further studies are warranted to explore other blended spaces, their discursive practices, and the utility of those practices. Examining the talk of professional teacher study groups would be generative to further describe the discursive practices. If I were to compare various blended-space speech communities I may be able to provide more detail into the nature of talk within a blended space. Further study will need to examine blended space with mixed-gender groups and the impact that has on the discursive practices deemed acceptable for use within a group. For example, how does the use of minimal responses, hedges, and politeness strategies change when a group is all-male or mixed gender. As each group determines the acceptable discursive practices for their talk, comparing talk across groups may bring further clarity to blended-space discursive practices.

Another layer of comparison that may add to the understanding of blended-space discursive practices would be to examine non-education groups such as boards of directors or employer-based teams in which groups need to develop consensus. I currently work with boards of directors who meet on a monthly basis. I have not done any analysis, but on the surface, I have observed that these groups have some discursive practices that are consistent with the focal group’s talk. Yet, I believe there are other nuances of discursive practices present in the talk that need to be examined. By analyzing the talk from various groups, I may be able to develop a more comprehensive framework for the nature of blended-space talk that can be used to understand the nature of talk regardless of the composition of the group. The exploration of group discursive practices seems endless. There are groups meeting within educational settings for pre-service and in-service teacher education, within alternative education contexts such as church-based small group programs, as well as boards of directors and employee-based teams that all provide opportunities to examine blended-space speech community discursive practices.
Final Thoughts

Imagine a school of teachers who willingly and excitedly participate in weekly conversation-based small groups to extend their knowledge and practices of teaching. It’s hard to envision such a thing. There are many obstacles to overcome in order to have this dream become a reality. The focal group and its blended-space discursive practices and focus on professional learning may offer a glimpse of hope for teacher professional development.

Facilitating and researching a conversation-based professional development program utilizing a symbolic interactionist lens required me to be reflective of my role within the focal group. Designing, facilitating, and analyzing a group was very challenging and required deliberate action to maintain my various roles. At times, I felt like I needed a support group to help me cope with the apparent disconnect between trying to help the group feel comfortable and safe to share, yet also record and analyze our conversations. Frequently, I would be asked if I am getting what I need for the research. I had no way of answering that question. All I could tell the group was that they just needed to keep coming to the group and talking. They would apologize for how much they talked, as they were concerned with the work I had to undertake to transcribe the sessions. The group demonstrated their care, not only for one another and their own learning, but also for the research. The participants dubbed our focal group, “The Research Group.” To them, the research component was also an important aspect of our shared endeavor. I was very blessed to have a group of women who instinctively cared for one another. Their talk provides hope for anyone wanting to utilize blended-space discursive practices that seem to support the goals of conversation-based teacher professional development. The focal group developed a professional playground in which members were able to take risks and have some fun while they explored professional notion of leading small groups and built lasting relationships with one another as supportive colleagues and friends.
REFERENCES


