"I am the seed in a watermelon": exploring metaphors about education, welfare reform, and women's lives.

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“I AM THE SEED IN A WATERMELON”: EXPLORING METAPHORS ABOUT EDUCATION, WELFARE REFORM, AND WOMEN’S LIVES

A Dissertation Presented

by

ANN CAREY SCOTT

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies Language, Literacy, and Culture Program
"I AM THE SEED IN A WATERMELON": EXPLORING METAPHORS ABOUT EDUCATION, WELFARE REFORM AND WOMEN'S LIVES

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ANN CAREY SCOTT

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The world is such a little place,
just the red in the sky before the sun rises.
So let us keep fast hold of hands,
that when the birds begin
none of us be missing.

- Emily Dickinson
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ABSTRACT

"I AM THE SEED IN A WATERMELON": EXPLORING METAPHORS ABOUT EDUCATION, WELFARE REFORM AND WOMEN'S LIVES

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This dissertation describes a qualitative, participatory action research study conducted in western Massachusetts from the spring of 1997 through the spring of 2000. The study investigated the educational experiences of a group of fifty-five low-income female students in one western Massachusetts community using interviews, focus groups, writing activities, and surveys. The study examined how participants were affected by contemporary social and economic issues, particularly by the policies commonly known as “welfare reform” that were legislated in the United States in 1996. Welfare reform created new challenges in the lives of many low-income women and their families by severely limiting the amount of assistance recipients are eligible to receive in their lifetimes and restricting their access to education and to the supports needed in order to pursue education.

All of the study participants were raising families, were current or former welfare recipients, were either enrolled in graduates of Adult Basic Education programs, and the majority were Puerto Rican women who spoke Spanish as their first language. Thus, the main contexts framing this study were welfare reform and
adult literacy, as well as the implications of race, language, gender, and class on low-income women’s educational experiences. Because the study employed a participatory action research approach, participants were full partners in all aspects of the research, including its design, methodology, analysis, and a variety of presentation activities.

The study described in this dissertation explored three key topics in order to understand the educational experiences of participants: the wide range of meanings participants associate with education; the impact of welfare reform on their learning and achievement; and the variety of ways they made use of and created support systems in order to reach their goals as parents and learners. Finally, an important aspect of the study was that it employed metaphor analysis in two ways: 1) as the study’s main tool for analyzing data and 2) as an innovative pedagogical strategy for the writing classrooms in which much of the data was generated. Thus, in addition to the study’s findings related to participants’ educational experiences, the study also generated findings related to educational practice.
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CHAPTER 1
PURPOSES AND CONTEXTS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The Tree of Letters

As a child who was learning to read and write, I had the habit of waking up early in the morning and lying in bed, looking through the high window across the room that framed the tangled branches of an old elm tree in the front yard. This was my favorite way to begin each day. The tree’s branches and leaves served as a kind of text in which I would shape letters and words. Each morning I deciphered the letters hidden in the tree, the k made of crossed branches, the o-shaped knot in the bark, the b formed by a leaf and twig. I learned to find simple three-letter words, first in block letters and later in cursive. As the seasons changed, the elm tree would reveal more of its alphabetical secrets. This was my reading tree, the tablet upon which I honed the literacy skills I was acquiring in school.

One day my grandfather cut the tree down because it was old and dying. The view outside my bedroom window changed drastically, offering only an expanse of sky that seemed vast, pale, and unreadable. I sorely missed my old companion, the elm tree. But I could read entire books by then, I could write my own stories, and I no longer needed the tree’s support. My world was filled with written words and reading and writing had become as natural and pleasurable as playing.

This memory serves as an allegory for the study described here. For me, literacy acquisition in English, in an English-speaking world, was a right that I never questioned. I never doubted that I would have all the support I needed to become as
literate as I chose to become. Over the years, my ability to read and write in English has served me well, giving me access to the kinds of knowledge, educational experiences, and work opportunities that are most highly valued in my culture. Yet, for all of the women who participated in this study, their rights to literacy acquisition and to the kinds of knowledge and education that can give them access to economic security are in question. Literacy, in the context of these women’s lives, is a site for political struggle. Their experiences are worth exploring in depth because of the questions they raise about the kinds of knowledge deemed valuable in this culture, who gets to define that knowledge, and who gets to acquire it.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the educational experiences of a group of low-income adult women learners, particularly to understand how their learning and achievement were affected by changing social, economic and political contexts such as welfare reform. Fifty-five adult learners participated in this study. All of the participants were women and mothers, and all but a few were single parents and heads of their households. The majority of participants are Puerto Rican women and about half of them speak Spanish as their first language. All of the participants, including myself, were current or former welfare recipients.

At the time the study took place, from the spring of 1997 through the spring of 2000, all of the participants, with the exception of myself, were enrolled in post-secondary Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs or had made a transition from ABE programs to college. Participants were enrolled in ABE programs to acquire
basic literacy skills, to prepare for the GED (high school equivalency) exam, or to learn English in ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) classes. Participants’ ages at the time of the study ranged from 16 to 50.

This study had its roots in a larger research project, the Changes Project, which took place from October 1997 through March 2000. A participatory action research (PAR) study, the Changes Project investigated the impact of welfare reform, changes in immigration policy, and the changing workplace on adult learners in five communities in Western Massachusetts. The study explored in this dissertation is located within the larger context of the Changes Project, and takes as its starting point some preliminary findings of one of the Changes Project teams, the Voces team of the Mentor Program at Holyoke Community College. I was the site research facilitator for the Voces team, as well as the Coordinator of the Mentor Program. Voces is the Spanish word meaning “voices.” Team members chose the name because of their desire to develop a collective, politically powerful voice through engaging in this research, and through bringing together multiple individual voices, an important goal for all of the team members. The team chose a Spanish term to reflect the Puerto Rican heritage of the majority of the research participants, and because of their pride in their ability to speak Spanish. Details about the Changes Project and profiles of six of the Voces team are given in Chapter 4.

The primary research question guiding this study is: What are the educational experiences of low-income female adult learners, who are current or former welfare recipients enrolled in or graduates of ABE programs, during the early years of
"welfare reform"? The following three sub-questions were articulated in order to answer the primary research question in depth:

Question 1: What are low-income female adult learners' perceptions of the meanings of education and what it makes possible for them?

Question 2: How has welfare reform affected the educational experiences of low-income female adult learners?

Question 3: Within the context of welfare reform, what are low-income female adult learners' perceptions about the supports that they both give and receive in order to achieve their education and life goals?

In addition to the three questions above, a fourth question addresses the use of metaphor analysis (the main method used to analyze data for this study) as an innovative tool for fostering critical pedagogy and multicultural curriculum development. This question, discussed later in this chapter, is:

Question 4: How can metaphor analysis be used as a pedagogical strategy to foster multicultural, learner-centered curriculum development and critical pedagogy?

Contexts of the Study

Because of the particular circumstances, backgrounds, and experiences of research participants, the multiple intersecting contexts for this study include 1) an economic context, including the economic patterns of women living in poverty, with an emphasis on the implications of race, class, language, and gender on women and poverty in the United States; 2) a welfare context, that is, the history of welfare policy both in the United States and in Massachusetts, with an emphasis on the implications of current welfare reform policies on adult learners; and 3) an educational context, including an understanding of literacy in its broadest terms, the ABE field, and
transition to higher education for ABE graduates. In addition to these contexts, this chapter presents a rationale for the use of metaphor analysis, both as a research tool and as a pedagogical and curriculum development strategy, followed by definitions of important terms used in this dissertation, and a discussion of the significance and limitations of this study.

The Economic Context

Poverty is primarily a women's and a children' issue in the United States. Two-thirds of all poor adults in this country are women. One out of every four children lives in a poor family. Over half of the single-female headed families in the United States today live in poverty, compared to an 11 percent poverty rate for families headed by two adults (Albelda & Tilly 1997). Single mothers are over four times as likely to be poor as other women (Albelda & Tilly 1997). It is difficult for one adult to support a family and even more so if that adult is female, as women still receive significantly less money for paid work than men. In 1995, women working full time earned 71 percent as much as their male counterparts (Albelda & Tilly 1997). In addition, because women work fewer hours on average than men in this country, usually due to family care responsibilities, their average annual earnings are actually only about one-half of the earnings of men (Albelda & Tilly 1997). Raising families has negative financial consequences for women, as a woman with a child under the age of six is 23 percent more likely to be poor than a woman without children.

Poverty is also a racial issue. National statistics indicate that there is a racial dimension to poverty, one aspect of which is a disproportionate number of people of
color living in poverty. African American women and Latinas are more likely to be poor, and to stay poor for longer periods of time, than are White women, having three times the likelihood of being poor as Whites (Dujon & Withorn 1996), with a 30 percent poverty rate (Albelda & Tilly 1998). Because Whites make up nearly three quarters of the U.S. population, the largest group living in poverty today are White women and their children, but African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans are disproportionately poor. While 13 percent of Whites, men and women, are poor, 36 percent of African Americans, 34 percent of Latinos and 17 percent of Asians are poor (Dujon & Withorn 1996). Massachusetts’s data on families receiving welfare benefits are consistent with national figures on the poverty rates of different racial and ethnic groups. While the typical Massachusetts family receiving welfare benefits in 1998 was a White woman in her thirties with one or two children, 29 percent were Latino families and 18 percent were African American families (Kates 1998). These data are an important part of the context of this study for many reasons, including the ethnic diversity of the study participants, most of whom are Puerto Rican women.

Poverty seriously impacts a person’s access to education as well as her earning power. The earning potential of women without a high school diploma or college education is drastically compromised compared to women with higher educational attainments. The poverty rates for adults who dropped out of high school is two and a half times greater than for high school graduates, and six times greater than adults with four-year college degrees (Albelda & Tilly 1997). Thirty-seven percent of women with eight or less years of education are poor, while fewer than
eleven percent of women with four-year college degrees are poor (Dujon & Withorn 1996). The gender gap in earnings is also evident in statistics about educational attainment: women with high school diplomas are one and a half times more likely to be poor than male high school graduates (Albelda & Tilly 1997).

The correlation between educational attainment and income is exacerbated for women of color and women whose dominant language is not English, for a variety of reasons, including higher rates of leaving secondary school before graduation, graduating without being adequately prepared for higher education, and not having access to information about educational options that are available.

Because the majority of participants in this study are Puerto Rican women from Holyoke, Massachusetts who did not complete high school, the educational experiences of Puerto Rican students in Massachusetts, and the economic implications of that experience, are important aspects of this study’s context. Puerto Rican students belong to one of the most undereducated ethnic groups in the United States, with the highest high school dropout and attrition rates of any group in the country, and they have, as a group, one of the lowest numbers of completed school years (Nieto 1995). In Holyoke, Massachusetts, the site for this proposed study, the dropout rate for Puerto Rican students has been as high as 72 percent (Frau-Ramos & Nieto 1993), which is consistent with statistics in other parts of the United States (Nieto 1995). In addition, Puerto Rican students are more likely to be two or more years below grade level than their peers, and to have a very low enrollment rate in college preparatory courses (Frau-Ramos & Nieto 1993).
Since the 1960s many educational research studies have attempted to explain the causes for the high dropout rates among Puerto Rican students (Nieto 1995). In general, early studies tended to be based on a “deficit model” (Nieto 1995), focusing on so-called “deficiencies” of individual students who dropped out of school, as well as the “deficiencies” of their families, communities, and even their cultural background, blaming these factors for students’ low educational attainment rates. More recent studies have shifted the focus from the individual student to take a broader and more comprehensive view of interconnected factors at work in schools and the larger society that impact the educational experiences of students who do not belong to the dominant culture (Fine 1991, Nieto 1996). These factors include issues such as institutional racism and discrimination based on differences such as gender, language, class, ethnicity, and, for Puerto Rican students, the legacy of a colonial relationship with the United States.

While the high school dropout rate in general is higher for boys than it is for girls, among Puerto Rican high school students more girls than boys drop out of high school (American Association of University Women 1992). Teenage pregnancy is a major cause nationwide for young women to drop out of school, as nearly three quarters of adolescent mothers who are seventeen or younger leave high school before graduating (Sadker & Sadker 1991).

The Welfare Context

Many single mothers of all ethnic groups rely on public assistance, or welfare, to support their families at some point in their lives. In fact, one out of three single
mothers in the United States currently rely on public assistance to support their families (Albelda & Tilly 1996). All of the participants in this study are single mothers who are either current or former welfare recipients, and more than half of them dropped out of high school because they were pregnant.

Public assistance programs for poor families came into being as part of the Social Security Act, passed by Congress in 1935, which also created social insurance programs such as Unemployment Insurance and Social Security. The Social Security Act of 1935, passed three to five decades after similar legislation in most other Western industrial nations, was based on the idea that the federal government should assume permanent responsibility for social welfare because “market economies rarely provide enough jobs or income for everyone” (Abramovitz 1996, 16) and that a safety net was needed for the poor in order to prevent social and economic chaos.

The dismantling of social welfare policies, including Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) began in earnest during the Reagan administration. President Reagan publicly attacked the philosophical underpinnings of the welfare state. President Bush continued this assault with his “No new taxes” approach to lowering the revenues needed to fund social programs. Shortly after President Clinton was elected, he promised to “end welfare as we know it” and the Republicans followed his cue with their “contract on the welfare state” (Abramovitz 1996, 19), which ushered in an era of “welfare reform” in which the safety net for poor families, established in 1935 by an act of Congress, was finally removed.
These current welfare reform policies present severe challenges to educational attainment for low-income adult women who rely on public assistance to support themselves and their families. Two aspects of welfare reform that pose the greatest threat to educational access and attainment for welfare recipients and former recipients are the time limit on benefits and the work requirement, or workfare, which requires welfare recipients with school-aged children to do paid or volunteer work in order to continue to receive cash benefits.

Welfare reform was instituted on a federal level as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), signed by President Clinton in 1996. This federal welfare law ended the safety net of AFDC benefits for poor families by establishing a five-year life-time limit on cash benefits and establishing a work requirement (either paid or volunteer work) for eligible families of between twenty and thirty hours a week. Massachusetts was one of nineteen states granted a waiver from this federal policy in order to implement its own reforms. In Massachusetts, welfare reform preceded the federal PRWORA with what is known as “Chapter 5,” enacted in the fall of 1995 and fully implemented in December 1996. Chapter 5 is more severe in its restrictions on benefits than the federal policy, limiting cash benefits to eligible families to two years within a five-year period. Chapter 5 also includes a twenty-hour weekly work requirement for families whose youngest child is six and in school (Kates 1999).

Welfare reform policies may jeopardize people who are trying to gain the skills they need to become self-sufficient, to move from welfare to work. This is
particularly true for low-income adults in literacy programs and community colleges, who need sufficient time and a wide variety of supports and services in order to attain their educational goals. Low-income adult learners often lack the basic life and educational supports that their middle-class counterparts may take for granted. Many low-income adults are supporting families as single parents. Many are learning to speak English, or to attain basic literacy skills. Many have multiple problems associated with poverty — such as homelessness, chronic unemployment, health problems and lack of access to adequate health care, lack of transportation or quality child care for their children — which place further obstacles in the way of their educational achievement. The “one size fits all” premise of current welfare reform policies ignores important differences in the kinds of supports and the amount of time low-income learners need in order to complete their education. These reforms assume that all welfare recipients are starting out at the same educational level and with the same kinds of supports in place.

While it is important for all welfare recipients to have access to education and training and to be given the time they need to complete their educational goals, educational access is especially crucial for adults lacking basic literacy skills, who face much greater odds in finding and maintaining employment. A report issued in 1999 by the Educational Testing Service analyzing the employment prospects of welfare recipients with varying literacy levels predicts that recipients with the highest skills will be able to find and keep good jobs, and that an increase in education and training for people in this category could yield substantial returns. But for recipients with
literacy skills that are minimal or basic, their prospects for upward mobility are very limited. The report suggests that women with the lowest literacy skills may need up to 900 hours (more than two years) of course work just to boost their skills to the next level (Carnevale & Desrochers 1999).

Another research report, released by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, or NCSALL (Levenson, Reardon, & Schmidt 1999), evaluates the literacy and employment skill levels of adults receiving welfare benefits. This report also emphasizes the acute need of many current and former welfare recipients in the United States for basic skills training and education if they are to find and retain even the lowest skilled, lowest paying jobs. According to the NCSALL report, 35 percent of welfare recipients are at Level 1 literacy, the lowest of five categories of literacy levels, and 41 percent are at Level 2. At Level 1, individuals can do simple tasks like sign their names or total a bank deposit. People at Level 2 can use math and reading skills for common everyday tasks like filling out forms, deciphering charts and graphs, and reading comprehension. Adults at Levels 1 and 2 are not generally able to perform higher order tasks or to meet the literacy demands of everyday life and are at a severe disadvantage when it comes to getting and keeping jobs (Levenson, Reardon, & Schmidt 1999). In addition, according to a report by the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute in Boston, almost half of the welfare recipients in Massachusetts with minor children lack a high school diploma or GED (MLRI 1999).
There is a direct correlation between educational attainment and a person’s ability to earn a living and to support a family. U.S. Census figures from 1991 show that 24 percent of families in which the heads of household did not complete high school live in poverty, while only 2 percent of families headed by adults with a B.A. degree live in poverty. A National Institute for Literacy (NIL) report (NIL 1999) states that nearly half of the adults in the United States with the lowest literacy levels live in poverty, compared to 4-8 percent of those with the two highest literacy levels. The report also states that teen pregnancy rates are higher among individuals with lower literacy skills and that three out of four food stamp recipients performed at the two lowest literacy levels (NIL 1999).

These figures become even more dramatic when comparisons are made between the income levels of men and women, as women’s earnings lag behind men’s at all levels of educational attainment. The gender gap in earnings is particularly salient for this study, as most welfare recipients are women and their children. In 1993 the average yearly earnings of women without a high school education was $15,400, while men with the same educational level earned an average of $21,800. Women with associate’s degrees earned an average yearly income of $25,800, while their male counterparts earned $33,700. Women with B.A. degrees earned an average of $31,200 per year, more than twice the income of women who did not complete high school. Men with B.A. degrees earned an average of $42,000 per year (Economic Policy Institute 1998, cited in Kates 1998). These figures make it clear that access to education and training is particularly crucial for low-income women who are
supporting families on public assistance if they are to make a successful transition from welfare to work.

Although the figures cited above make a strong argument for the correlation between an individual’s educational attainment and her standard of living, this does not mean that education is a panacea, that learning to read and write or getting a college degree automatically guarantees a living wage or a stable income. If that were the case, curing economic injustice would be a very simple matter. But life, and the economy, are not that simple: though education can indeed have a very positive impact on a person’s earning power, there are many other economic and social problems that education alone cannot solve, such as the effects that class, race, language and gender have on access to educational and job opportunities.

The notion that education is an economic cure-all is not only simplistic, it is dangerous, akin to the mythical notion of meritocracy: that people succeed or fail in this society based solely on their own merit. The logical conclusion of such a false notion is to blame the victims of an economy that is stacked against a large segment of society. In an article examining the intersections of literacy, poverty, welfare, and work, D’Amico (1998) challenges the prevailing notions underlying the legislative policies known as welfare reform. The author claims that the problem of welfare “dependency” is a “labor market structural problem, not a problem of willingness on the part of individuals to work” (D’Amico 1998, 6), that is, that current social, institutional, and economic forces cause people to be poor, rather than individual behavior, attitude or will:
A prevailing assumption of welfare reform, strongly suggested by the legislation's title: "Personal Responsibility Act," is that poverty and joblessness are caused by a failure of will, by the behavior of individuals, as influenced by their cultural beliefs. A second assumption, and one that guides education and training policy, is that some individuals are unemployed because they lack the literacy and skills necessary for available jobs. . . . [T]he false behaviorist assumption that the majority of people receiving public assistance don't work because they lack incentive masks the fact that most people circulate between low paying, unstable jobs and welfare. This fact has more to do with the nature of the entry-level job market, and the lack of national childcare and health care systems, than with attitudes and behavior toward work (D'Amico 1998, 3).

The quote above lays the groundwork for an important assumption underlying this study: that the vast majority of women who are welfare recipients want to leave welfare and to work at jobs that support them and their families, and that they are striving to make a transition from welfare to work within a welfare system, and a larger labor market, that limits their opportunities to do so. Some of those limitations relate directly to gender, class, race, ethnicity, and language. The participants chosen for this study represent these assumptions: they are women, mostly Puerto Rican women, all of whom are heads of household, current or former welfare recipients, and adult learners. All of the participants are either currently enrolled in, or graduates of Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs, including GED (high school equivalency exam) preparation programs, basic literacy programs for adults, and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) programs. Those participants who have graduated from ABE programs are enrolled in or graduates of a community college. All of the study participants are striving daily to care for their families and to rise out of poverty by way of education.
The Educational Context

What are the implications for educators, and for literacy practice in particular, of the issues of welfare reform and education within a complicated social, political, and economic landscape? The issues and conditions described in this chapter may be external to literacy programs and the practitioners who work in them, but they affect learners directly.

This study begins with a notion of literacy and literacy practice that is critical and liberatory. This means defining literacy as more than the ability to read and write and function in a text-based world. First, critical literacy requires critical pedagogical strategies in which the educator’s role is that of a partner in the learning process. For educators, especially those working with low-income learners and students of color, this means understanding learners’ realities, including the impact of race, gender, language, and class on literacy as well as the larger socioeconomic contexts in which adult learners operate. It means examining one’s own assumptions, beliefs and values regarding literacy, work, welfare, and so on. And it means cultivating the belief that learners are the authorities of their own experiences, and creating in classrooms what Greene (1988) called “authentic public spaces” in which “diverse human beings can appear before one another” and articulate “multiple perspectives in multiple idioms, out of which something common can be brought into being” (Greene 1988, xi).

For learners, in addition to gaining the basic literacy and numeracy skills that are necessary for economic survival in today’s economy, a critical, liberatory literacy provides the ability to critically analyze the contexts in which they operate and affords
them opportunities to develop the intellectual tools needed for making important life decisions, for choosing political positions, and for acting upon them. Within the context of welfare reform, particularly when working with poor people, this means “acknowledging the dissonance between the interests of employers and workers, between the objectives of funding and the purposes of learners, and between education as a human right, and education as a form of job training” (D’Amico 1998, 13).

The discussion of literacy in its broadest, most critical sense is relevant to this study for at least two important reasons. First, two of the study’s three sites are adult literacy programs and all of the study’s participants are adult learners who are either enrolled in or graduates of adult literacy programs. Second, the study is based on a participatory action research model, with several complementary purposes. It aims to both document and produce knowledge about the educational experiences of women students who are current or former welfare recipients. It aims to do this by engaging those very women as researchers, as co-investigators into the impact of issues that are critical to their lives, and it aims to enhance their literacy, critical, academic, social, and political skills as part of the process.

Using Metaphor Analysis as a Research Tool

Finally, a brief discussion of metaphor analysis, the main analytical approach used in this study, is important for understanding the study’s multiple purposes. Metaphor analysis was chosen as an analytical tool in order to take advantage of the fact that metaphors contain rich and complex information about people’s experiences,
perceptions, and ideas, their relationships to the world, their understandings of the contexts in which they operate, as well as their cognitive processes.

Furthermore, analyzing metaphors is a particularly appropriate approach when working with data from participants at various literacy levels and from different language groups, because the ability to create rich, interesting, and complex metaphors does not depend upon a person’s ability to read and write in English. Because metaphors are a fundamental part of the human conceptual system (Basso 1976, Fiumara 1995, Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Schon 1979, Turner 1987), people from all language groups and literacy levels use metaphors to express themselves. A more comprehensive discussion of metaphor analysis is presented in Chapters 2 and 3, relating to the literature framing this study and the methodology used to carry out the research.

Using Metaphor Analysis in the Classroom

Metaphor analysis is also an appropriate approach for this study because of the ways it can be used to foster critical literacy and to help educators better understand the experiences and perceptions of the learners who are in their classrooms. Thus, the fourth research question guiding this study addresses the use of metaphors and metaphor analysis as a curriculum and pedagogical strategy.

From its inception, the study was envisioned as having complementary goals: 1) to find out how social, economic and political changes are affecting adult learners and to apply what is being learned (about learners’ lives, about classroom-based participatory research, and about teaching) and 2) to inform and improve classroom
practice. During the early stages of data analysis, Voces team members became intrigued by the use of metaphor analysis to further our understanding of the data learners were generating in writing classrooms. (A complete description of the metaphor analysis techniques used in this study is found in Chapter 3). While the team was learning to use metaphor analysis as a data analysis tool, we also began to apply this knowledge in writing classrooms. For example, writing class facilitators would ask learners to generate metaphors about various themes and, as a group, examine and expand those metaphors. We found that, by both creating and examining their own metaphors, learners were able to engage in critical thinking, build group knowledge, generate data, and develop literacy and academic skills. Thus, for the Voces team, metaphor analysis became much more than an analytical tool: it also became a teaching tool in ABE writing classrooms.

All of the questions guiding this study supported its dual goals. The study examines how adult learners participating in the study make sense of and adapt to a changing social, economic and political environment as it relates to their educational achievement. Their perceptions about higher education, both what they believe it promises them and their relationship to it, were examined. As the first three sub-questions indicate, the study explores a cluster of three topics that were identified as salient by Voces team members in the initial phase of data collection: education, welfare reform, and support (Changes Project Final Report, 2000).

Voces team members identified these three topics as being key factors in understanding participants' educational experiences, because they reveal what
participants' need in order to achieve their educational goals, as well as what they gain from education. In particular, team members wanted to explore the topic of support as it relates to the notions of dependence, independence, and interdependence because these topics directly address stereotypes about welfare dependency that team members were eager to counter.

The second major goal of this research study was to explore ways to inform pedagogy and curriculum development, particularly in ABE language arts classrooms, and the fourth research sub-question addresses this goal. A key consideration of participatory action research is to ensure that participants benefit from their involvement as researchers, and that those benefits relate to the particular goals participants identify as being important to them. Because the participants were adult learners enrolled in a variety of educational programs, and because many of them were experiencing a great deal of pressure to achieve their educational goals within a limited amount of time, this study was designed to ensure that their participation significantly enhanced their educational experiences and helped them to meet their goals.

For Voces team members, all of whom were community college students, this meant ensuring that the expertise they developed as researchers gave them knowledge, skills, and experiences that enhanced their educational and life goals. For the adult learners enrolled in ABE programs this meant making sure that they benefited from their participation in writing classes and workshops (one of the main data-collection sites for the study) by strengthening their critical reading, writing, and
thinking skills, as well as their basic literacy and/or English language acquisition. For all participants, the study was designed to enhance their understandings of the sociopolitical contexts in which they operated and to guide and support them in developing more empowering ways to operate within and act upon these contexts. With these considerations in mind, metaphor analysis was used to develop innovative approaches for teaching and developing curriculum for the classrooms in which participants were enrolled.

In keeping with these dual goals, two different perspectives about metaphors and metaphor analysis guided this study. First, metaphor analysis was used to examine qualitative data from interviews, focus groups and classroom writing assignments by participants in order to add to the knowledge about the educational experience of low-income female adult learners, many of whom were second language learners, in a “post-welfare” era. This aspect of the study should be of interest to educators, researchers, funders, policy makers and economic rights and social justice activists. Second, the study explored several uses and purposes to which metaphor analysis can be applied: as a data generating method; as a tool for analyzing qualitative data; as a framework for curriculum development; and as a teaching strategy. This aspect of the study should be of interest to educators and researchers.

**Definition of Terms**

In this section I define some of the terms used throughout this study in order to establish common meanings that are essential for understanding this study. The
definitions offered here come from a number of different sources, as indicated, or are created by me out of a synthesis of definitions.

**Adult Basic Education (ABE):** Adult Basic Education is an umbrella term referring to educational programs that teach literacy skills to adults. ABE includes programs or courses that teach the following:

- *Literacy,* or basic reading and writing skills
- *Numeracy,* or basic skills related to numbers or to mathematical skills
- *General Educational Diploma (GED, or high school equivalency exam)* preparation
- *Native Language Literacy (NLL),* or basic literacy skills taught in learners’ native languages (other than English)
- *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL),* or English instruction for people whose native languages are not English
- *Citizenship Classes,* for newcomers and immigrants to the United States preparing to become U.S. citizens
- *Workplace or vocational training programs* that have literacy, numeracy, GED, NLL or ESOL components

The domain of ABE usually does not include public secondary schools or colleges. However, this study extends the definition ABE learners to include those community college students who are graduates of ABE programs and/or currently enrolled in developmental or “pre-college” level courses or ESOL courses, that is, those ABE graduates who are making a transition to “mainstream” college level classes taught in English. Currently, more than half of the students at Holyoke Community College enroll in developmental level or ESOL courses, generally in their first year.

**Adult Learner:** The term adult learner refers to students who are adults either because they are of legal age (over eighteen) or because they are emancipated minors
who are self-supporting (as is the case with many of the teenaged mothers participating in this study). The terms learner and student will be used interchangeably throughout this study. However, learner is the preferred term as it emphasizes the act of “learning” over that of “studying,” thus allowing for the notion that learning can result from a variety of activities (i.e., that studying something is not the only, or even the best route to learning about it) within a variety of contexts.

**Literacy:** The most commonly understood definition of literacy is having the ability to read and write, or having knowledge or competence in a particular area (such as being “computer literate”). Using this definition, a person can be described as being “literate in two languages,” for example; as being “highly literate” (meaning well-educated or well-read); or as having “low literacy skills” that is, able to read and write only at the most basic level. While the “ability to read and write” is a core definition of literacy used throughout this study, a more expanded, critical definition of literacy informs the study as well, such as the distinctions made by Freire (1991) between literacy as the ability to read print and literacy as the ability to read “the world.” And Gee (1991) offers a pluralized conception of literacy, arguing that there are many varieties of discourse systems and practices that make up literacy, and that everyone who engages in the social use of language is literate. Not every form of literacy is the same, however, according to Gee (1991), in terms of their power and dominance in society.

**Critical Pedagogy:** In this study, I use Nieto’s (1999) definition of critical pedagogy: a pedagogical approach “through which students and teachers engage in learning as a
mutual encounter with the world," an approach that "implies praxis, that is, developing the important social action predispositions and attitudes that are the backbone of a democratic society, and learning to use them to help alter patterns of domination and oppression" (Nieto 1999, 103). For further discussion of critical pedagogy, refer to the review of literature on multicultural education and critical pedagogy in Chapter 2.

Participatory Action Research (PAR): PAR is a type of research with a particular set of approaches and philosophical beliefs that fall within the qualitative research paradigm. In general, “participatory” means that PAR invites participants to become partners in the research process, though the degree of partnership and participation varies from one project to the next. Participants are usually stakeholders or community members, people directly affected by the situations being studied. PAR attempts to “enable community members to validate and reframe information provided by their own life experience to enable them to take control of their surroundings and better determine their future” (Plaut et al 1992, 57).

Metaphors: For the purpose of this research study, I define metaphors as expressions that aid the understanding of one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. This definition is based on the notion that metaphors do more than simply compare words, ideas, or concepts: they set up a relationship between two or more conceptual domains.

Metaphorical Concepts: Metaphorical concepts are the larger concepts to which all individual metaphors, or metaphorical expressions belong. Lakoff and Johnson (1981)
argue that the ordinary human conceptual system governing our thoughts and our everyday functioning, and structuring our perceptions, actions, and relations, is, by its fundamental nature, metaphorical. In other words, it is the metaphorical structure of the way people think and categorize information that makes metaphors as linguistic expressions possible. For further discussion of metaphors and metaphorical concepts, refer to the review of literature on metaphors in Chapter 2 and to the discussion of this study’s methodology in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several ways. First, it addresses a particular combination of interrelated issues: women, poverty, ethnicity, language, welfare reform, and education. The majority of participants in this study are Puerto Rican women who have dropped out of public schools and have resumed their education either as learners in Adult Basic Education programs or at a community college. Many of the participants speak Spanish as their first language. Thus, an important aspect of this study is the impact of race, ethnicity, and language on the other issues being addressed: poverty, gender, education, and the welfare system. This study adds an important perspective to the limited literature currently available about the ways that gender, class, race, language, and access to education intersect and interact in the lives of the women participating in this study.

Second, this study contributes to the body of qualitative research studies that examine the educational experiences of adult learners based on their own perceptions of those experiences. This is the only current research study, to my knowledge, that
addresses this particular set of issues from the perspective of welfare recipients and that is based on research conducted, in large part, by a group of adult learners who are directly and profoundly affected by the issues being addressed. And third, the study significantly informs both theory and practice, adding to the knowledge base about language research (metaphors in particular), about critical pedagogical strategies for language arts classrooms, about classroom-based research, and about some of the critical social, political, and economic issues that affect low-income adult learners and their families.

Because the state and federal welfare policy changes known as welfare reform were first enacted in 1996 in the United States (and in the fall of 1995 in Massachusetts), there is a limited amount of current literature dealing with the effects of these policies on women’s educational attainment. There are even fewer studies that approach and discuss these issues from the perspective of the welfare recipients themselves, as this study does. The literature on welfare reform used to frame this study consists mainly of newspaper articles, legal services documents, and reports from studies about the known and predicted impacts of welfare reform policies on adult learners, as well as books on women’s economic issues and the history of social welfare programs in the United States. The unique contribution of this study is that the stories and perspectives of a group of women directly affected by welfare reform are at its heart, and that these women conducted much of the research as well, making many of the important decisions about what questions to ask and how to ask them, what stories to tell and how to tell them.
Finally, this study adds to the literature relating to both theoretical and practical knowledge, particularly regarding language research in educational settings and strategies for using language research to shape and inform a pedagogy that is critical, culturally relevant, and socially responsible. The study sheds light on the educational experiences of a group of women learners, within a particular set of contexts, by paying close attention to the language they employed to represent those experiences and contexts. This study examined specific themes that the participants themselves identified as being critical aspects of their educational experience. In addition to examining these themes, the study explored the cognitive processes that people engage in when they make metaphors, adding to the body of knowledge about language theory. In other words, the study addressed the meanings associated with participants’ words, the process they engaged in to create those meanings, as well as the implications of both the process and the meanings for classroom practice.

Limitations of the Study

This study had four major limitations: 1) it involved a limited number of participants, all of whom were female adult learners and current or former welfare recipients; 2) it was located in a small geographical area; 3) it was filtered through my own biases, interests, and perceptions; and 4) some of the data collection activities took place within structured educational settings, a fact which may have constrained the “naturalness” of the interactions between researchers and participants. However, all of these limitations are offset by other factors, which are detailed below.
The study was limited by its small number of participants and by the fact that it was located in a small geographic area. Fifty-five women who were adult learners in two Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in Holyoke, Massachusetts participated in the study through interviews, focus groups, writing classrooms, and as survey respondents. In addition, five community college students who were members of the *Voces* team, all of whom are graduates of ABE programs, were observed over an extended period of time and interviewed on at least two occasions, in addition to their participation in focus groups and writing classrooms. Because of the limited number of participants and geographic scope, the study can make no claims as to the generalizability of its findings. It does, however, aim to reveal something about the *particular* - - the particular stories of a small group of women in a particular time and place - - rather than the general. By so doing, the study adds to the general knowledge about the experiences of low-income adult women learners in a post-welfare era. In addition, though the number of participants may be relatively small, they were carefully chosen for their expertise and unique understandings of the issues being explored. It is also important to note that a significant amount of time (more than two years) was spent with participants, allowing for a sustained engagement in the field (Ely 1991) and for the development of a solid and trusting working relationship between myself, the *Voces* team, and other participants.

The third limitation listed above is that the participants’ experiences were documented, analyzed, interpreted and reported in this study through the filter of the researcher’s perceptions, that is, through my own perceptions. Many factors affected
my perceptions. The fact that I am an educator who has worked for a decade with adult learners in Holyoke, primarily with low-income Puerto Rican women, gives me an “insider’s” view (Zeni 1995) of the territory being researched. This privileged position, while it may have afforded me easy access to information about many features of the study (Wolcott 1988), also means that I have a number of biases related to my own experiences in Holyoke.

Certain aspects of my personal history that I have in common with the study participants (I am a former welfare recipient, a single mother who has been an adult learner for many years, and a welfare rights activist) colored my perceptions and influenced what I chose to report as much as the things about my life that differ from the women participating in the study (such as the fact that I am a White, European American woman of fifty-one with a graduate degree and a relatively stable, relatively high income). All of these factors, and many others, function as lenses, and they affected what I saw and how I saw it throughout the entire research process.

However, there are a number of factors that address this limitation. The first is my commitment, as a researcher, to make my interests and biases explicit to the best of my ability. In addition, the methodological structure of the study, its participatory nature, allowed for a high level of input and feedback from participants, ensuring that my perceptions and interpretations were checked throughout the course of study. In addition, the study design was cyclic, involving multiple data collection phases, which allowed opportunities for reflection and for the refinement and testing of interpretations to occur from one phase to the next (Dick 1997).
Finally, the study was limited by the fact that some of the data collection activities, including much of the written and observed data, took place in formal educational settings that may have created obstacles to open communication. Two important characteristics of qualitative research are that it pays close attention to the contexts in which the inquiry takes place, and that those contexts are, whenever possible, natural rather than contrived (Ely 1991). However, the constraints to open communication that may have come out of a structured classroom setting in this study were offset by the fact that community college students who are close in age and come from similar ethnic, class, and educational backgrounds to the participants co-facilitated the writing classes with me. Also, because my approach to teaching writing is participatory and learner centered, and my personal teaching style is relaxed and informal, many of the barriers to open communication that may have resulted from more formal pedagogical approaches were removed.

In addition, while the collection of written and observed data took place in classroom settings, interviews and focus groups were conducted outside of the classroom, in more relaxed, less formal settings, complete with refreshments and comfortable, upholstered chairs and couches. And finally, the data also included interviews I conducted with Voces team members, with whom I had established a close and trusting working relationship over an extended period of time, a relationship that spilled across the borders of the research project and into many others domains of our lives. Those of us who worked together on this research study came to think of
ourselves as a family, with a familial bond that helped us to overcome communicative restraint.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an introduction to the study reported here, outlining its goals and purposes, the questions it investigated, and its economic, political, and educational contexts. A rationale for the use of metaphor analysis was discussed, both as an analytical approach and a pedagogical tool, in terms of its appropriateness for exploring the experiences of the adult learners who participated in the study from their own perspectives. This chapter also defined important terms used throughout this report. The study’s significance was discussed, including the contributions it made to the adult literacy field, to literature about the effects of welfare reform, to qualitative, participatory research, and to language research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study was informed by three areas of literature that together provide a framework for investigating the research questions articulated in Chapter 1. These three literature strands are: 1) multicultural education and critical pedagogy, 2) welfare reform and its impact on the educational attainment of recipients, and 3) metaphors and metaphor analysis. Each of these areas is described comprehensively in this chapter. The principles and practices of multicultural education provide the philosophical basis in which this study is grounded. In particular, theories about knowledge construction, empowerment of learners and teachers, the implications of cultural and language diversity, and critical pedagogy informed this study. Literature about the recent policy changes known as welfare reform and the ways these changes have affected adult learners provide a basis for understanding the particular social, economic, and political contexts in which the study’s participants are situated. Finally, literature relating to metaphors and metaphor analysis informed this study’s methodology as well as some of its pedagogical implications. The literature on metaphors discussed in this chapter address four areas: 1) definitions of metaphors, 2) theories about the relationship between language and thought, 3) the cognitive function of metaphors, and 4) metaphors and education.

Multicultural Education and Critical Pedagogy

Definitions of Multicultural Education

The theories and practices of multicultural education provide an important framework for this study. Access to high quality education for all students is a major
goal of multicultural education, and this study sought to understand how social conditions such as poverty, the ramifications of race, gender, and class, and social policies such as and welfare reform affected educational access for a group of low-income adult women. Multicultural education addresses inequality, both in the ways schools are connected to the inequities of the larger society and in the ways social inequality is manifested in educational institutions through underserving, miseducating, and marginalizing learners from dominated groups. This approach to education regards race, ethnicity, culture, social class, and other forms of diversity as salient features of U.S. society (Banks 1999). It views this diversity as a rich resource for education because the multiple perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences that make up that diversity can greatly enrich school communities as well as the construction of knowledge that takes place in schools.

Multicultural education has its roots in the Civil Rights movement in the United States, and was first developed in the late 1960s as an interdisciplinary education reform movement designed to restructure schools so that all students could function well in a culturally diverse world (Banks & Banks 1995, Gay 1983, Nieto 1996, Spring 1997, Suzuki 1979). Since that time, multicultural education has become increasingly influential in reforming and restructuring schools throughout the United States, although it still faces serious challenges that reflect the “value dilemma and identity crisis in U.S. society . . . as groups on the margins of society begin to participate in the center and to demand that their visions be reflected in a transformed America” (Banks 1999). According to Pardini (2000), current challenges to
multicultural education "stem in large part from an increasingly conservative political climate coupled with the enduring legacy of white supremacy" (4).

There are many definitions of multicultural education, several of which are reviewed here. Nieto (1996) conceptualizes five levels of multicultural education as it is practiced in schools. The lowest level is "monocultural education," in which no attention is paid to student diversity, racism is unacknowledged, and education supports the status quo. Throughout the next three levels ("tolerance," "acceptance," and "respect," ) education expands to include the diverse lifestyles and values of many groups, policies and practices that challenge racism become increasingly proactive, , and students and teachers take part in social action in increasingly critical ways. The highest, most ideal level involves all participants in schools engaging in "affirmation, solidarity, and critique" and "multicultural education pervades the curriculum; instructional strategies; and interactions among teachers, students, and the community" (358-9). According to Nieto (1996) multicultural education is "a process of comprehensive school reform" (307) that includes the following seven basic characteristics:

- antiracist education
- basic education
- important for all students
- pervasive
- education for social justice
- a process
- critical pedagogy

The study described in this dissertation was particularly informed by two of the seven characteristics listed above, education for social justice and critical pedagogy, in that it sought to foster in the research participants the knowledge, attitudes, confidence,
skills, and social connections to enable them to change their relationships to oppressive social institutions and policies such as welfare reform and to “put their learning into action for social justice” (Nieto 1999, 316). Critical pedagogy is discussed later in this chapter.

Sleeter notes the difference between “mainstream” multicultural education and its focus on self-esteem building and learning about various cultures and what she terms “critical multiculturalism” which involves a critical examination of institutional racism. (Sleeter, quoted in Pardini, 2000). Bennett (1995) defines multicultural education as an “approach to teaching and learning that is based upon democratic values and beliefs, and seeks to foster cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies and an independent world” (13). Bennett’s definition includes four dimensions: “the movement toward equity, the multicultural curriculum approach, the process of becoming multicultural, and the commitment to combat prejudice and discrimination” (Bennett 1995, 13). This study was informed by two of these dimensions in particular. One of the study’s goals was a movement toward more equitable opportunities for educational access for adult learners enrolled in Adult Basic Education programs. Achieving this goal required a commitment to combating discrimination through exploring the ways social and educational policies discriminate against low-income women and women of color, and fostering the empowerment of research participants to act on their knowledge and combat these discriminatory policies and practices.

Banks’ (1999) definition of multicultural education categorizes eight major characteristics that an ideal multicultural school would include: high expectations of
teachers for all students; curriculum that accounts for multiple perspectives, culturally relevant pedagogy; respect for the diverse languages and dialects that students speak; instructional materials that depict events from diverse perspectives; students of color and language minority students are represented proportionately in classes for the gifted and talented; a school environment that values all cultural and ethnic diversity, especially that within the school itself; and multiculturally oriented and trained school counselors (17-20). Banks (1999) also defines the major components of multicultural education by conceptualizing its five major dimensions: 1) content integration, 2) the knowledge construction process, 3) prejudice reduction, 4) an equity pedagogy, and 5) an empowering school culture and social structure (14). The study described in this dissertation was particularly influenced by two of these dimensions: the process of knowledge construction as it occurred throughout the life of the research project and the empowerment of adult learners who participated in this study within their schools and society.

Multicultural Education and Knowledge Construction

Multicultural education assumes the non-neutrality of both education and knowledge, views knowledge as socially constructed, and fosters the potential of education for generating knowledge that challenges social norms and institutions (Banks 1999, Freire 1993, Greene 1988, Nieto 1999, Spring 1997, Walsh 1991). Making the knowledge construction process explicit is an important aspect of multicultural teaching because it helps learners to understand how knowledge is created and influenced by the particular understandings, experiences, and positions of those creating it, such as their racial, ethnic, class, and gender positions (Banks 1999).
Banks (1993) discusses the national debate between “western traditionalists” and “multiculturalists” over the kinds of knowledge that belong in public school, college and university curricula, that is, in the canon. He develops a typology describing five types of knowledge, all of which, he argues, should be included in the canon. These types of knowledge are personal/cultural, popular, mainstream academic, transformative academic, and school knowledge. His rationale for including all five types of knowledge in the canon is based on arguments against the limitations, unexamined or unacknowledged assumptions, perspectives and biases of western empirical scholarship.

This study is also informed by Park’s (1996) discussion of three interconnected forms of knowledge that are generated through participatory action research: representative, relational, and reflective knowledge. Representative knowledge attempts to interpret and depict data in ways that create a coherent reality. Relational knowledge, in which the knower is also the known, is created out of the relationships formed within a research community. Relational knowledge involves engaging participants in constructing knowledge together by sharing their individual knowledge and perspectives with each other, perspectives that are based on their first hand experience of the issues being investigated. Reflective knowledge is closely related to Freire’s (1993) concept of conscientização, involving both critical and moral awareness, instilling in the knower conviction, courage, and empowerment to engage in social action. A more thorough discussion of these three forms of knowledge takes place in Chapter 3.
This study was informed by the transformative potential of multicultural education (Banks 1999, hooks 1993, Nieto 1999) in that it encourages critique, facilitates social action and implies "praxis," an approach to education that combines knowledge, reflection, and action (Freire 1993, Shor 1992, Sleeter 1996, Nieto 1999 Walsh 1991). Transformative education has as a major purpose the empowerment of learners. An empowering school culture, according to Banks (1999) "involves conceptualizing the school as a unit of change and making structural changes within the school environment so that students from all social-class, racial, ethnic, and gender groups will have an equal opportunity for success" (17). The goals of a transformative curriculum, according to Banks (1999), are to help learners "to know, to care, and to act in ways that will develop and foster a democratic and just society in which all groups experience cultural democracy and cultural empowerment" (32-3).

According to Nieto (1999), the empowerment of students is "not simply the development of individual consciousness, but a social engagement . . . [suggesting] a redefinition of relationships between and among teachers and students" (Nieto 1999, 105). Empowerment is not a commodity given by the teacher to the learner. Rather it involves creating an environment that is "both stimulating and flexible in which students can exercise increasing levels of power while regularly reflecting upon and evaluating the . . . learner-teacher relationship (Peterson 1991, 165). Empowering education implies access to "forms of knowledge that enable creative life and thought, and access to a social dialogue that enables democratic communication and participation" (Darling-Hammond 1998). Empowering education means provoking
learners to "reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space . . . [and to] become empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds" (Greene 1988).

Multicultural Education, Culture, and Language

The implications of cultural and linguistic diversity have an important bearing on this study because of the ways language and cultural differences affected participants' educational experiences, highlighting the "intriguing connection between culture and the sociopolitical context of schooling" (Nieto 1996, 143). "Discontinuity" (Nieto 1996) or incompatibility between home and school cultures and languages create serious barriers to educational achievement for learners from dominated or marginalized groups, whether these are physical barriers such as the lack of access to information and educational opportunities, or psychological barriers such as the alienation and cultural devaluation some learners experience within educational institutions because of their languages and cultures. Nieto (1996) calls for a three-pronged approach on the part of schools to enhance the success of learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, including 1) acknowledging the differences that learners bring to school, 2) admitting that these differences may influence learning and achievement, and 3) making provisions for these differences (136-7).

One of the ways to acknowledge and understand the impact of difference on learning is for educators to pay attention to the complexities of those differences (Greene 1993, Nieto 1996, 1999, Tatum 1997). Nieto (1996) cautions that culture alone does not account for all human difference as it relates to learning, stating that
viewing culture as the “primary determinant” of academic achievement can be “oversimplistic, dangerous, and counterproductive because, while culture may influence it does not determine who we are” (137). Other factors that influence learning include students’ individual learning styles, communication styles, and language differences (Nieto 1996).

Some of the educational barriers learners face because of language differences include the lack of English in an English dominated culture, the outsider status that speaking a language other than English often confers on people, the devaluation of peoples’ home languages and cultures, negative interactions between learners and teachers, the fact that students who are not fluent in English are often viewed as less intelligent than native English speakers, and the lack of recognition on the part of educators for the sheer difficulty of learning to speak English (Nieto 1996).

As these factors suggest, many of the barriers encountered by students who are learning English do not necessarily stem from language differences per se, but from the ways schools and society treat those differences. For the women who participated in this study, the fact that they spoke Spanish or were bilingual was not, in and of itself, a problem. Rather, most of the barriers they experienced were caused by negative attitudes and the lack of understanding and accommodation on the part of the English dominant schools, social service agencies, and communities they interacted with. Bilingualism, in fact, can be an asset to learning. A first language can provide useful building blocks on which to learn a second (Nieto 1996), and literacy in more than one language can give people an advantage over those who are monolingual. In addition, language diversity, like cultural diversity, can enrich any
educational setting if it is valued, understood, and utilized as a resource for learning and teaching about the world from a variety of perspectives.

There are other important differences among groups who migrate or immigrate to the United States that need to be taken into account in order to understand the sociopolitical context of learning, such as the historical relationships of each group to the United States. Ogbu (1991) classifies minority groups in the United States into three categories as a way to account for the difficulties these groups may experience in schools: 1) Autonomous minorities are those groups possessing a cultural identity that is different from the dominant culture, but their cultural identities do not cause them to be subordinated socially, economically, or politically as a group. 2) Immigrant minorities are those who move voluntarily to the United States with expectations for greater opportunities and/or freedom, and do not experience school failure as a group because their expectations influence the ways they respond to the educational institutions in their host culture. 3) Castelike or involuntary minorities come to the United States involuntarily because of slavery, colonization, or conquest (or they are descendants of those who migrate involuntarily). It is this group that experiences the greatest difficulties in schools. Ogbu argues that the cultures of involuntary minorities “embody contrasting cultural or collective identities, folk theories of how to succeed in the United States, and degrees of trusting relationships with the public schools and the white Americans who control them,” all of which contribute to their “patterns of social adjustment and academic performance” (Ogbu 1991, 31).
The majority of participants in this study are Puerto Rican women, a culture that falls into Ogbu’s “involuntary minority” category because of the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States and the accompanying history of economic, political, cultural, and linguistic domination by the United States over Puerto Rico (Banks 1991, Nieto 1993, Spring 1997, Bigler 1999). Ogbu’s theories help to explain some of the conflicts the participants experience in U.S. schools. However, other factors and contexts must be considered as well in order to understand participants’ school experiences, including the interconnected impacts of race, gender, language, and poverty as well as the particular educational experiences and individual qualities of learners involved in this study (Nieto 1996).

Another factor that impacts this study is the notion of “deculturalization” (Spring 1997), the pressure society places upon dominated groups to leave behind their home languages and cultures and to assimilate to U.S. culture and society. Many of the participants in this study talked about their efforts to maintain their home cultures and languages and to transmit these to their children, even though they often experienced a tremendous pressure to assimilate in order to succeed academically. These women work hard to preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage from one generation to the next in order to forestall its extinction, a very real threat that history has proved results from assimilation (Banks 1996). Multicultural education has played an important role in developing pluralistic alternatives to the assimilation model.

Critical Pedagogy

An important characteristic of multicultural education, critical pedagogy, informed this study, particularly as it relates to adult literacy. Critical pedagogy is an
approach that gives learners and teachers alike opportunities to engage in both learning and action in order to bring about social change and social justice (Nieto 1999). Two major goals of this study were to engage adult learners in research activities and educational experiences stemming from critical issues in their lives and to create opportunities for them to bring about social change. A critical pedagogical approach implies building on the knowledge and experience learners bring to the classroom, which begins, as Nieto suggests, with “acknowledging that students have significant experiences, insights, and talents to bring to their learning, and . . . finding ways to use them in the classroom” (Nieto 1999, 109).

The participatory nature and ethical concerns of this study were informed by Freire’s discussion of “thematic investigation” within educational settings as “a process of search, of knowledge, and thus of creation” (Freire 1993, 89). This process involves investigating “generative themes,” that is, themes identified by participants that contain “the possibility of unfolding into again as many themes, which in their turn call for new tasks to be fulfilled” (Freire 1993, 83). Thematic investigation, according to Freire, “is only justified to the extent that it returns to the people what truly belongs to them; to the extent that it represents, not an attempt to learn about the people, but to come to know with them the reality which challenges them” (Freire 1993, 91). This study was informed by these considerations, as one of its major goals was to enhance participants’ knowledge of their lived experiences within larger sociopolitical contexts in order to foster their ability to act upon the realities which challenge and oppress them.
The Relationship Between Multicultural Education and Critical Pedagogy

Multicultural education “has always contained within it the seeds of critical pedagogy” (Nieto 1995b, 192). According to Nieto whose definition of multicultural education includes critical pedagogy (Nieto 1996), both fields have benefited from each other: multicultural education has “become enriched through an incorporation of tenets of critical pedagogy, . . .[and] critical pedagogy has become more grounded with an injection of considerations of race, class, gender, and difference” (Nieto 1995b, 192). Multicultural education and critical pedagogy are separate fields that have many concepts, concerns, practices, and objectives in common. Their common purposes are to “empower students and transform schools and society for greater freedom, equality, and justice within the contextual realities of cultural pluralism . . . [and both are] grounded in convictions that the democratic imperative is still valid and attainable.” This imperative, however, “requires a radical transformation of the education process” (Gay 1995, 181-2). The philosophies upon which both multicultural education and critical pedagogy are based are central to the debate about school reform, particularly in terms of achieving greater equity and excellence and linking educational reform to democratic principles and the politics of cultural differences (Gay 1995, Giroux & McLaren 1989).

Both multicultural education and critical pedagogy use a language of critique, “endorse pedagogies of resistance, possibility, and hope” and are “grounded in principles of personal liberation, critical democracy, and social equality, and an acceptance of the political and partisan nature of knowledge, human learning, and the educational process” (Gay 1995, 156). Both emphasize engaging in analysis of how
schools perpetuate discrimination against marginalized groups and of the ways that such perpetuation links them to other institutional forms of racism and discrimination (Gay 1995).

Most mainstream pedagogy is “membership-oriented” in that it requires teachers to help learners assimilate to the dominant culture and acquire “those necessary interpretive skills and forms of cultural capital that will enable them to negotiate . . . the often complex, complicated, and conflictual public and institutional spaces within the larger society” (Sleeter & McLaren 1995, 6). Multicultural education and critical pedagogy, on the other hand, “bring into the arena of schooling insurgent, resistant, and insurrectional modes of interpretation and classroom practices” which contest the dominant cultural norms and premises for “‘proper’ behavior, comportment, and social interaction.” (Sleeter & McLaren 1995, 6).

Critical pedagogy “challenges teachers and students to empower themselves for social change, to advance democracy and equality as they advance their literacy and knowledge.” (Shor 1993, 25). Multicultural education and critical pedagogy are much more than “a set of methodological formulations.” Rather, they consist of a “particular ethico-political attitude or ideological stance that one constructs in order to confront and engage the world critically and challenge power relations” (Shor 1993, 7).

Origins of Critical Pedagogy

One of the most influential contributors to both the theory and practice of critical pedagogy was the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire’s literacy practices and theoretical work dealt mainly with discrimination based on social class in adult
Freire coined the widely used term “banking education” or a “banking concept of education” (Freire 1993), a phrase referring to an educational approach in which the teacher, who is viewed as knowledgeable, bestows knowledge upon the student, who is viewed as having no knowledge. “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat” (Freire 1993, 53). The banking approach to education is an “exercise of domination” that has the “ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating [students] to adapt to the world of oppression” (Freire 1993, 59).

Traditional “banking” approaches, whether in public schools or adult literacy settings, conceive of knowledge as positivistic, situating knowledge as separate from the individual’s actions, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, and contexts (Walsh 1991). In positivist oriented pedagogy, knowledge is viewed and treated as “separate from lived experiences, as transcendent of culture and history,” and disconnected from its human purposes (Walsh 1991). In a positivist approach, curriculum and instruction convey that there is one standard language, culture, and perspective (that of the dominant group) that is legitimate, valued, and worthy of portrayal (Walsh 1991).
Critical theory provides a basis for viewing human knowledge in ways that connect it to human needs and to the contextual forces and relations of power that influence knowledge (Walsh 1991). A critical approach to literacy “begins with the recognition of the complex and often contradictory dynamics of and relations among learners, teachers, communities, schools, and society” (Walsh 1991, 17) and helps learners and teachers to question, challenge, and act in enlightened ways upon the structures and institutions that oppress them.

Critical Pedagogy and Literacy

Freire (1993) viewed literacy as encompassing more than reading and writing skills, but rather as a process that is “purposeful, contextual, and transformative,” placing “the learner rather than the teacher or the text at the center of the literacy process” as an active agent (Walsh 1991, 6). Macedo (1995) argues against an “instrumentalist approach” to literacy, particularly “literacy for the poor” which employs a “competency-based skills banking approach . . . characterized by mindless, meaningless drills and exercises” that “prevent the development of the critical thinking that enables one to ‘read the world’ critically and to understand the reasons and the linkages behind the facts.” (78). The instrumentalist approach to literacy may produce what Macedo (1995) calls “functional literates,” whose literacy development may give them access to jobs and better economic status, but an approach that merely emphasizes the mechanics of reading and writing sacrifices a “critical analysis of . . . the social and political structures that inform their realities” (84) or the racism, sexism, classism and other forms of discrimination that they face in their schools and communities. Leistyna and Woodrum (1996) critique the “back to basics” movement
in education, based on conservative “technocratic” models that focus on transferring basic skills in reading, writing, and math from instructor to student through drill and rote memorization. “Such a pedagogical model, which focuses exclusively on preparing students for the work force, abstracts education from the challenges of developing a critically conscious, socially responsible, and politically active student body and citizenry” (Leistyna & Woodrum 1996, 1).

Wells (1991) defines literacy as having four levels: performative, functional, informational, and epistemic. Performative literacy involves acquiring decoding written messages into speech and understanding its meaning. Functional literacy involves the ability to cope with the everyday reading and writing demands of social life such as reading newspapers and filling out job descriptions. The informational level requires the ability to access the knowledge that schools offer, particularly through reading. The fourth level, epistemic literacy, involves literacy as a communication mode, both to enhance interpersonal communication through reading and writing and to acquire ways of “acting upon and transforming knowledge and experience that are, in general, unavailable to those who have never learned to read and write” (Wells 1991, 53). In this sense, literacy is both a language mode and a thinking mode. This epistemic level of literacy is most closely related to critical pedagogy in that it is concerned with “transforming knowledge and experience” through connecting them to reflection and action.

Problem-Posing and Dialogue

Using a “problem-posing” approach to education (Freire 1993, Leistyna & Woodrum 1996), critical pedagogy involves teachers and learners together viewing
the world as a “text” and deconstructing that text by posing questions, critiquing it, taking it apart, and examining it from a variety of perspectives, within various contexts, and through a variety of sociohistorical lenses. Deconstruction is a process in which surface appearances are penetrated in order to “transcend the tyranny of common sense, to expose the unconsciousness of a culture” (Kincheloe & Steinberg 1996).

Critical pedagogy involves both teachers and learners as co-participants in learning and the construction of knowledge as they engage in dialogue, a “process of learning and knowing” (Freire & Macedo 1996) with the goal of empowering participants to act upon and transform their relationships to the oppressive social institutions to which they are connected and to create a community characterized by a shared commitment and a common good (hooks 1993). Dialogue in a critical pedagogical sense is a focused, purposeful conversation using discussion and open-ended questioning in order to illuminate the lived realities of learners rather than to obscure or ignore them (Peterson 1991). “Liberatory” dialogue challenges the “existing domination” of the traditional student-teacher relationship in that it “disconfirms domination and illuminates while affirming the freedom of the participants to re-make their culture” (Shor & Freire 1987).

Critical pedagogy both promotes an understanding of difference and the social and political implications of difference, and engages teachers and learners in a form of dialogue that involves thinking, speaking, and acting across differences (Leistyna & Woodrum 1996). Dialogue in this sense is not a prescriptive methodology, but rather it requires taking into consideration the particular contexts of the issues at hand and
the multiple perspectives of participants (Freire & Macedo 1996, Leistyna & Woodrum 1996), “tapping the spectrum of intelligences, encouraging multiple readings of written texts and readings of the world” in order to “inspire hitherto unheard voices . . . to empower people to rediscover their own memories and articulate them in the presence of others, whose space they can share” (Greene 1996, 29). Engaging in dialogue requires opening “public spheres . . . where a better state of things can be imagined; because it is only through the projection of a better social order that we can perceive the gaps in what exists and try to transform and repair” (Greene 1996, 29).

Welfare Reform and its Impact on Educational Attainment

The impact of welfare reform on adult learners and their ability to complete their educational goals is also an important aspect of this study’s context because virtually all of the participants were affected by these policies, most of them in profound ways. A primary goal of this study was to examine in depth how welfare reform affected a relatively small group of participants. Some of the other studies and reports on welfare reform’s impacts on other groups in other locations helped to illuminate some of the issues and experiences this study’s participants have in common with other welfare recipients in other parts of the nation.

Because the implementation of the policy changes known as welfare reform only began in 1996 nationally, the literature related to its effects on women’s educational attainment is limited. The literature framing this study consisted mainly of newspaper and journal articles, documents from legal service organizations and other advocacy groups, reports from studies about the impact of welfare reform on access

In the three years between February of 1995, when welfare reform was instituted in Massachusetts, and February 1999, state welfare rolls dropped by 46.5 percent. Over six thousand families, including 8,400 children lost their benefits in Massachusetts during this period (MLRI 1999). In Massachusetts, as in many other states, several studies offer contradictory information and interpretations of how families are faring who have lost TAFDC benefits as a result of welfare reform. In April of 1999 the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance released a report, “How Are They Doing,” based on a longitudinal study of households leaving welfare. The report paints a relatively rosy picture of former welfare recipients’ income levels and general well-being. The DTA report was based on data from 341 individuals interviewed within three months of losing their TAFDC benefits, though the number of these respondents who continued to participate in the study after a year of losing their benefits dropped to 210 (MADTA 1999).

The majority of respondents in the DTA study were White, female, and English speaking. Forty percent of the respondents did not have a high school diploma or GED. Three quarters of the people interviewed in the first round stated that they were the same or better off financially since leaving TAFDC, and 60 percent of these respondents thought they were better off financially since losing their
benefits. Eighty percent reported that at least one person in the household “had worked at some time since leaving TAFDC.” At the time of their interviews, more than a third of the respondents were working full time (30 or more hours a week) making a median wage of $280 per week, while seventy-one respondents were working part time, making a median wage of $140 per week. By the fourth round of interviews, 83 percent of the 210 interviewed reported being the same or better off financially and 85 percent said their general well being had improved since leaving TAFDC (MADTA 1999).

Several reports issued at the same time as the DTA study offer a very different portrait of how post-welfare families are doing in the state. One of these, “A Closer Look” (MLRI 1999), prepared by the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, examined the number of requests for extensions of benefits made by families reaching the time limit. Of 6,328 Massachusetts families whose benefits had run out, more than half had requested extensions. Only 4 percent of these extensions had been approved at the time of the report in March, 1999, even though, as the report states, many of these families are still living in poverty:

What does this mean for families? 8,400 children have already lost all of their TAFDC benefits. Of these children, 5,400 are in families where the parent is working but earning so little that the family qualified for a small supplemental welfare grant before the time limit hit. Most of the rest have no income at all. All of these children were poor before the time limit hit, and they are even poorer now (MLRI 1999, 3).
The MLRI report claims that the state is discriminating against working poor families by denying extensions to benefits that may offer a direly needed bridge of support for families making the transition from welfare to work. Albelda, an economist at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, critiques the DTA report even further:

The main philosophic principles of Massachusetts's welfare reform are "work first" and "any job is a good job." (The latter slogan appears prominently in DTA offices across the state.) Intuitively and empirically, we know the types of welfare policies passed in 1995 -- short time limits, strict reporting and work rules, limited education and training opportunities -- do provide a strong push for families receiving welfare to go off. The real question is, to what? This report finally provides some answers, but they are not the ones we were told we would get with welfare reform (Albelda 1999, 13).

According to Albelda, about one out of four of the former recipients who responded to the DTA's survey were earning more than $250 a week twelve months after leaving welfare. Another 25 percent were earning wages below the poverty level. About 20 percent were back on welfare and not employed, while the remaining 30 percent were neither employed nor on welfare. Half of those employed were working in low-wage occupations, the kinds of jobs that carry few, if any benefits. More than two out of five respondents did not receive health insurance through their jobs a year after leaving welfare. Despite the low earnings of most former recipients, Albelda states, the Massachusetts legislature has refused to allow education and training to count as part of the work requirement, or workfare, under welfare reform, arguing that people should pursue education and training after they find jobs. "The findings in the DTA's report suggest that this argument is wrong," Albelda states:
A year after leaving welfare, only one out of every ten (11.2 percent) respondents had participated in an education or training program in the three months prior to their interview. The most common reasons cited are that they had no time (36.5 percent), they couldn't afford it (24.7 percent), and they did not have child care (12.9 percent). Two-thirds said more education and training while on welfare would have been helpful (Albelda 1999, 13).

Research done by the National Priorities Project in Northampton Massachusetts suggests that people entering the job market in Massachusetts with few skills may indeed find jobs, but their chances of moving out of poverty are slim, given the kinds of jobs available to them. Sixty-one percent of the jobs with the most growth in Massachusetts pay less than a livable wage (the minimum income required to meet a family’s basic needs), while 42 percent of these jobs pay less than half of a livable wage. Studies by the Census Bureau and the National Governor’s Association report that only 28.8 percent of former welfare recipients hold jobs that pay above the $14,500 poverty level for a family of three (National Priorities Project 1998).

In a recent position paper on declining educational opportunities for low-income women, Kates (1998), who is co-chair of the Massachusetts-based Welfare Education Training Access Coalition, or WETAC, critiques a number of erroneous premises on which welfare reform’s “work-first” philosophy is based, including the false assumptions that most welfare recipients have no work experience; that they are not currently working; that jobs are readily available; that job retention rates are high; and that employers are willing to hire people regardless of their literacy, training, and
education skills. "While it is realistic to expect that most adults can find and hold a job," Kates says, "it is unrealistic to believe the job market will provide all of them with a decent standard of living" (22). In Massachusetts, an estimated 29,000 former recipients will be competing for 14,500 low wage jobs or job training opportunities in the near future, while the existing low skilled workforce will also be competing for those same jobs. This gives the people competing for these jobs a 37 percent chance of obtaining one of them (National Priorities Project Fact Sheet, cited in Kates).

The reports cited above reflect the tone of much of the current debate on the outcomes of welfare reform both nationally and in Massachusetts, a debate characterized by very different interpretations of statistics and often diametrically opposed assumptions about the reasons people live in poverty, lack employment, and rely on welfare. Two articles that appeared in the same edition of *The Boston Globe* (Wong 1999; Meckler 1999) reflect the contradictions of this debate. The Wong article, citing an Urban Institute study, predicts that, because of a booming economy, the low-skill labor market in Boston would easily absorb the hundreds of former welfare recipients looking for jobs each year and that this influx of workers would not drive down wages or displace other workers, as others had feared. The Meckler article examines child poverty rates in the United States in the past three years, and claims that, while welfare reform has done a fine job in moving people off welfare it has a dismal record of moving people, particularly children, out of poverty.

In a *New York Times* article, Edelman (who resigned from President Clinton’s cabinet in protest of his signing the 1996 welfare law), critiques what he sees as Washington’s current boasting about the success of welfare reform, which, he claims,
should be much greater in a booming economy (Edelman 1999). Edelman writes that, depending on the state, 30 to 50 percent of those who leave welfare do not find jobs. Of those who do, many can not find steady work: unemployment records from a number of states show that two-thirds of those who left welfare were unemployed for at least three months in the first year after leaving the rolls. And, many who work can not get their families out of poverty: more than 70 percent of poor children live in families in which someone has income from work. And these problems, states Edelmen, hit minorities the hardest: “We should remember that race is an underlying issue in the debate on poverty” (Edelmen 1999).

In Massachusetts, as in Washington, the official story is that welfare reform has been an unqualified success because of a dramatic drop in caseloads. Yet, opponents of welfare reform policies claim that it has driven the nation’s poorest families deeper into poverty while removing a vital safety net for them (Emery 1999). Speeter (cited in Emery 1999), observes “If the goal is just to get people off welfare, then I suppose the welfare bureaucracy may be successful. We really need to go beyond that. What we’re seeing state-by-state is that we’re becoming a two-tiered society. There’s a growing underclass that is just not able to make it.”

A major assumption underlying welfare reform policies is that poverty is caused by the deficient behavior of the poor (D’Amico 1998; Albelda & Folbre 1996; Abramovitz 1996). Steinitz, a professor in the Center for Public and Community Service at the University of Massachusetts/Boston and a welfare activist for more than two decades, writes:
While victim blaming is nothing new, it invariably escalates during times of conservative ascendance, and that's what we're seeing now. The myth of individual responsibility is being used to justify the grossest inequities in U.S. history. After all, so the myth tells us, welfare moms, school drop-outs, and the unemployed must have only themselves to blame if they can't find a way to make it in this age of spectacular economic growth (Steinitz 1999, 3).

The pro-welfare reform, victim-blaming campaign waged by the legislature and often supported by the mass media is fueled by a number of false myths and stereotypes about welfare recipients. According to Steinitz:

The "crisis" in welfare . . . [has] been manufactured to convince us that drastic action is needed, action that many people once might have found too harsh. For example, the conservative attack on the successes of the 1960s welfare rights movement began in the '70s with a relentless stream of stories about lazy, fraudulent, immoral, welfare queens, having baby after baby in order to stay on the dole . . . . These . . . tales set the stage for the recent successful campaign to end welfare as an entitlement. But, in reality, welfare recipients do not spend their lives raking in benefits, cheating the government or having more children in order to increase their benefits. Indeed, the majority of recipients have received assistance for less than two years, have the same number of children as other women, and have worked both before and after receiving benefits. (3)

Much of the literature specifically addressing how Massachusetts welfare reform policies affect recipients' access to education and the impact of educational access on their earning potential (1999 Blanton 2000, Kates 1988, Meckler 1999, Nolan 1999) tends to agree that declining educational opportunities have had a very negative impact on low-income women's ability to earn a living wage. Many predict that the state's job market will not be able to provide a decent standard of living for the large numbers of former recipients seeking jobs, especially during the economic downturn that is expected to follow on the heels of the current economic boom (Crowley 1999, Kuttner 2000, National Priorities Project 1988). The National
Priorities Project predicts that an estimated 29,000 former recipients will be competing for 14,500 low wage jobs or job training opportunities in the near future, while the existing low skilled workforce will also be competing for those same jobs, giving each job-seeker about a 37 percent chance of obtaining a job (National Priorities Project Fact Sheet, cited in Kates 1998).

For Latinos, the economic prospect is much worse than for whites. According to a study presented at the National Conference of La Raza (Daily Hampshire Gazette 2000), U.S. born Latinos have a poverty rate three times higher than whites. Even in a booming economy, Latinos nation-wide only earned half the amount of money as whites in 1998, an income disparity that could have severe economic consequences in the near future, as Latinos’ participation in the workforce grows. A growing but increasingly poorer work force could harm the United States’ ability to compete globally as well as to fund programs like Social Security. (Daily Hampshire Gazette 2000).

**Metaphors and Metaphor Analysis**

Metaphor analysis was an important feature of this study as it was used both to generate and analyze data as well as to explore innovative learner-centered pedagogical strategies. This coupling of research methodology with educational practice reflects the philosophical principles of both multicultural education and participatory action research in that it suggests ways to link theory to practice and to provide opportunities for participants to advance their literacy and academic skills while furthering their knowledge of the issues being investigated.
The literature on metaphors and metaphor analysis is extensive. This study mainly draws on literature dealing with people’s spoken or written metaphors as they relate to cognition, particularly within educational settings. This literature aided analysis and interpretation of language data collected for this study. Locating the study within this body of literature provided insights about ways to analyze the content of the metaphors studied, thus furthering knowledge and understanding of peoples’ experiences and perceptions about the topics addressed in interviews, focus groups and writing activities. The literature on metaphors also provided a foundation and framework for understanding the cognitive process of making metaphors, using language data to understand the ways people conceptualize and categorize their experiences within the social, political, and cultural contexts from which they think and speak. Furthering the understanding of low-income adult learners’ experiences and the ways they conceptualize and express these experiences will be of interest both to researchers and educators, especially those with an interest in studying language data in educational settings as it relates to cognition.

In order to inform the research interests of this study, the literature used as its foundation will address the following interrelated themes:

- definitions of metaphors
- theories about the relationship between language and thought
- the cognitive function of metaphors
- metaphors and education

A Definition of Metaphors

The literature provides numerous and often conflicting definitions of metaphors. For the purposes of this study, I define two related terms: metaphors and
metaphorical concepts, because this research study analyzes both individual metaphors used by participants and the metaphorical concepts to which they belong. I define metaphors as expressions that aid the understanding of one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. This definition is based on the notion that metaphors do more than simply compare words, ideas, or concepts: they set up a relationship between two or more conceptual domains (Basso 1976, Glucksberg & Keysar 1990, Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Ortony 1993, Turner 1987). Examples of individual metaphorical expressions that were analyzed in this study include those which made explicit connections between two conceptual domains (such as “education is a trampoline” and “support is a spider web”), as well as expressions that make implicit connections between two conceptual domains (such as “education opens a lot of doors for people” and “I have a good network of support to help me stay in school”).

Metaphors are commonly defined as comparisons: figures of speech which make obvious or implied comparisons between two or more things which share salient properties. In the literature on metaphors, Aristotle is often quoted as considering the comparative metaphor to be the paradigm for all metaphors. The notion that a metaphor is “the recognition of objective properties being objectively shared by objective referents in the objective world” is attributed to Aristotle (Turner 1987, 18). Turner (1987) calls the comparative metaphor “Aristotle’s metaphor,” and asserts, as do many contemporary metaphor scholars, that it is only one of many other types of metaphors (Fiumara 1995, Fogelin 1986, Goosens et al 1995, Lakoff 1987, Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Turner 1987). In addition, the process of comparing two or more
things is only one part of a very complex cognitive undertaking when making formulations.

Fogelin (1986) calls the comparative metaphor an “elliptical simile,” a “comparison drawn elliptically that might have been drawn directly” (Fogelin 1986: 27). The meaning of an elliptical simile is not significantly altered with the addition of “as” or “like” (that is, “Achilles is a lion” is commonly understood to mean “Achilles is like a lion”). However, even if read as an elliptical simile, a metaphor usually has more force than a simile, because of its brevity and its ability to startle the hearer or reader with its novelty or the trick of its seeming falseness at first reading (Fogelin 1986).

Turner (1987) critiques the notion that all metaphors are expressions of similarity between two things, saying that such a definition of metaphors presupposes that the shared properties of the primary and secondary subjects already exist in a person’s conceptual understanding, and that metaphors do not “impose structure on our concepts; they merely rely on previous structure and do no more than highlight, filter, or select aspects of that given structure” (Turner 1987, 17). Creative metaphors, Turner (1987) argues, often create similarity, thus imposing structure (the secondary subject imposes structure on the primary). Numerous metaphors used in everyday speech that are part of common conceptual understanding that do not structure each other in terms of their shared properties (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Turner 1987).

Metaphorical concepts are the larger concepts to which all individual metaphors, or metaphorical expressions (such as the ones given above) belong.
Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim that the ordinary human conceptual system governing our thoughts and our everyday functioning, and structuring our perceptions, actions, and relations, is “fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (3). In other words, it is the metaphorical structure of the way people think that makes metaphors as linguistic expressions possible. Gibbs (1994) states that conceptual metaphors structure everyday experience and that most of our basic concepts are understood metaphorically. Many literal expressions actually belong to metaphorical concepts that are part of ordinary cognition, and thus are actually metaphorical, or figurative, rather than literal. The fact that conceptual metaphors (“argument is war” for instance) are so deeply entrenched as function unconsciously in language that speakers are unaware, consciously, of the figurative nature of many expressions they commonly use. However, despite the fact that these devices operate unconsciously, they still have the power to structure cognition, to organize thought and experience, and to convey that structure and organization.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) divide metaphorical concepts found in everyday speech into three main categories: orientational, ontological, and structural. 

Orientational metaphorical concepts, such as “more is up,” structure concepts in a linear way, such as up/down; front/back; ahead/behind. Examples of common metaphorical expressions belonging to the concept “more is up” include:

- My income rose this year.
- The number of graduates from our program went up.
- The pollen count is incredibly high today.

Ontological metaphorical concepts project entity or substance onto things that lack entity or substance, as in the conceptual metaphor “the mind is a container.”
Some commonly used examples of mind/container metaphors include “I can’t get the thought of you out of my head; Her mind is full of ridiculous notions; He’s empty-headed.”

*Structural* metaphorical concepts structure one type of experience or activity in terms of another, as in “Understanding is seeing” (“I see your point; This experience was a real eye-opener for me”). Metaphors like the examples given above are so prevalent and so deeply embedded in everyday language that they usually are taken as literal rather than as metaphorical expressions. However, when closely analyzed, the metaphorical concepts underlying a person’s linguistic expressions can reveal a great deal about their experiences, values, perceptions, ideas, relationship to the world, and so on. All of the conceptual metaphors examined in this study are structural metaphors.

Rather than having salient properties in common, orientational metaphors are usually based in physical and cultural experiences and beliefs, and can vary from one culture to another (Turner 1987). An example is the orientational metaphor “rational is up/emotional is down” (“She couldn’t rise above her emotions,” “We engaged in a high-level intellectual discussion”). Lakoff and Johnson (1987) argue that the “rational is up” metaphor stems from both physical experience (that human beings stand upright, making “up” superior to “down”) and from a particular cultural belief that human beings have control over animals and nature because of their ability to reason, thus making reason superior to emotion.

Numerous studies (Basso 1976, Gibbs 1986, Fiumara 1995, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Schon 1979, Turner 1987) provide a great deal of linguistic evidence
that reveals the pervasiveness of metaphorical concepts in everyday thought and speech. These studies show how metaphors both reflect and help to shape their speakers’ conceptual systems, physical experiences, relationships to the world, and the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts within which people’s ideas are conceived and developed. Kittay (quoted in Fiumara 1995) states that metaphor is “as fundamental as inductive and deductive reasoning in formulating hypotheses, providing explanations, forming categories, generating predictions and guiding behavior” (11).

Gibbs (1994) argues that the use of metaphors is pervasive in everyday speech, and the ease with which such communicative devices are used and understood is due to the speakers of a particular discourse having “common ground (i.e., the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes that are recognized as being shared by speakers and listeners in any discourse situation” (413).

An example of the pervasiveness of metaphor use in everyday speech is a database consisting of figurative expressions relating to linguistic action compiled from the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Goosens et al 1995). The database consists of nearly 2,000 commonly used expressions relating specifically to linguistic action.

Theories about Metaphors: The Relationship Between Language and Thought

Theories about metaphors in the literature used for this study are concerned primarily with the ways metaphors relate to human cognition, particularly the ways people conceptualize and categorize information, ideas, experiences, and perceptions. In recent years, metaphor has become a popular area of research in a number of
disciplines, particularly in education, psychotherapy, and the interdisciplinary area of
cognitive science, which includes linguistics, philosophy, psychology, computer
sciences, anthropology, and literary theory.

Current theories about metaphors and their relation to cognition abound, are
extremely diverse, and often hotly debated. Much of the current debate about
metaphors centers on how people think, that is, on the relationship between language
and thought and the nature of the human conceptual system and its organization

Lakoff (1987) compares the “traditional view” of human cognition (which he
refers to as *objectivism* because it asserts that human reason is “abstract and
disembodied [and] . . . independent of the understanding of any organism”) with more
recent claims, including his own, that reason has a “bodily basis” (xii). Lakoff refers
to the “new view” (that thought “fundamentally grows out of embodiment”) as
*experiential realism* or *experientialism* (Lakoff 1987, xv). Johnson (1987) uses the
term “non-objectivist” to argue that “embodied and imaginative structures of
meaning” are always influenced by “human understanding, which constitutes our
experience of a common world that we can make some sense of. A theory of meaning
is a theory of understanding” (174).

The objectivist view has held sway for at least two thousand years, from the
time of the ancient Greeks. While there is agreement in both objectivist and
experientialist camps that categorization is central to the way people make sense of
experience, objectivist theories adhere to the following assumptions:
• thought is independent of the human body
• the mind is a “mirror of nature” because symbols (words and mental representations) correspond to the external world and are “internal representations of external reality” (Lakoff 1989, xiii)

In contrast to objectivist beliefs, the experientialist view holds that:

• thought is embodied: conceptual systems grow out of physical experience
• thought is imaginative, exceeding the literal representation of external reality, but the imaginative capacity that results in metaphor and other forms of mental imagery is based on human experience, often bodily experience (Lakoff 1989, xiv)

The study described in this dissertation takes the experientialist view of how human experience relates to linguistic expressions, that is, that human experience influences human thought and, as a result, influences understanding and the construction of knowledge. This view allows for the notion that the diversity of human experience creates a diversity of knowledge and that all knowledge is socially constructed, subjective, and influenced by the experiences and perceptions of the knowers. Thus, these ideas have important implications for a multicultural, non-positivist view of knowledge construction as well as for aiding the understanding of who we are as human beings and how our minds work in relation to our physical experiences in the world. Lakoff sums up the experientialist view elegantly when he states, “It is not incidental to the mind that we have bodies.” I would add to this that it is not incidental to the mind that we have different experiences, histories, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, social positions, genders, and so on.

The experientialist view impacts understanding of both the nature of reason and concepts about learning. This view suggest that, as educators and researchers, we should “cultivate the embodied aspects of reason” (Lakoff 1989, xvi), paying
attention to peoples' individual and collective experiences in the world and in their physical selves as we study language, structure institutions, develop curriculum, and so on.

The Cognitive Process of Making and Understanding Metaphors

Metaphor use reveals a great deal about cognitive structure, how ideas are organized and how one idea relates to another (Tourangeau 1982). A metaphor's two subjects are often quite distant from each other. For example, one of the team members who participated in this study, Rhonda Soto, contributed the metaphor, "being on welfare is like a roller-coaster ride," in which she equates being a welfare recipient to a frightening, confusing, and emotionally stressful journey. The two subjects, primary ("being on welfare") and secondary ("roller-coaster ride"), interact in interpretation as the secondary subject is employed to fit or become parallel to the primary. Interaction can also be reversed when reciprocal changes occur, cognitively, in the secondary subject as a result of the interaction in semantic domains (Tourangeau 1982). In the case of Rhonda's metaphor, reciprocal changes might include thinking about certain aspects a roller-coaster ride in novel ways after using or hearing this metaphor. The novelty and difficulty of many metaphors has to do with what Ortony (1993) sees as a dissimilarity or incongruence between domains.

Metaphors involve two systems, usually drawn from two domains of experience. "Despite their fundamental incompatibility, the two systems can stay married because the one serves as a model for the other" (Miall 18). This notion has implications for questions about how metaphors are recognized and interpreted as well as why some metaphors are more memorable and thus, preferable to others.
Recent psycholinguistic theory about metaphors has shifted from a purely linguistic approach, that is, understanding metaphors as strictly linguistic entities, to a conceptual approach, viewing them in terms of conceptual processes. Cacciari and Glucksberg (1994) outline three major traditional theories that treat metaphors as linguistic entities (the comparison view, the incoherence view, and the interaction view), and discuss more recent theories of metaphors involving categorization and conceptual processes that are, in part, based on these three views. They argue that understanding the complex and diverse ways people make sense of metaphors calls for a variety of theories.

Theories about metaphors as comparisons constitute the most traditional and influential view, first attributed to Aristotle. As comparisons, metaphors are seen as transferring a name from one object, condition, or experience to another, as in “education is a picnic.” The comparative view assumes a “feature-matching” (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1994) process between two parts of the metaphor, in which the features or attributes of the source entity (“education”) are mapped onto the target or topic (“picnic”). The author argues, however, that this “feature-matching” process is too limited to capture the complexity and force of metaphorical language because is it based on the same cognitive process used in making and understanding literal statements, as, for example, in the literal paraphrase of the metaphor above, “education is like a picnic.” Ortony (1993) states that, because metaphors involve a tension that results from the incompatibility of the some of the features of the source and target (education and picnic), and that a literal translation of a metaphor ignores this tension.
The "incoherence view" considers metaphors to be semantically incongruous or defective statements, breaking rules of syntax and semantics by making false statements (Katz 1964, Searle 1979). According to this view, these linguistic rules are corrected or resolved when a metaphor is understood through literal paraphrasing. Like comparative theories, the incoherence view assumes that comprehending metaphors involves a literal interpretation in order to make semantic sense of them, and thus requires more steps, and more time, than the understanding of literal language. However, Tourangeau & Rips (1991) found, in investigating how people interpret metaphors, that metaphors were interpreted primarily on the basis of emergent features that were not necessarily salient characteristics of the source or target feature, rather than employing literal paraphrasing.

Theories that take the "interactive view" involve the notion that people interpret metaphorical statements through a three-step interaction of the two distinct subjects (primary source and secondary target or vehicle): 1) constructing parallels between semantic domains, 2) selecting characteristics of the secondary subject to construct parallels which fit the primary subject, and 3) making parallel changes in the secondary subject to align the two parts of the metaphor.

More recent metaphor theory expands on traditional theory in that it is based on the understanding that metaphor use and interpretation involves reasoning, inferential, and conceptual processes as well as linguistic processes. These conceptual processes include making use of previously acquired categories and conceptual schema and the creation of new categories and conceptual schema (Basso 1976,
One of the important functions of metaphors is that they highlight selected shared properties of the categories or conceptual domains they entail. For example, in the metaphor “education is a key,” contributed by a Voces team member, Krystal, key highlights certain properties that it shares with education, such as the ability to open things (doors, opportunities, certain kinds of knowledge), the experience of being locked inside or outside of a place, and the need for skills, tools and knowledge in order to gain access to a place. This metaphor is also ontological, as it gives a concrete substance, key, to an abstract concept, education. Like all metaphors, “education is a key” creates a single conceptual domain in which the meanings associated with education and key are semantically connected.

Although highlighting sets of shared properties is a major function of metaphors, metaphors tend to hide more than they highlight (Basso 1976, Katz et al 1998, Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Turner 1987). For example, in a metaphor supplied by Voces team member Alicia Robert, “support is a suit of armor,” the shared properties of support and suit of armor are limited, while there are many more aspects of the two that do not enter into a single semantic domain or “unitary concept” (Basso 1976, 55) created in this metaphor. In other words, while suit of armor highlights the aspects of support that protect people from harm, it does not address other important aspects of support. It provides a partial picture of the kinds of supports participants need and the ways they create, use, give, and perceive of the concept of support. Thus, for the purposes of this research study, I collected a variety of participants’
metaphors about each topic being investigated (i.e., support is a suit of armor, a net, a tree, a wall, an ant colony) in order to reveal a cluster of shared properties that offered a rich and complex picture of the meanings associated with these topics.

Turner (1987) claims that metaphors often do more than simply draw upon existing conceptual structures and highlight certain aspects of those structures: metaphors often impose new structures and salient properties, thus creating similarity where there had been none, conceptually, before. Metaphors are particularly useful for expressing new knowledge or new situations, as they “invite, direct, and control exploration of a context in which new knowledge is implicit, though not yet manifest” (Fiumara 1995).

An example of inventing metaphors to express new knowledge and to create new similarity is seen in the “watermelon seed” metaphor used in the title of this dissertation: “As a welfare recipient, I am the seed in a watermelon.” Betty Falcón, the Voces team member who created this metaphor, described her experience as a welfare recipient in terms of a watermelon seed, using the seed to express her sense of isolation and separation from others in similar circumstances her inability to break out of the system in order to grow, develop her potential, be productive, and support her family. In essence, Betty imposed one conceptual domain upon another in her metaphor in order to express a meaning that was unique to her situation and to a particular time and place in history, thus creating a new similarity between the two concepts that previously had no obvious similarity. The “watermelon seed” metaphor is examined in more depth in Chapter 6.
A metaphor’s novelty is related to its memorableness and effectiveness because novelty helps people to understand relationships between two subject domains in new ways (Tourangeau 1982). A novel metaphor, like Betty’s watermelon seed, can influence listeners, if momentarily, to adopt a view or system of belief that might not have occurred to them or that they might otherwise reject, thus either supplementing or contradicting previously held beliefs. Interpreting novel metaphors involves two kinds of novelty, related to both new beliefs and new packaging, that is, the process involves acquiring new beliefs within new structures for those beliefs (Tourangeau 1982). Another way of understanding this process is to say that the semantic parallels proposed by a metaphor require explicating entailments that are bounded by a set of dimensions. If the metaphor is a novel one, interpretation consists of conceiving a list of new entailments and dimensions that link both subjects of the metaphor, and in this way, create new knowledge.

**Metaphors and Education**

Theories about the cognitive significance of metaphors in educational settings contend that using metaphors enables learners and teachers “to transfer learning and understanding from what is well known to what is less well known in a vivid and memorable way, thus enhancing learning . . . . Metaphorical teaching strategies often lead to better and more memorable learning than do explicit strategies” (Petrie & Oshlag 1993, 580-1).

Mayer (1993) discusses how metaphoric language can foster students’ understanding, particularly relating to scientific descriptions. The author identifies three positive effects of instructional metaphors, specifically regarding metaphors that
create analogies, on learners' cognitive processing abilities. These effects are to foster 1) the selection of key information emphasized by the metaphor, 2) the creation of parallel connections between primary and secondary domains of the metaphor through organizing key information into coherent structures such as the sequence or order of a chain of events, and 3) the integration of both domains through a process of mapping key information from the secondary domain onto the primary domain. According to Mayer (1993), all of these processes can improve learners' retention of key information, conceptual recall, and problem-solving ability.

Pedagogical strategies involving metaphors include the use of analogies, which can effectively introduce difficult or novel concepts or describe abstract concepts in terms of more explicit, concrete concepts. Furthermore, because, according to recent learning theories, the process of acquiring new knowledge requires building upon what people already know, the idea of using metaphor as a teaching strategy makes a great deal of sense, as it describes what may be unknown in terms of what is known. According to Petrie and Oshlag (1993), “metaphor is one of the central ways of leaping the epistemological chasm between old knowledge and radically new knowledge” (583).

In addition to providing learners with a bridge between familiar and unfamiliar knowledge, the study described in this dissertation shows that engaging learners in both the creation and analysis of metaphors can help them to express and generate knowledge that arises from unprecedented or novel events, circumstances, or contexts. Producing metaphors can help learners to generate ideas, explanations, make connections, discover resemblances, and see things from different perspectives
through connecting a primary topic with a secondary topic drawn from their own experiences. Thus, as a pedagogical strategy, metaphors have the capacity to bridge the knowledge gap by drawing on the experiential base of learners.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a review of three areas of literature that provided a basis for the issues, questions, and methodology of the study reported here. Literature relating to the principles and practices of multicultural education, with an emphasis on its possibilities for generating transformative knowledge and fostering student empowerment, provided a philosophical base from which to view the educational experiences of the culturally and linguistically diverse study participants. A review of literature on critical pedagogy, one of the important characteristics of multicultural education (Nieto 1999), located this study within a vision of liberatory educational practice, particularly regarding the field of adult literacy.

A review of literature relating to the effects of welfare reform on the learning and achievement of welfare recipients addressed the economic and political contexts of this study during the era of welfare reform and helped to locate some of experiences of this study’s participants within a larger historical and national framework. The literature relating to metaphors and metaphor analysis provided the basis for this study’s main analytical approach, particularly highlighting traditional and contemporary theories about the relationship between language and thought, the cognitive process by which metaphors are used and understood, and the educational implications of metaphor use. In addition, because this study also used metaphor
analysis as a pedagogical strategy, this area of the literature review illuminated some of the ways theory can be linked to practice in educational settings.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the design of the study presented in this dissertation. A rationale is presented for using the methodologies I selected: for qualitative research in general, for participatory action research, and for metaphor analysis. There is a discussion of the forms of knowledge construction participatory research makes possible and pays attention to. In the design section, I outline the sources of data for this study: interviews, focus groups, classroom writing exercises and field notes, as well as demographic data from a survey conducted among participants. Following this, I summarize the process for organizing and analyzing the data, including coding, categorizing, and analytical strategies, metaphor analysis in particular. The chapter ends with a discussion of strategies for acknowledging researcher bias and ensuring the validity of the analysis.

Overall Approach of the Study

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods are appropriate for this research study for a number of reasons. The principles and philosophical beliefs underlying qualitative research include the notions that realities are multiple and shifting, that all forms of human inquiry are value-bound, and that research always involves a “simultaneous mutual shaping of knower and known” (Ely 1991). Qualitative research lends itself to the study of small groups of participants, within “natural” settings or contexts, over an extended period of time. Prolonged engagement with participants within natural contexts are needed, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989) in order to “overcome the
effects of misinformation, ... to uncover constructions, and to facilitate immersing oneself in and understanding the context’s culture” (Guba & Lincoln 1989, 237). In this study, data were collected from five Voces team members and fifty other participants, some of whom participated in the study for more than two years. For the most part, data collection took place within educational settings such as classrooms.

Qualitative researchers seek to understand the world from the participants’ perspectives and frames of reference (Hull 1997). The study of human beings is a complex business requiring a long-term commitment and the need to examine both the individual experience and the multiple contexts - - social, political, cultural, educational, etc. - - within which that experience takes place. The research questions that guided this study required a close and sustained examination of various domains of participants’ lives because they were situated within and affected by numerous shifting and evolving contexts.

The qualitative research paradigm also recognizes that the human being is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and that, as a result, qualitative forms of inquiry produce subjective knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Miles & Hubermann, 1994). Finally, it can be said that, while quantitative research is about numbers, qualitative research is about words, and that the participants being studied should be able to speak for themselves (Ely 1991). The primary focus of this study was on language, and it looked closely at the words, phrases, and figures of speech used by participants to describe their experiences as learners, parents, and social beings.
Participatory Action Research

The study described in this dissertation took as its starting point a prior research project outlined below, the Changes Project, which employed a participatory action research (PAR) approach. PAR is a type of research with a particular set of approaches and philosophical beliefs that fall within the qualitative research paradigm. In general, “participatory” means that PAR invites participants to become partners in the research process, though the degree of partnership and participation varies from one project to the next. Participants are usually stakeholders or community members, people directly affected by the situations being studied. PAR attempts to “enable community members to validate and reframe information provided by their own life experience to enable them to take control of their surroundings and better determine their future” (Plaut et al 1992, 57). The Changes Project involved five teams of learners at different educational institutions in Western Massachusetts. These learners were involved in all phases of research, with increasing levels of expertise and commitment, including question generating, study design, instrument development, data collection, analysis, development of findings and recommendations, and presentations. All team members were paid for their work. In the study reported here, members of one of those teams (the Voces team, profiled in the Participants section of this chapter) were involved in data collection and analysis, and also participated in “member checking” at certain key points of the analysis — reading, reflecting upon, and critiquing my work.

Rather than using an “outsider” researcher, as in more traditional research methods, PAR researchers tend to be “insiders,” often educators who work directly
with and are responsible to the students whose learning is being documented (Zeni 1995). The multiple research teams that the Changes Project employed were led by site research facilitators, or SRFs (myself included), all of whom were literacy practitioners.

The "action" in participatory action research reflects the assumption that social change needs to take place within the area of inquiry. In this sense, PAR shares certain key assumptions with "critical" research: a critique of contemporary society and the belief that research should be used to change society; the belief that contemporary society privileges certain groups over others; and the belief that mainstream research practices often (if unwittingly) reproduce these social inequalities (Carspecken 1996). PAR pursues action and research outcomes simultaneously (Dick 1997). This combination of research and action as a strategy for social change is a powerful example of an attempt to integrate theory and practice in educational research (Gaventa & Horton 1981). The study described here assumed that changes needs to occur, both in the welfare system and in educational institutions, in order to increase educational access for more low-income women.

PAR tends to be cyclic, that is, similar steps occur within similar sequences throughout the life of a given research project. The Changes Project involved three cycles, referred to as "phases" (Changes Project Proposal 1997), of question generating, data collection, analysis, reflection, and presentation. The cyclic nature of PAR helps it to be responsive to emerging needs of the situation being studied and of the participants involved in the inquiry. This approach also adds to the validity of the investigation in that interpretations that are developed in early cycles can be tested.
and refined or changed in later cycles (Dick 1997). This study traced the development of ideas, topics, and findings that occurred in the three phases of the Changes Project, and examined a particular set of those topics in more depth.

PAR, as described above, is the starting place, or the philosophical native soil in which this study was born. All of the aspects of PAR discussed above were an appropriate "birthplace" for this study, which aimed to learn about the experiences of adult students within particular social, educational, political and economic contexts; to include participants as research partners; to create opportunities for participants to further develop their literacy and academic skills; and to inform the field of education about what was learned.

**PAR and Knowledge Construction**

Participatory Action Research is different from more traditional research approaches in the ways it generates, identifies, and values knowledge. Park (1998) provides a useful framework for discussing knowledge generation in participatory research by identifying three different forms of knowledge that PAR produces: representational, relational, and reflective. Although separate, the three forms of knowledge are interconnected, stimulating and reinforcing each other, making each other possible.

**Representational Knowledge**

Representational knowledge, epitomized by empirical-analytical science, is the form of knowledge that attempts to "depict and explain reality faithfully" (Park, 1998, 6), to organize data in ways that depict a coherent reality. This involves generating an
interpretative form of representational knowledge, one that portrays reality “in terms of the meaning that is intersubjectively rendered” (Park, 1998, 7).

Combined with other knowledge forms, representational knowledge is useful to PAR communities, but on its own it is limited by an inability to represent how participants perceive their experiences or create understandings through their interactions with one another. Unfortunately, representational knowledge is usually the only form of knowledge considered valid within contemporary empirical Western epistemology. But participatory research, by its very nature, must take continual stock of other knowledge forms as they occur, and create structures and opportunities to foster them, if it is to proceed in ways that are responsive to a community’s evolving needs and interests.

Relational Knowledge

Relational knowledge comes out of, and is inseparable from, relationships formed within the investigative community. It is the form of knowledge in which the knower is also the known. Voces team members, for example, both knew about and had experienced first hand many of the situations they were studying. And, through getting to each other, all of us on the team entered into that relational knowledge, learning from each other by way of the emotional bonds we formed as our relationships developed, discussing our own experiences as single mothers, students, and welfare recipients.

Relationships are the foundation of a PAR research community and participatory research activities must be designed to enhance and develop them. Because learning is a social activity, participants can greatly expand their knowledge
and understanding of the issues being researched as they build relationships with each other. Relational knowledge involves participants on an emotional level, as they come to know one another through emotional ties such as friendship, shared commitment, love, and trust, as well working through darker emotions such as fear, anger, and frustration. The many research gatherings that the Voces team attended -- including team meetings, analysis workshops, conference presentations, and other group activities -- allowed participants to form strong attachments to one another. Team meetings gave participants opportunities to develop supportive communities, united by common work and common goals.

In a PAR setting, relational knowledge often creates a foundation for representational knowledge because the trust that is created as relationships are built is a necessary pre-condition for generating knowledge through honest dialogue and other forms of significant human interaction. Of all the emotions that characterize relational knowledge, trust is the one that makes the representational knowledge that is generated most valid, because it allows people to speak frankly and authentically to one another. "Where there is no trust emanating from relational knowledge, the picture of the community situation that people gain from their investigation is a mere shadow of the reality" (Park, 1998, 8).

The participants in this study developed representational knowledge about the issues being investigated because they were able to connect to each other through relational knowledge. For example, through collaborative work with other research teams working on the Changes Project, Voces team members working on welfare reform were able to learn about workplace and immigration issues being investigated
by other teams, to see the “local” in terms of a larger “whole” and thus, to locate their individual experiences within larger contexts.

Reflective Knowledge

Reflective knowledge is a key form of cognition in PAR, involving both critical and moral awareness, which Freire (1993) termed conscientização (translated as conscientization), a term that connotes both raising consciousness and developing a social conscience. Reflective knowledge “instills conviction in the knower, and the courage to go with it, and commits him or her to action . . . [and] it gets articulated and grows in strength as people get involved with action in concrete situations” (Park, 1998, 9). People’s abilities to accomplish change and to transform society must be grounded in “an awareness of a world lived in common with others” (Greene, 1988, 4). In this sense the Changes Project shared the goals of what Banks (1999) terms “transformative curriculum” in which knowledge, caring and action are highly interrelated. Engaging in this research project helped participants to know, to care, and to act in relation to each other and to the social issues being investigated. Reflective knowledge, and the kinds of social actions it makes possible, require a community in which open and sincere discussion can occur, that is, reflective knowledge presupposes a community that is interconnected through relational knowledge. “When people lack attachments, when there is no possibility of coming together in a plurality or a community, when they have not tapped their imaginations, they may think of breaking free, but they will be unlikely to think of breaking through the structures of their world and creating something new” (Greene, 1988, 17).
Reflective knowledge moves participants forward into social actions with the purpose of changing the oppressive conditions being investigated.

One of the important assumptions of this study is to conceive of literacy as having the potential to be "emancipatory" (Macedo 1991), that is, literacy as a vehicle for empowering people within the various social structures that oppress them. Empowerment is the "other side of the coin of domination," according to Nieto (1999, 105), a state in which individuals and groups challenge the patterns and structures of domination in their lives. In order to challenge those structures, however, a critical understanding must be reached about how such structures function as well as the contexts in which they operate. In this way reflective knowledge and the social actions it inspires are grounded in representational knowledge.

Reflective Knowledge and Action

One of the questions that often arises in PAR settings is: "what 'counts' as action?" As Selener (1997) states, action in PAR is closely linked to social change. As participants in this study, for example, we knew that we were influencing educators' understanding of learners' lives through the knowledge we were generating about the impacts on adult learners of welfare reform. Was this a form of social action? Was it a form of social action when research participants (and others with whom we shared relational and representational knowledge) changed their perceptions about each other, and learned to value the diverse experiences and perceptions each brought to the project as adult learners, teachers, workers, welfare recipients, and immigrants?
The question of what counts as action echoes repeatedly in discussions about PAR, and will not be resolved in this dissertation. What this study did find, through feedback from participants, was that the variety of actions adult learners engaged in were deeply significant for them, often representing an important first step that their participation made possible, whether this step was to develop an ability to speak in public, to become politically involved in their communities, or to acquire knowledge and skills that enhanced their educational experiences and helped to prepare them for higher education and careers.

In addition to generating the three forms of knowledge discussed above, participatory research in educational settings can also support the development of more “practical” forms of knowledge, strengthening skills people can use in other domains of their lives. Many of this study’s participants developed the kinds of knowledge that enhanced their acquisition of literacy, academic, research, communication, English language, and job-related skills and experience that they identified as being important to them at the outset of the study.

**Analytical Approach**

**Metaphor Analysis**

One of the main analytical approaches used in this study was an examination of participants’ metaphors. Metaphor analysis was an appropriate tool for the kind of written and spoken language data examined in this study for several reasons. Metaphors are the “dreamwork” of language: Like a dream, a metaphor may contain a hidden cache of meaning that is unique to its creator. Metaphors are often highly compressed expressions, well worth the trouble of unpacking for what they can reveal
both about their creators’ unique experience of the world and about the conceptual foundations of the world to which those creators belong.

Metaphor analysis was a useful approach for this study because it provided a framework for analyzing how participants thought about, categorized, and expressed their experiences and ideas according to a particular set of conceptual principles. Studying metaphors can reveal basic underlying principles that people use to conceive of and evaluate information, ideas and experiences. Metaphor analysis is an appropriate method for examining language data generated by participants from different language groups and literacy levels because everyone, whether they realize it or not, both uses and creates metaphors constantly in everyday speech, and everyone, across cultures, languages, and literacy levels, is capable of creating powerful metaphors that create new meanings, fill lexical gaps, and express profound truths that would otherwise be inexpressible. Metaphor analysis is also appropriate and useful for a participatory research project that aims to inform classroom practice, as this study found that generating and analyzing metaphors could be used as an innovative pedagogical strategy in writing classrooms.

When generating a new metaphor, one is in a sense filling a gap in language, saying what cannot otherwise be said in such an economical way. Because metaphors link two or more different semantic domains into a single semantic domain, they have the potential to create a new meaning area where previously there had not been one. This study sought to understand people’s experiences dealing with new situations and shifting contexts, such as changing welfare or other institutional policies, for which there may not have been adequate means of expression previously. Thus, their
metaphors revealed very rich sources of information about how they created and expressed meaning linguistically in new or unprecedented situations.

Metaphor analysis can also expand the understanding of how people from different cultural, language and social groups use language to make meaning out of similar situations, showing patterns of difference and similarity across groups.

**Design of the Study: Data Collection Methods**

A variety of data collection methods were used in this study, including interviews, focus groups, classroom writing assignments, field notes, and surveys of the study participants. Fifty-five participants were involved in one or more of these data collection activities. The variety of data collection methods helped to offset some of the obstacles to communication associated with each individual method.

**Interviews**

I conducted two interviews apiece with five *Voces* team members, each lasting approximately one hour and *Voces* team members conducted eight interviews with other community college students and four with ABE learners, each lasting between 30 minutes and an hour. These interviews generated 18 audiotaped hours. Of the 22 interviews, eight were conducted in Spanish and 14 in English. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and Spanish excerpts used in this dissertation were translated into English.

**Focus Groups and Surveys**

Focus group data came from three focus groups conducted with eight adult learners from the community college and 10 learners from an ABE program for young mothers. Participants in focus groups were chosen because of certain common
characteristics (Kreuger 1994), namely that they were women, current or former welfare recipients, single mothers, and learners enrolled in or graduates of ABE programs. All of these groups focused on themes related to the experience of being both a student and a welfare recipient, and involved carefully planned discussions facilitated by Voces team members. A key concept of focus groups is that, rather than leading the discussion, as happens in the traditional interviewing process, facilitators play a more passive role, allowing for participants' interest to lead the discussion and for group knowledge to develop (Krueger 1994). For this study, the focus groups generated complementary data to that which came out of interviews and written assignments, and thus provided opportunities to compare data collected under different circumstances and settings.

This study also used data taken from two surveys conducted during the spring and fall of 1999 with 41 participants, as well as data from a survey conducted with 30 ABE practitioners from the region in the spring of 2000.

Writing Classes

Data from writing classes consisted of writings generated by study participants over a two-year period (from January 1998 through December 1999). These writings, by ABE learners and community college students, came from assignments that were developed with the aim of eliciting information about the topics researchers identified as salient in the initial stages of this research study. These topics, as discussed earlier, are education, welfare, and support. For the purposes of this study, only those writings that related directly to the questions guiding this study were used. The data
from writing assignments consisted of approximately 200 pages of writing by twenty-one participants.

**Field Notes**

In addition to interviews, focus groups, surveys, and writing assignments, data for this study included my ethnographic field notes and journal entries, written after research team meetings, writing classes, and focus groups, as well as after more informal occasions for observing the interactions of research participants.

My role in this participatory action research project required me to become immersed in the day-to-day activities as both a participant and a research facilitator, a role that enabled me to see “from the inside how people lead their lives, how they carry out their daily rounds of activities, what they find meaningful, and how they do so” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw 1995, 2). Writing field notes and journal entries provided me with a valuable tool for stepping back from this immersed state, becoming an observer (if only in hindsight), and reflecting on what I had experienced as a participant. My field notes were used to document the research process as it unfolded, capture some of its key moments, chart the effects the project was having on participants, plan future activities, reflect on larger contexts and implications, and examine how own biases and experiences were influencing the project. Many of the thoughts and observations from these field notes were developed into more focused analytical memos that helped to guide the analytical phase of the study.

**Methods for Collecting and Generating Metaphors**

The methods for collecting and generating metaphor data for this study took place in interviews, focus groups, and writing classrooms, involving three different
strategies to generate three different categories of metaphors: *conceptual*, *creative*, and *template* metaphors. Together these offered a rich portrait of how participants created and expressed meaning about the topics investigated.

One of the strategies for generating metaphor data was to ask participants to write or discuss topics related to the research questions, in writing classes, focus groups and interviews. These data were examined in order to find and categorize the kinds of metaphors which Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call “metaphors we live by,” that is, the metaphorical concepts that are often so deeply embedded in everyday language that we ordinarily do not notice them or even conceive of them as metaphors. These metaphors are linked to basic conceptual principles, assumptions, and folk theories that belong to a given culture or society. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the “metaphors we live by” stem from the ways in which human beings physically experience the world. Examples of “metaphors we live by” are statements such as these, which were generated in this study’s first phase of data collection:

- I’m afraid to speak because I feel *locked in* my own doubts.
- I have the *freedom* to express my feelings through writing.
- Please don’t try to *shut me up*.

The examples above are conceptual metaphors that are embedded in everyday speech, often unacknowledged as metaphorical. All three statements came from ABE students in a writing class who were responding to the topic of “voice.” The larger metaphorical concept to which these examples belong could be phrased as: “verbal expression is freedom” or, conversely, “the inability to express oneself verbally is a
prison.” A more general concept to which these metaphors belong is the “mind is a container” concept.

The second method for generating metaphor data in this study was to explicitly ask participants to create metaphors that best expressed their unique experiences and perceptions, particularly as they related to the topics examined in this study (education, welfare, and support). I refer to these metaphors as creative metaphors. Creative metaphors were generated in writing classes and interviews during which participants were asked to create metaphors about the particular topics being explored.

The third strategy for generating metaphor data in this study was to provide what I call template metaphors for research participants. An example of a template metaphor is the drawing of a wall that was given to a group of focus group participants. They were told that the wall was a metaphor for support, the “bricks” representing supports they receive and the “mortar” representing supports they give. The bottom tier of bricks and mortar represented the “foundation” supports necessary to sustain life. The next tier up represented supports needed to go to school and to stay in school, and the top tier represented supports that improved the quality of life. Another example of a metaphor template used in this project was the “Welfare System Tree,” which participants used as a conceptual framework to talk about their understanding of the welfare system. They were asked to assign names and functions to the different parts of the tree, ground, forest, environment, and so on, in order to figure out how the welfare system connects to other systems or institutions they knew about, and how they, as individuals, related to or fit into these systems.
Metaphors generated using the three approaches described above were analyzed in order to discover the larger conceptual principles to which they belong. The interpreted data painted a rich portrait of participants' individual and collective experiences within the larger contexts of their lives.

**Data Organization and Analysis**

The data from interviews, focus groups, writing activities, surveys, and field notes, were organized into coded “chunks” of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs (Coffey & Atkinson 1996) relating to the three broad topics investigated (education, welfare, and support), as well as sub-topics, or conceptual metaphors, that were developed during the analytical process. Members of the Voces team helped me to organize and code data in the early stages of the research study in order to establish agreement about the coding process and to identify salient topics to be investigated.

Analysis was ongoing throughout the process of reviewing and organizing data. As noted by Ely (1991), the concept of “self-as-instrument” that is so basic to qualitative research “connotes personal control and personal responsibility and, therefore, personal creativity,” meaning that “analysis is part and parcel of the ongoing, intertwined process that powers data collection” (Ely 1991, 86). Analytic memos were used as a device to facilitate this ongoing analytical process. Ely (1991) describes analytic memos as “conversations with oneself about what has occurred in the research process” (Ely 1991, 80). Because this proposed study also relied on the principles and practices of PAR, team members participated in the process of
developers analytic memos. They read, critiqued, discussed, contributed to, and altered ten analytic memos that I wrote during the course of this research study.

**Description of the Metaphor Analysis Process**

In this study, metaphors were analyzed using a procedure based on and developed from the work of Keith Basso (1976), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (Lakoff and Johnson 1981; Lakoff 1987) and Mark Turner (1987; 1998). *Conceptual* metaphors relating to the topics that this study investigated were gleaned from transcribed interviews, focus groups and writing assignments. Analysis involved explicating each metaphor’s *entailments* (the logical extensions of its meanings, its *heirs*, so to speak), *dimensions* (the conceptual continua occupied by the metaphor, such as up/down, empty/full, soft/hard, etc.), the *semantic domains* being linked, and the larger concepts to which each metaphor belongs. An example of a conceptual metaphor is found in this statement, contributed by a Changes Project team member: “Welfare reform is . . . not meant to bring [poor people] out of poverty, but to make them more entrenched in it.” The terms *bring out* and *entrenched* suggest that poverty, the subject of the metaphor, is being semantically linked to the experience of being buried, hidden away, or stuck in a trench, a trench that is deep enough to require help in being “brought out” of it. The metaphor entails the dimensions *up/down* and *in/out*, suggesting that the experience of poverty belongs on the *down* and *out* end of these scales.

Analysis of *creative* metaphors followed a similar procedure to that of the conceptual metaphors. However, instead of the analyst generating a list of entailments, the metaphor maker was interviewed, asked to provide a list of
connotations, or "explanatory paraphrases" (Basso 1976). For example, during a *Voces* team analysis meeting that lasted about one hour, team members analyzed the metaphor, "education is a key, but they keep changing the locks." The team generated ten questions for the metaphor's author (including such obvious questions as *What does the key open?* and *How did you get the key?*). These questions yielded 26 explanatory paraphrases, including: *Key holders have the academic preparation necessary to know how to open the door; We need allies who have knowledge about how to find and how to use the right keys; We need more doors and we need more keys.*

After developing this list of connotations, we looked at some of the dimensions inherent in the paraphrases we had generated. These dimensions included inside/outside; locked/unlocked; open/closed; and access/exclusion, and they showed how the metaphor located the speaker outside of the door and excluded her from what was beyond the door (opportunities, knowledge, good jobs, etc.). The analysis process taught us a great deal about how the author perceived herself in relation to education and to the social, economic, and political contexts of her education. The analysis also helped us to develop a new line of questioning that we used in a focus group the following week.

Because the *template* metaphors used in focus groups for this study provided participants with metaphorical concepts as a *fait accompli* (i.e., *support is a wall; the welfare system is a tree*), their analysis focused more closely on the details of the metaphorical entailments. Thus, the template metaphor data were used to add details to what we already had learned about peoples' experiences and perceptions of the
themes being investigated, though it did not add to our understanding of the conceptual underpinnings of participants' linguistic expressions.

**Strategies for Ensuring Credibility of the Analysis and Interpretation**

According to Ely (1991), a credible research effort is one that is believable to the people being studied as well as to others who read the report. Ely claims that qualitative researchers must take certain actions in order to establish credibility, including a prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation, peer de-briefing and member checking (Ely 1991). In this study, two years were spent in the field collecting data and engaging with participants (from January 1998 through December 1999).

Triangulation of findings occurs when at least two pieces of data converge, particularly when data have been gathered by different methods (Ely 1991). Triangulation is a kind of cross-checking of facts, insights, and conclusions (Guba & Lincoln 1989). In this study, triangulation occurred with data collected in interviews, focus groups, surveys written assignments, and ethnographic observation documented in field notes and analytic memos.

This study also employed peer debriefing, mainly through meetings, phone calls, and e-mail communication with site research facilitators (SRFs) from other educational sites participating in the Changes Project. Five Changes Project SRFs were responsible for facilitating the work of five Changes Project teams, and together, we functioned as a support group for each other throughout the life of the project. The SRF group provided a vital and indispensable structure for airing, critiquing and developing ideas, acknowledging researcher bias, suggesting new points of view, and
for moving the research process along. Although the Changes Project came to an end, one SRF who worked on the issue of welfare reform met with me on several occasions to provide support and peer debriefing for this study.

Finally, the credibility of this study was ensured through ongoing “member checking,” a key strategy for ensuring the credibility of research findings (Lincoln & Guba 1985). One of the strengths of PAR is that member checking is built into the structure of the research from the start. In this study, members (those people being “studied,” who were the most directly affected by the issues under investigation), were also researchers. Regular and sustained discussion about the work we were doing and what it meant occurred throughout every phase of the project: Voces team members contributed to decisions about what questions we would ask and helped to develop the methods and instruments for asking them. They collected and analyzed data, developed findings, recommendations, and presented at numerous conference presentations and workshops. Team members helped to identify and develop the categories and topics that were investigated, waded through reams of data, reviewed and contributed to my analytic memos, and participated in many hours of discussion about findings and recommendations. They did this work in one-on-one meetings with me, in Voces team meetings, and in larger meetings with other Changes Project teams and SRFs.

Thus, one of the important strengths of this study was that it developed according to the multiple voices, ideas, stories, visions, perspectives and interests of a group of learners directly and profoundly affected by the questions it asked. And one
of the important challenges of this study has been to produce a document that remained true to those multiple voices and visions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the design of the study reported in this dissertation, including a discussion of the particular methodologies it employed within a general framework of qualitative research. The philosophical orientation and practices of participatory action research were outlined, with an emphasis on the forms of knowledge that are made possible, fostered, and explicitly articulated in a PAR setting. The study’s data collection and analysis techniques (metaphor analysis in particular) were addressed, as well as the strategies that were used to ensure credibility. The issues discussed in this chapter illuminated some of the methodologies that are particularly suited to meeting the multiple goals and purposes of a participatory action research project such as the one reported here.
CHAPTER 4

SETTING THE STAGE

The Research Setting

In this chapter, I present a description of the study’s setting, including background information about the Changes Project and the Mentor Program. In the section on participants, I summarize the criteria for selection of participants and present profiles of six of the Voces team members, including myself, with a description their educational histories, their experiences as welfare recipients, the contributions each made to this study, and the impact their participation in this study had on their lives.

The Changes Project

This study expanded upon and explored in more depth some of the important findings from a regional research project, the Changes Project. Although this study grew out of the Changes Project, which is described below, several key points distinguished the two studies from each other. First, the Changes Project was a regional collaborative research project involving five research sites in Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties, while the study described in this dissertation was limited to one geographic location, Holyoke, in Hampden County.

Second, the Changes Project engaged five teams of adult learners, both male and female, located at the five sites, to carry out this research with other adult learner participants, both male and female, in their communities. The study described in this dissertation involved one of those teams, the Voces team, from the Mentor Program at Holyoke Community College, and team members as well as other research
participants were all women, all current or former welfare recipients, and all (with the exception of myself) enrolled in or graduates of three educational institutions in Holyoke (the Care Center, the HALO Center, and Holyoke Community College).

Finally, the two studies investigated different, though related questions. The Changes Project’s main research question was to investigate the impact of welfare reform, immigration reform and the changing workplace on the learning and achievement of adult learners in Western Massachusetts. The study described here investigated the impact of one of those issues (welfare reform) on a smaller group of participants from a more limited geographical area. In so doing, this study explored in greater depth some of the topics that were identified by the Changes Project as salient in the lives of women who were going to school and supporting their families with the help of public assistance. Those topics are education, welfare reform, and support.

The Changes Project was a three-year, federally funded collaborative research study that looked at the impact of welfare reform, the changes in immigration policies, and the changing nature of work on the learning and achievement of adult students enrolled in five adult education programs in western Massachusetts. The project began in the fall of 1997 and was completed in the summer of 2000. Each team of the teams consisted of learners from five education programs and a site research facilitator. As stated above, the Changes Project was conducted in large part by adult learners who have direct experience of the three issues they were investigating. Team members were involved in research activities for approximately two of the three years. Literacy practitioners and methodological consultants spent the first six months of the project developing its overall design. During the final six months, the project
coordinator and site research facilitators were involved in dissemination activities, including writing reports, articles, and producing a video (information about where to locate these materials are in the Appendices).

The five participating program sites of The Changes Project were the Center for New Americans in Northampton, which investigated all three issue areas; the International Language Institute of Massachusetts, Inc. in Northampton, which investigated the impact of immigration reform, the Labor/Management Workplace Education Program at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, which investigated the impact of the changing workplace; the Read/Write/Now Adult and Family Learning Center of the Springfield Libraries and Museum, which investigated the impact of welfare reform; and the Mentor Program at Holyoke Community College in Holyoke, which also investigated the impact of welfare reform. The Changes Project was coordinated by SABES West (the Western Resources Center for the System for Adult Basic Education Support), located at Holyoke Community College and was funded by the Field Initiated Studies Grants Program, which is administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Institute on Post Secondary Education, Libraries and Lifelong Learning, US Department of Education.

The Mentor Program

All of the Voces team members were also volunteer mentors in the Mentor Program at Holyoke Community College (HCC). I started the Mentor Program in 1993 (and have continued to be its Coordinator since then) in order to fill what I perceived to be a serious gap in support services for students in community-based
ABE programs in the Holyoke area who wanted to make a transition to college. HCC students volunteer as mentors, helping learners in participating programs to make informed decisions about career and educational goals, to successfully navigate the community college environment, and to take advantage of the many supports available to them at the college and in the community. Most of the mentors are themselves graduates of ABE programs and most of them, like most of the people they mentor, are low-income single mothers. The program is founded on the beliefs that, with appropriate support and guidance, people who have “been there” can be powerful resources and role models for people who are “still there” and that all communities have natural leaders within them.

Mentor Program activities include panel presentations, workshops, weekly writing classes, summer mini-courses, tours, classroom visits, informal tutoring, and peer counseling. As the majority of students served by the program are Spanish speaking, all program activities are conducted in both English and Spanish. The Mentor Program currently offers weekly writing classes (led by local writers and co-facilitated by HCC mentors) at four education programs in Holyoke: The Care Center, the HALO Center, the Community Education Project, and the New England Farmworkers Council. These classes serve multiple purposes. They help participants to develop the writing skills needed for college level work; they provide opportunities for supportive, mentoring relationships to develop through weekly contact between mentors and learners; and they give mentors opportunities to develop leadership and teaching skills. In addition, the Mentor Program runs summer mini-courses for new and prospective college students from participating community-based programs.
These courses help participants to prepare for the demands and expectations of college with a focus on reading, writing, study skills, and computer skills. Mentors participate in the courses as teacher-aides, with a mentor/student ratio of approximately one to four. The writing classes and the mini-courses were also sites for collecting written data about the topics investigated in this study.

The Mentor Program was an appropriate site for this study because it has, since its inception, been involved in welfare advocacy and both formal and informal research about the unique experiences and support needs of adult learners who are welfare recipients. In addition, the ethnic, linguistic, educational, and economic backgrounds of the mentors replicate that of the other participants in the study. Because mentors come from the same community as the learners they mentor, they have direct experience of the issues investigated as well as first hand knowledge of the community and, in many cases, close relationships within the community. Mentors have a strong commitment to this research project because the questions we investigated affect them daily, intimately, and profoundly.

Because an important aspect of this study was its participatory action research approach, it is important to mention some of the welfare rights projects and coalitions across the state that have guided its course. In the face of conflicting and often disturbing reports about the fate of Massachusetts families who can no longer count on the safety net of public assistance, the Mentor Program responded in a number of different ways: by engaging in research to document the effects of welfare reform on learners; by developing classroom-based research strategies to involve
learners, particularly welfare recipients, in research that is critical to their lives; and by joining with others across the state who are doing similar work.

The Mentor Program has been connected with a number of welfare rights activist projects over the years, both before and during its involvement with the Changes Project and with the study described in this dissertation. Mentors worked for several years with the *Welfare Education and Training Access Coalition (WETAC)*, based at Smith College and Brandeis University, leading training sessions on organizing low-income college students and documenting the effects of welfare reform on students at Holyoke Community College. In 1997, the Mentor Program contributed data to the *Welfare and Human Rights Monitoring Project*. This project, directed by Victoria Steinitz in conjunction with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee in Cambridge, MA (Steinitz 1996), employed “reporters” throughout the state who documented the DTA’s methods of implementing welfare reform. The project found (and presented to the Massachusetts legislature) that the treatment many recipients were subjected to by caseworkers violated their basic human rights, and that welfare reform implementation was characterized by chaos, cynicism, and flagrant lawlessness.

In addition to its documentation activities, the Mentor Program worked with activists across the state on the planning committees for two national conferences focusing on women, education, and welfare reform: The Ritter Conference on “Women and Welfare in the 90s” held at Smith College in 1998, and the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society Conference, “Get Up, Stand Up,” also held at Smith
College, in 1999. Mentors were also founding members of the Pioneer Valley Welfare Rights Coalition in 1998, which led monthly rallies to protest welfare reform.

The Participants

The study described in this dissertation comes out of the work done by one of the Changes Project teams, the Voces team of The Mentor Program at Holyoke Community College. Ten women, including myself, participated in the Voces team for varying lengths of time over the course of two years. I was the site research facilitator for the team. After their participation with the Changes Project ended, five of the Voces team members agreed to continue working with me to investigate the questions articulated in this study. This chapter concludes with their profiles and details their contributions to this study.

In addition to the ten Voces team members, who both contributed data to this study and participated as researchers, thirty-five learners at two ABE programs in Holyoke (The Care Center, a GED program for pregnant and parenting teen women and the HALO Center, which offers ESOL and GED classes), and ten other Holyoke Community College students participated in the study, for a total of fifty-five participants. All of the participants in the study were current or former welfare recipients, adult learners and women. The majority of learners from the two ABE programs are Puerto Rican women. Approximately half of these participants speak Spanish as their first language. Thus, many of the data collection activities were conducted in both English and Spanish.
Voces Team Member Profiles

The following profiles of six Voces team members are included here in order to leave a record, if a brief one, of the tremendous contribution that these women made to this study. All of these women are highly intelligent, dedicated, creative, and hard working parents, learners, and researchers, and all have faced great challenges in completing their educational goals. Together, we formed a vital community, united by common goals and committed to a common vision of social and economic justice, and the emotional bonds we developed reached far beyond our roles as researchers.

Voces team members had a great deal in common. All of us were current or former welfare recipients and students at various educational levels at the time the study took place. All of us began our higher education at community colleges in Massachusetts. All of us were single mothers. All of the team members are high achieving students and caring, responsible mothers. Team members have from one to three children and our ages range from 23 to 51. Those who are profiled below, who worked on the project for varying lengths of time, include Betty Falcon, Krystal Recor, Alicia Robert, Maria Santana, Rhonda Soto, and myself. Team members agreed to use their real names in this study, in order to receive credit for the work they have accomplished as researchers.

The Voces team members profiled below are ethnically and linguistically diverse. Betty Falcon and Maria Santana were born in Puerto Rico and Spanish is their first language. Rhonda Soto is biracial/bicultural (half Puerto Rican and half Irish American), a native New Yorker, and English is her first language. Alicia Robert is also biracial/bicultural, half Irish American and half African American and a native of
Massachusetts. Krystal Recor and I are both European Americans. All of the Voces team members speak both English and Spanish, with varying degrees of proficiency.

Betty Falcón

Betty Falcón was a founding member of the Voces team, and worked as a researcher and a mentor for the Mentor Program throughout the course of this study. Betty is a Puerto Rican woman in her late thirties and a self-described “Latina” who speaks both Spanish and English, her first language being Spanish. She is smart, funny, has strong opinions, loves to tell stories, and is an effervescent, rapid-fire communicator. She has three children, two school-aged daughters and a son who was born in 1999 after she received her community college degree.

Born in Carolina, Puerto Rico in 1962, Betty completed her secondary education there, receiving a high school diploma, before moving to Holyoke, Massachusetts. Her school experience in Puerto Rico was very positive. In Holyoke, Betty enrolled in an ESOL program serving Latino adults where she studied English for about a year. It was in this program that Betty developed the confidence and found the encouragement and support to enroll in college. Several years later, while in college, Betty was thrilled and proud to return to that same program as a writing teacher for the Mentor Program.

Betty began her college career at Holyoke Community College, where she was enrolled in the ESOL program for two years. She joined the Mentor Program and became a program assistant, a work-study position, while she was still studying English. After completing the ESOL program, she entered “mainstream” classes, earning her associates’ degree in Arts and Sciences in 1998. Currently, Betty is a
student at Westfield State College, where she is working toward a B.A. in sociology, with a focus on social work.

Betty’s experience as a welfare recipient has been both positive and negative. She is still receiving welfare benefits, which enabled her to complete an associates’ degree and transfer to a four-year college while supporting her family. However, she has experienced problems related to welfare reform:

Sometimes my social worker [welfare case worker] makes me feel bad because I am on welfare. Also, sometimes she does not inform me correctly about welfare policies. In fact, she almost cost me my welfare benefits by not informing me about my rights to continue receiving benefits, but an attorney from Western Massachusetts Legal Services helped me to win an appeal. Now I can stay on welfare for another year and finish my bachelor’s degree.

Because Betty documented her plans to get a bachelor’s degree before welfare reform was instituted, she has the right to complete her education and stay on welfare, receiving a “grandfathered” status that exempts her from the two-year time limit. Her caseworker, however, never informed her of this right. But because of her participation in this study, Betty was able to get the information she needed as well as a legal advocate to help her win her case. It was from this experience that Betty’s “watermelon seed” metaphor was born.

The study described in this dissertation owes a great deal to Betty Falcón for the many contributions she made. She helped to articulate the research questions and to develop interview guides, focus group formats, and writing activities. Her data collection activities included five interviews conducted in Spanish, administering surveys to HCC students, and co-facilitating writing classes and two focus groups. Betty helped to translate interview guides from English to Spanish, and to translate
Spanish data into English. As a participant, Betty was interviewed once by a Voces team member and several times by me. She helped to analyze data during two analysis phases and helped to develop the metaphor analysis techniques that we used for data analysis and as an approach to teaching writing. She also participated in two conference presentations. Betty was particularly interested in exploring how Spanish-speaking participants were treated by the welfare system, and continually reminded us of the unique experiences, barriers, and strengths of this group of learners.

Betty’s experience as a researcher for this study was extremely positive. The research activities gave her valuable skills she can apply to her studies as well as experience that is directly related to the field of sociology. Betty describes her experience as a researcher in this way: “It was like a door we opened to let in information that is important to so many people in need. We opened up a lot of information about how people are affected by welfare reform, and we learned about the needs of many different groups in our community.”

Below is a poem Betty wrote as a participant in a writing group. It attests to her talent and creativity as well as her pride and connection to her Puerto Rican heritage:

My Heritage

I am from the enchanted island.
My hometown smells like mango, quenepa, jobo, and café.

I am from indios, españoles, and africanos.
My tierra smells of cazabe, corn, sugar cane.
I am from hard ground workers.
I am from noches buenas and three kings.
I am from Christmas with a smell of coquito,
rice with pigeon peas, pasteles, and lechón.

My music sounds of cuatro, guiro, and guitar.
When you put these sounds together,
You can hear one seis chorreao bien improvisado.

I am from congas y cueros.
I am from bombas y plenas.
My island smells of Spain, Madre Patria,
with peleas de gallos and regata.

I am from all of these things: smells, music, heritage, and tradition.
I am from this rich culture who made me
proud to say I am Puertorriqueña.

Krystal Recor

Krystal Recor worked on this study as a Voces team member for two years
while she was enrolled at HCC. Born in 1972 in Springfield, Massachusetts, Krystal is
in her late twenties and is the mother of three young children, two daughters and a
son. Krystal is strong-willed but flexible, very focused, a quick learner and a good
listener with wonderful people skills. She describes her ethnic background as
Caucasian and her primary language is English, though she speaks some Spanish that
she learned informally from her Spanish-speaking friends. Krystal attended both
elementary and secondary school in Massachusetts. She dropped out of high school
and later received a GED, after which she enrolled at HCC. Krystal sums up her
educational experience in this way:

I never felt like I fit in with the other kids at school. I had a child at the age
of 17 and then went into a GED program. I never finished that program. At
the age of 21, after my second child, I went into another GED program. I
never completed that program either. At the age of 24, after my third child, I
went to the OWL program in Springfield, took the test and passed. I entered
HCC the following winter. I felt like I had to be a good role model for my
kids that I was a single parent of, that’s what got me through college. I decided very recently to withdraw from the bachelor’s degree program that I’m in so that I can focus on my kids’ education for now. I intend on completing my M.S.W. when my children are older.

While she was enrolled at HCC, Krystal worked for two years for the Mentor Program as a work-study program assistant. She received her associates’ degree from HCC in December of 1999 and immediately went to work for a mental health organization as a full time residential assistant for young adults. She also worked one morning a week for the Mentor Program’s writing program as a writing instructor after graduating. In September of 2000, Krystal enrolled in an undergraduate social work program at Elms College, but did not complete the semester.

Krystal received welfare benefits while she was at the community college, but is no longer on welfare. Although she was still eligible to receive benefits after graduating from college, she voluntarily left the system because she found that “the pressure of constantly verifying and having to report to the office all the time was too much stress.” Her experience with the welfare system was often demeaning and demoralizing. As she puts it, “I try to appreciate the assistance that I received, but I feel that they repeatedly stripped me of my dignity and literally made me beg and fight for aid.”

Krystal contributed a tremendous amount of work to this study. She was involved in articulating questions and developing survey, interview, and focus group instruments as well as recruiting participants. She co-facilitated writing classes at two research sites, and collected data through conducting interviews with college and ABE learners, administering surveys with community college students, and co-
facilitating two focus groups. Krystal worked on two phases of analysis and was an enthusiastic contributor to the metaphor analysis activities we developed. She helped to identify the themes and topics that guided the second phase of data collection as well as the questions explored by this study. She also presented at four conferences, two of them statewide and one national. In addition, Krystal participated in a welfare rights rally in Northampton, Massachusetts as a rally organizer and speaker. Krystal joined the research team because, as she wrote:

The project interested me because it involved me in so many ways. I wanted to educate myself so that I could educate others about the new welfare reform policies. I also needed the support that I received from everybody involved. It also made my desire stronger to become a professional advocate.

The research project also gave Krystal many experiences and skills that have served her well in her work as a residential counselor. Shortly after she began her new job, Krystal sent me this e-mail message:

I forgot to tell you how thankful I am. All of those workshops and other various duties that I did with you really prepared me for what I have to do on this job. I would be so nervous and not know what to expect from all of the seminars that I have to attend but because of you I'm a Vet. Thank you so much for everything. I wish I could express how really thankful I am but words can't express it enough. Please keep me a part of the Mentor Program. It has done so much for me, I want to give as much back.

Finally, Krystal offers a metaphor for what it was like to do research on questions of such critical importance to her own life:

Being a Changes Project Researcher was like being a meteorologist. A person who studies the weather may detect a storm or a tornado and be fearful of his well being, but still reports the potential danger to others. He will also follow the storm to see where it's going and how severe it will get, to keep the public updated. On the flip side, he may detect a week of sunshine and plan ahead for himself, but still reports this information to those he does and does not know.
Alicia Robert

Alicia Robert was a Voces team member for six months, from January through June of 1999. Alicia was born in Massachusetts in 1977 and attended elementary and secondary public schools in Amherst. Now in her early twenties, Alicia is a single parent of two pre-school aged daughters. Although Alicia is shy, she does not let her shyness interfere with the ambitious goals she has set for herself as a student. She knows how to use her intelligence and knowledge in ways that made a powerful, quiet impact. Alicia defines her ethnic background as bi-racial, Irish American and African American. Her primary language is English and she speaks a little Spanish.

Alicia dropped out of high school in her senior year, after having been sick for several months in her junior year with mononucleosis. Because of attendance requirements, Alicia was told she would not be able to graduate with her class because of the time she missed when she was sick, so she decided to leave school. Shortly after this, Alicia took a GED preparation course at Holyoke Community College, and after passing the GED exam, enrolled in an Associates' degree program there. She graduated from HCC in May of 1999, and immediately started working at two part-time jobs, as home health aide for a health services agency and as an ESOL instructor. Currently, she has a new full time job with an Internet company. She is also enrolled full-time at Westfield State College, where she is working toward a B.A. in Psychology.

Alicia was a welfare recipient while she was a student at HCC. After graduating, she voluntarily left welfare because the end of her time limit was fast
approaching and she felt pressured to go to work, even though her youngest daughter
was only an infant at the time. Alicia’s experience with the welfare system was mixed.
Because of welfare reform and the looming time limits, being a welfare recipient
caused her a great deal of anxiety and insecurity. It was like “driving on a dark road
with no headlights,” she said, “You’re on a path with a destiny in mind but you can’t
really see ahead because you don’t know what’s going to happen when your benefits
end. It feels dangerous.” Although she appreciates the support she received to help
her through community college, Alicia felt that the system was not really “there” for
her. She believes that the new policies requiring people to prioritize finding a job over
getting an education are not really in the economy’s best interests in the long run.
However, because Alicia was able to get an associates’ degree, had some prior work
experience, and was a native English speaker, she believes she was better off than
many welfare recipients who do not have these same advantages.

Alicia’s goal is to “become independent.” She describes independence as
“being crowned queen of your own queendom,” that is, being in charge of your own
home, family, and life. Alicia feels that she is about halfway to being crowned and
that, once she has her B.A., she will be able to achieve the kind of independence she
wants. The crown, according to Alicia, is made of self-confidence, belief in her ability
to reach her goals, and her own hard work and help from others that contribute to her
accomplishments.

Alicia came to work for the Mentor Program and joined the Voces team in her
final semester at HCC and continued to do research through the summer of 1999 after
she graduated. She joined the research team during its final phases of data collection,
analysis and dissemination, and contributed a great deal to the study through conducting surveys, interviews, and co-facilitating focus groups, as well as helping with the final stages of analysis. Alicia also presented at two conferences and participated in a welfare rights rally in Northampton as a rally organizer and speaker.

Alicia gained a great deal in the way of knowledge, skills, and connections during her six months as a Voces team member, which she summarizes below:

I have learned research strategies to get the most information out of people and I learned to do metaphor analysis, which really gives you information about individuals and the way they think. These research skills have helped me in the psychology classes I’m taking at Westfield. The most important thing I learned about myself is my capability to utilize and comprehend things I am not familiar with or thought were beyond me. I have learned that a lot of people have the desire to learn more but are not given the opportunity to advance at the pace they need, due to welfare reform. They don’t have the information about where to go, so they feel stuck and may be afraid to ask.

Maria Santana

Maria Santana worked as a Voces team researcher for approximately six months, from December of 1998 through the summer of 1999. She defines her ethnicity as Puerto Rican. Like Betty Falcón, Maria was born in Carolina, Puerto Rico and earned her high school diploma there. She liked high school, but had a difficult time when her mother left home and she had to take care of her seven siblings. This caused her grades to suffer, which made her “feel bad,” but she managed to graduate nevertheless. Maria has three daughters, aged eight, six, and four, and is in her early forties. She is soft-spoken, shy, extremely well organized, devoutly religious, and highly intelligent.
Maria moved to Holyoke in 1994, where she studied ESOL in a community-based ABE program for about a year before enrolling in the ESOL program at HCC. The ABE program helped her to learn English, but, she says, “the way they taught English made me feel like I was in the first grade,” rather than an adult who was highly literate in her first language. Her experience in the ESOL program at the college, where she spent three years, was much more positive. After Maria graduated from the ESOL program she had to leave college to go to work before completing her associates’ degree. She is registered to return to HCC as a part time student in January of 2001, though she will continue to work full time. Maria’s field of study is Early Childhood Education and she works as a pre-school teacher, a job she finds very fulfilling.

Maria was a welfare recipient while she was at HCC, but her benefits ended when she reached her time limit. Because of this, she had to drop out of HCC before completing her degree. Currently, Maria receives assistance to help pay her children’s daycare fees while she is working. She feels that welfare reform policies are shortsighted: “It’s like they don’t give us the opportunity to finish our education. They constantly pressured me to find a job, whether I was ready or not.”

Maria’s contributions to the research study included conducting four interviews in Spanish, co-facilitating one focus group, co-teaching several writing classes, and translating Spanish data into English. Maria also participated in data analysis groups, was particularly helpful in both contributing and analyzing metaphors, and participated in two statewide conference presentations. Her participation in the project helped her, she said, “as a student and a worker.”
learned a great deal about the issue of welfare reform and its impact on adult learners. She sums up her experience in this way:

I thought I was the only one who had problems with welfare. But the project made me feel like I could use my own experience to help others. The research project made me think that I can work for my community and help people who don’t know how to defend themselves, people who are lost.

Her work as a researcher also helped Maria to overcome her shyness: "I feel a little more comfortable and I talk a little bit more about the project. I share laughter, am less afraid, and not so shy." Maria’s metaphor for being a researcher for this study was "going through a dark path. At the end of the path, you see a little light, like a star, and you try to reach it. You feel like that."

Rhonda Soto

Rhonda Soto worked as a Voces team member for three years, longer than any other participant. She was already on the Mentor Program staff as a work study program assistance when the project began, was a founding member of the Voces team, and continued to work as a researcher for a year after graduating from HCC. Rhonda is in her late thirties and is the single mother of a thirteen-year-old son. She describes herself as bi-racial, half Irish American and half Puerto Rican. Rhonda speaks both English and Spanish, and English is her first language.

Born in New York City in 1962, Rhonda attended high school in the Bronx, but dropped out in her senior year because she was bored. “School wasn’t meeting my needs. I was not challenged and it wasn’t helping me to develop in the ways I wanted to develop.” Soon after leaving high school, Rhonda took the GED exam and passed it. Rhonda is a whirlwind of activity, talk, and ideas and has highly developed
social skills. She is an exuberant, vocal, creative, pleasure-loving, deeply spiritual being, and a born storyteller.

After working in New York for several years, Rhonda moved to Massachusetts where she enrolled at HCC. She was 32 at the time, and became a welfare recipient for the first time in her life in order to go to school. She enrolled in the Early Childhood Education program and received an associates’ degree in 1998. After graduating from HCC, Rhonda transferred to Mt. Holyoke College, where she is currently enrolled in the Education and Psychology Department. Her schooling was interrupted for a semester because she was involved in a serious motorcycle accident and broke several bones in her arm, from which she will probably never completely recover. She returned to Mt. Holyoke in September of 2000, and is carrying 18 credits for both the fall and spring semesters in order to graduate in May, 2001.

Rhonda’s experience with the welfare system, and with welfare reform in particular, was fraught with conflict. At the same time that Rhonda was doing research on welfare, learning in great detail about the ins and outs of changing welfare policy and its sociopolitical context, and becoming an ardent welfare rights activist, she was also experiencing a number of problems with her own welfare case, some of which are detailed in Chapter 6. She had problems getting critically important information about her case, was treated with hostility welfare staff, and was repeatedly “sanctioned,” having her benefits interrupted several times because the welfare office misplaced her documents. Rhonda describes her experience as a welfare recipient as “being on a roller-coaster ride: It feels scary, dangerous, and confusing.
You can’t see what’s ahead or plan for the future, because you’re so emotionally caught up in the hassles of the moment.”

Rhonda was informed that her benefits would end before she received her associates’ degree, but she knew she had the right to an extension because she was eligible for “grandfathered” status, due to the fact that she had documented her intention to transfer to a four-year college before welfare reform was instituted. She sought the aid of a legal services attorney and had several appeal hearings, but ultimately lost her appeal. As a result, Rhonda’s welfare benefits ended shortly before she enrolled at Mt. Holyoke, and has since had a very difficult time supporting herself and her son while in school. She relies on a number of supports such as student loans, a local food bank, fuel assistance, generous friends who bring her groceries when she runs out of food, and her mother’s help with cash, child care, and the use of a washing machine.

One of the positive results of being on welfare in this era has been Rhonda’s ability to develop her survival skills, to look elsewhere for resources, and to connect with others in order to survive:

As a result of the time limit, I’ve found other resources. I’ve learned to be a fighter, and to know what’s really important, like taking care of my son, providing him with a stable environment, and completing my education. Nobody is going to stop me from doing those things. I have a strong will, stubbornness, and defiance. And I have a family who believe in me. I won’t give up now that I’ve come this far.

Rhonda contributed a tremendous amount to this study. As an original member of the research team, she was involved in all aspects of the project. She helped to recruit team members and other participants, articulated research questions,
and helped to design interview, survey, and focus group instruments. She conducted five interviews, was interviewed four times, co-facilitated one focus group, and was a teacher in one of the writing classes that was a research site for this study. Rhonda contributed a great deal to the analysis for this study as well. She helped to identified important topics in the first round of analysis, was an enthusiastic metaphor analyst in the second round, and compiled and analyzed survey data. Rhonda also participated in four conference presentations. In addition to her research activities, Rhonda became actively involved politically in several welfare rights organizations, and was a vocal and impassioned advocate for welfare recipients in meetings with legislators, welfare rights vigils and rallies, radio programs, and newspaper interviews.

Rhonda describes her experiences as a researcher for this study as being part of “a giant web of voices”:

You start off being one little voice, but then you make all of these connections and your voice becomes louder and stronger. It’s not just me alone anymore. I’m speaking for myself and for others too when I make those connections. When you do that for others, you get it back in different ways. You learn things. You get support. You grow wiser. You realize how much you really have to offer the world, because of where you’ve been.

For Rhonda, her work as a researcher affected her in many ways. It gave her valuable research skills, information, and knowledge that she was able to apply to her current studies. The experience was, she said, was both exciting and sad. “What struck me most was that I knew how much I needed something like this project, research that could make a change in the world.” For Rhonda, the research project was a very emotional experience: “The whole time that I was getting support from others in the project, I was also living the nightmare of welfare reform. But there was
always someone who was worse off than me, and that helped me to know that I could survive it too.”

Ann Scott

Being the research facilitator for the *Voces* team was the kind of gift that comes along only once in a lifetime. As the profiles above suggest, I worked for three years with an extraordinarily talented, diverse, and committed group of women, a group that made this study possible because they shared their lives, ideas, hopes, passions, and struggles with me and with each other. We came to know each other intimately as we engaged in this work and I became well acquainted with their children, their friends, and some of their mothers as well. I was profoundly changed by this experience, and will always be grateful for the opportunity to work with the *Voces* team and for all that they taught me.

I am a white, European American woman, 51 years of age, and the mother of a 21-year-old daughter who I raised by myself from the time she was two. I was born in an Illinois suburb, lived in a New Jersey suburb, and moved to Massachusetts in 1967 after graduating from high school. I was the shy member of an otherwise gregarious family, in a household filled with musical, artistic, and literary activity. Before going to college, I worked as a cook, a museum docent, and a park ranger. I was the proprietor of a leather shop for a brief time and worked as a hand-weaver for ten years. I traveled as much as possible, in the United States, Mexico, Europe, and Canada. My life was interesting, but my economic prospects were limited because I did not have a college degree.
At thirty-five, when my daughter was starting kindergarten, I went back to school, enrolling full time at a community college in Haverhill, Massachusetts. Although I was very anxious about returning to school after a twenty-year break, I took to it like a duck to water, joyfully. After three semesters, I transferred to Smith College’s Ada Comstock Scholars program, from which I graduated in 1991 with a B.A. in Comparative Literature. After Smith, I went to work in Holyoke as a VISTA volunteer at a GED program for teen mothers. Two years later I started the Mentor Program at Holyoke Community College and, at the same time, began an M.Ed. program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, majoring in multicultural education. After completing my master’s degree, I embarked on the doctoral program that led me to this dissertation.

When I went back to school I also became a welfare recipient. This was during the pre-welfare reform era, and my experience was relatively positive compared to that of the participants in this study. The welfare system supported my efforts to get a bachelor’s degree, and my caseworkers were supportive, helpful, and encouraging. I was never pressured to hurry through my studies or to leave school and get a job. I did, however, experience the daily struggle of raising a child on limited resources, as well as the social stigma and internalized shame that being on welfare confers. After graduating from Smith, I left the welfare system behind me, feeling a mixture of fear and relief.

Before being hired as a research facilitator for the Changes Project, I was part of the team that developed the proposal, submitted to the federal Department of Education, which funded this research. As the research facilitator for the Voces team,
my work involved designing the study, recruiting participants, organizing the *Voces* team and our research activities, and facilitating workshops in which the team explored many aspects of the work, including question generation, developing instruments, data gathering, analysis, generation of findings, and dissemination activities. I met with the team every week and kept the research ball rolling. I also acted as the liaison between research facilitators working at other sites, the project coordinator, and various methodological consultants and advisors who worked with the Changes Project. While working on the Changes Project, I was also developing the study within this project that was to become the subject of this dissertation.

Working with the *Voces* team taught me a multitude of things. I learned to be patient, to listen, to live with ambiguity, to honor the process, and to understand the various meanings of participation. I learned to have high expectations for the quality of work adult learners can accomplish, while at the same time allowing participants to define their own goals and outcomes. I learned that participatory action research has a life of its own, and can have powerful impacts that are impossible to imagine when embarking on a project. I think of PAR, and this research study, as a spiral: We each began where we were and, as we rose through the spiral, continually returned to the same questions, the same community, the same selves, and the same concerns. Together we climbed in ever-widening circles, expanding both our understanding of the issues we were studying and our connections to people engaged in similar work, changing our perspectives, our communities, and our lives in unexpected and profound ways.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter the research setting for this study was described in order to provide a context for the work that was carried out, particularly in terms of the prior research and educational activities that lead to this study and the interests, experiences, and perspectives of the Voces team members who carried it out. Background information was given about the Changes Project, in which this study had its roots, and the Mentor Program, in which the research team members worked. Six of the Voces team members were profiled in order to document their contributions to this study and to highlight some of the impacts of their participation both on the study’s outcomes and their own lives.
CHAPTER 5

"WITH EDUCATION, MY VOICE WILL BE HEARD"

Metaphors About Education

In this and the following chapter data generated over a two-year period with adult learners in Holyoke are analyzed. I chose to analyze a particular cluster of metaphors that were most representative and occurred most frequently in approximately 300 pages of data taken from interview and focus group transcripts, metaphors generated in Voces team analysis meetings, and written work from writing classes. The data have been organized according to the three topics being investigated: education, welfare, and support. Metaphors on these topics were abundant in the data, and have been organized into ten metaphorical concepts, four under education, three under welfare and three under support. This chapter presents analysis of the four metaphors relating to education.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

Wolcott’s (1994) definition of qualitative analysis involves three modes or activities for organizing and reporting qualitative data: description, analysis, and interpretation. Description involves rendering an account that stays close to the originally recorded data, with the assumption that the data “speak for themselves” (Wolcott 1994, 10). Description addresses the question “What is happening here?” Analysis generally builds and expands upon description through a careful, systematic process that involves identifying key features such as patterns and interrelationships among data. Analysis is concerned with how things work. Interpretation involves making sense of the data, addressing both meanings and contexts, and it does so in
ways that may reach “beyond the limits of what can be explained with the degree of
certainty usually associated with analysis” (Wolcott 1994, 11). These three functions
or modes of analysis often overlap, as the process is dialectical rather than linear, but
my purpose for defining them separately here is to provide a framework for
identifying and making a distinction between the different actions I employed in
analyzing the data for this study, in other words, to show my hand in the data. In
general, the themes in this chapter will first be discussed using a descriptive mode,
followed by a more analytical and interpretive mode.

The analysis and interpretation of individual metaphors and metaphorical
concepts generated by the adult learners who participated in this study offer a rich
portrait of the meanings the participants associate with the topics being explored. As
discussed in the literature review, metaphorical concepts are the larger concepts to
which all individual metaphorical expressions belong. The ordinary human conceptual
system that structures people’s thoughts, perceptions, actions, and relations is,
according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphorical in nature. That is, the
metaphorical structure of the way people think and categorize information makes
individual metaphors as linguistic expressions possible. In this section, the terms
metaphor and metaphorical concept will be used interchangeably. According to
Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 1999), metaphors are structural in at least two ways: They
create an organized structure to facilitate conceiving and expressing experiences,
situations, and activities. They also structure people’s conceptual systems and,
consequently, their actions.
Metaphors are rich sources of information about people’s perceptions and experiences because they say, often with ordinary words, what ordinary words cannot say on their own. The following is the definition for metaphors that I use in this study: *expressions that aid the understanding of one conceptual or semantic domain in terms of another conceptual or semantic domain.* Because metaphors link two or more conceptual or semantic domains, they are capable of creating new conceptual or semantic categories that express new or unique situations, experiences, perceptions, and relations. In this sense, the creation of metaphors can allow for language to adapt to changes in an individual’s conceptual system or in the world at large. On the other hand, many metaphors are not particularly novel or unique: nevertheless they can still reveal a great deal of information about the speaker. For example, one of the conceptual metaphors discussed in the following section, *education is a journey,* is neither a unique nor a novel conception. Yet, as will be seen, *education is a journey* reveals a great deal about the ways participants in this study conceive of and express their educational experiences. In addition, the journey metaphor becomes even richer when analyzed in relation to some of the other metaphors participants use.

According to Lakoff (1985), all metaphorical statements have entailments, just as non-metaphorical, or literal statements do. For example, the concept *education is an investment* has the following entailments or, as Basso (1976) calls them, “connotative paraphrases”: Education requires capital expenditure; the capital expenditure includes and individual’s hard work, time, and resources; the investment can yield economic and personal benefits.
In addition to entailments such as those listed above, metaphors have “semantic dimensions,” according to Fernandez (1972), that is, metaphors move their subjects along a semantic dimension or set of dimensions and are thus bounded by two often opposite features at either end of a continuum. These dimensions, like the entailments, both structure and limit the metaphors. For example, two of the dimensions of the metaphor education is an investment are sufficient/insufficient capital expenditure and many benefits/few benefits.

In this chapter the topic of education will be discussed using the conceptual metaphors that frame the ways participants wrote or talked about education. Each of the four metaphors about education are discussed using data samples to highlight particular attributes of each metaphor. My analytical process consists of the following basic systematic operations:

1. Organization of the language data into topics (in this chapter the topic of education is examined and in Chapter 5 the topics of welfare and support are examined)

2. Organization of the topics according to the conceptual metaphors to which they belong

3. Feature analysis of the metaphors, consisting of three major operations: generating a list of each metaphor’s entailments (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) or connotative paraphrases (Basso 1976); charting the semantic dimensions of each metaphor; and examining the extent to which metaphors about a given topic create an interrelated semantic system that is bounded by its own dimensions.

4. Interpretation of the metaphors based on patterns and interrelationships within and across topics

Analysis of Education Metaphors

The data analyzed in this chapter relate to the first research sub-question articulated in Chapter 1: What are low-income female adult learners’ perceptions of
the meanings of education and what it makes possible for them? The adult learners who participated in this research project wrote or talked about education in remarkably similar ways. Whether participants were enrolled in GED or ESOL programs or in two or four-year colleges, most of what they said about education falls into the following four metaphorical concepts: education is a journey; education is personal development; education is an investment; and education is access. All of these metaphors belong to what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call “structural metaphors,” that is, metaphors that structure one kind of experience or activity in terms of another. Often the metaphors I analyzed fit into two or more metaphorical concepts. There are also some notable differences between the data generated by teen parents and those generated by college students, which will be discussed in the sections to follow.

The greatest number of metaphors generated about education fit into the first two metaphorical concepts listed above: education is a journey and education is personal development. Education is an investment yielded about half the number of metaphors as the two above, and the fewest metaphors were found under the concept education as access. For the section focusing on participants’ concepts of education, I analyzed 71 metaphors about education as a journey, 58 metaphors about education as personal development, 35 metaphors about education as an investment, and 15 metaphors about education as access. These metaphors range in length from a single phrase to an extended metaphor developed in a paragraph or a poem, some examples of which are included in this section. Approximately a third of the metaphors analyzed in this section were deliberately created as metaphors, that is,
participants created them in response to writing assignments or in metaphor workshops. The rest of the metaphors analyzed here belong to what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call “everyday speech.”

Education is a Journey

Many of the adult learners participating in this study conceive of education as an important journey that they need to take in order to “better themselves” and to “move forward” through life. For most, whatever their current level of educational attainment, they believe that their ability to move forward is not possible without further education. A teen parent wrote that she and her friends want to go to college “so we can move on with our lives.” Jessie, a community college student said, in an interview: [Before college I had a job that was a] “stand-still position. I wasn’t going anywhere. I knew I wasn’t going to go anywhere unless I got an education.” Alicia Roberts, a Voces team member, wrote: “I know that I can go places [with education]. I know that I can make a positive difference in a lot of people’s lives.”

The educational journey these adult learners travel is not an easy one. In many senses, it is a hero’s journey, a quest for a prize of great value both to the individual and society. Like Parsifal in search of the Holy Grail, or more aptly, like the women warriors in Chinese mythology, the women in this study embark on an educational path that they perceive as being full of struggle, difficult choices, uncertainty, sometimes superhuman effort, and sudden pitfalls. The journey requires personal qualities such as determination, faith, and willingness to work hard, as well as support, guidance and encouragement from others. For women with few resources, many of whom do not speak English, and none of whom completed high school, the
journey is truly long and arduous. Yet for the most part they embark on it eagerly, for they believe that the rewards at the end are worth the effort and the cost. These rewards include knowledge, literacy and job skills, a satisfying career, self-sufficiency, self-confidence, and, as many participants put it, the opportunity to "have a voice" and to "become someone."

Many of the participants used metaphors that link education with climbing, flying, or jumping, as in "climbing a mountain," "flying and coming to a place you never thought you would see," or, as Mariluz, a student from an ESOL program in the community, wrote, "La educación es como un trampolin que nos puede hacer llegar tan alto como nuestras capacidades lo permitan." [Education is like a trampoline that lets us go as high as our abilities allow us to go.]

The journey's final destination, for most of the participants, is "the future," or "a better future." As Vicky, a teen parent in a GED program wrote, "Education is the stepping stone that leads to the future." Some participants conceived of their destinations as a list of their specific educational goals, as Mariluz wrote: "Mis metas son ir para colegio, primero estudiar inglés, luego quiero estudiar computadora. Para conseguir un buen empleo. Para seguir adelante." [My goals are to go to college, first to study English, then I want to study computers. In order to get a good job. To keep moving forward.] An adult learner and classmate of Mariluz, wrote a poem about her vision of education as a means to having a voice and being heard:

Con la educación se alza mi voz
para que se escuche el rugido
de una alma que quiere llegar
hasta donde sus fuerzas le permitan llegar.
Que con la educación se escuche mi voz:
voz de lucha, voz de esfuerzo, voz desde mi corazón.

[With education, my voice will be raised
with the roar of a soul
that wants to go as far as its strength permits it to go.
With education, my voice will be heard:
voice of struggle, voice of strength, voice from within my heart.]

Many participants conceive of their journey as a path or a road they take through their lives, as these women expressed it: “Education is a path that I take through my life, a path that would lead me to the future, . . . to a different place;” “Education has these many secret hidden roads and many detours;” and “La educación es un camino hacia el futuro” [Education is a road toward the future]. For many participants, the path or road is often perilous and full of obstacles, as articulated by these teen parents, enrolled in a writing workshop sponsored by the Mentor Program: “Education for me has been like going through that lonely road at night;” “There has been a lot of thunderstorms down these lonely roads;” and “Es un camino largo que tiene muchas barreras.” [It’s a long road that has many obstacles.]

For some, however, the journey is exhilarating and full of wonders. As Joanna, a teen parent enrolled in a GED program, wrote, “This is the fun of life: you start doing something and by the time you finish it’s all flipped around.” And Rhonda Soto, a Voces team member, said, “For me education will always be a new quest and a challenge.”

Many of the GED students participating in this study talked or wrote about their difficulties deciding which direction to take on their educational journey, whether to attend college or a job training program, what career to prepare for, or
what courses to take. “Education is like being blind,” Joanna, a teen parent wrote, “you don’t know where to go.” Some wrote about feeling isolated, uncertain, or powerless on their journey:

- I’m on my own walking a slippery floor, with no warning.
- Right now I’m at a crossroads in my education. I don’t know which way to go.
- At the beginning it was difficult to make the right decisions.
- I need power, the power to take me to a place I’ve never seen.

Others tell of finding guidance and encouragement for their educational journeys through the help of friends, teachers, family, counselors, and mentors. Vicky, a teen parent in a GED program who participated in the Mentor Program’s summer mini-course for college-bound ABE learners, wrote about the help she received from one of the mentors: “A mentor is like a map: they help to guide you in the direction you want to go.” Barbara, a community college student who participated in a focus group said, “There’s times that I just didn’t think I could make it, but my counselors and my peers helped me because they wouldn’t let me give up.” Maria Santana, a Voces team member enrolled in the community college’s ESOL program, put it this way:

My [ESOL] counselor, ... any time that I feel like I’m frustrated or sad, I go to her office and let her know what I’m feeling. Her feedback made me feel good. Like, I don’t know how to say that in English, but it’s like she push me up, you know [she says], ‘do this, you can do it.’

For many of the participants in this study, education is a solo journey in which they are “struggling to better themselves.” This journey requires possessing or developing personal qualities such as discipline, determination, “drive,” and the
willingness to work hard. As Joanna, a GED student, wrote, “For me, educational goals are getting up at dawn and struggle my tired body out of bed. If you don’t, you’re not going nowhere in this tough world that we live in. . . . My goal is to finish my education. . . . There’s no time to waste, is time to wake up.” For Paula, a community college student about to graduate with an associates’ degree, “The difficult part is concentrating and learning how to overcome the obstacles that appear in life.” Teen parents and community college students participating in a writing workshop also described the personal strengths they need in order to complete their educational goals:

- It’s that daily hustle to be on time. It’s that drive that my son shows when he rolls out of bed with just one call every day.
- I’ve worked too hard to stop now.
- It’s not easy. You need a lot of strength to get up in the morning and get going for a long day ahead of you. I’ve had a rough life, but I’m still on my feet and still rolling.

For some participants, the educational journey is not a path they take through life, but a vehicle, such as a plane, bus, boat, or train. The vehicle metaphor is fraught with its own set of perils, particularly regarding one’s ability to get on and stay on the vehicle. Ana, who became a mother at sixteen, thinks of her educational history as a journey that has been both a train ride and a walk. As a high school student, Ana was “on this train bound for [her] destination,” but when she became pregnant she had to leave school, to get off the train. Now, preparing for her GED, she thinks of herself as walking toward her destination:

I know it’s like being on this train bound for your destination, but somehow you got off, not by choice. You are walking towards your goal, but it’s not the same as if you were on board. The train goes by with tremendous pace, and you are walking to your destination oblivious of your race. With this
train the next stop is way ahead, but if and when you get there you are spent. Your train has long gone and here you are alone.

Using a model that is a synthesis of a metaphor analysis process developed by Basso (1976) and Lakoff (1985) the education is a journey metaphor suggests a line of questioning that serves as a guide for generating entailments or connotative paraphrases. Examples of such questions are: How is education like a journey? What kind of journey is it? How do you prepare for the journey? What is your destination? Who are your guides and what are your maps? What are the obstacles and difficulties? Using these and other related questions as a guide for examining the data, I generated the following entailments based on what participants said about education as a journey:

• Education is arduous and takes a long time.
• Although the specific destinations or outcomes of education are often unknown, it is still worth the effort to make the journey.
• Not everyone reaches their destination on the educational journey.
• Education moves you forward toward the future but you have to take the steps.
• Education involves fear, risk, uncertainty, and sacrifice.
• Education requires guidance, support, and encouragement from others, including peers, family, teachers, mentors, and counselors.
• Education requires determination, faith, hard work, and courage from yourself.
• Education requires setting goals and making choices as you go along.
• Education can be enjoyable and exhilarating.
• Education is rewarding. It can yield self-confidence, knowledge, skills, economic self-sufficiency, a better future, an opportunity to be heard, a good career.
• The obstacles on the educational journey include fear; discouragement; lack of preparation; feeling like an outsider; lack of resources and supports (such as money, transportation, child care, family and community support); lack of access to or information about educational programs; lack of English and literacy skills; getting pregnant; overwhelming personal responsibilities; failing classes; yours or your family members’ mental and physical health problems.
• The obstacles on the educational journey may keep you from completing the journey.
In addition to the entailments above, the *education is a journey* metaphor is bounded by the following semantic dimensions: moving/standing still; easy/arduous; long/short; uncertainty/certainty; completed/uncompleted; support/lack of support; many obstacles/few obstacles; many risks and sacrifices/few risks and sacrifices; yields much/yields little.

In the data analyzed for this section, some of the important differences between adult learners enrolled in college and those in ABE programs include a kind of vagueness about most aspects of the educational journey among ABE learners, and a more explicit and detailed understanding of the journey’s obstacles, challenges, outcomes, destinations, and benefits among the college students. Another important difference is that the college students participating in this study, while more aware of the potential challenges to completing their education, were also more determined to complete their education, more certain of their ability to achieve their goals, and better able to articulate strategies to overcome obstacles than their counterparts in ABE programs.

There are a number of reasons for these differences. One is that, in general, the college students are older than most of the ABE students, and thus have had more time and experience to understand and adapt to the world around them, to its limitations and possibilities. Secondly, as they make the transition from ABE programs into college, participants learn, from experience, to make informed decisions, to adapt to changing circumstances, to solve problems and overcome obstacles, to circumvent limitations, and to take advantage of possibilities. They also learn to articulate, specifically, what these decisions, circumstances, obstacles and
possibilities are. They learn how the “system” works and how to navigate it, acquiring the cultural and social “capital” (Bourdieu 1986) needed to function in a milieu previously closed to them. As will be seen in the sections to come, the educational experience itself can offer learners the skills and opportunities they need to complete their educational journeys.

As for the differences between ABE and college students in their determination to achieve their goals and their belief in their ability to do so, it is my belief that success breeds both the determination to succeed and the skills that make success possible. For those who see themselves as being in the early stages of their educational journeys, the future is full of unknown obstacles. But for those who have overcome some obstacles, they can learn from their experiences.

The most compelling features of the education is a journey metaphor could be summed up in this way: long, arduous, risky, dangerous, unknown, rewarding, and exhilarating. Is this an accurate representation of the educational experiences of the adult learners participating in this study? When I reflect on my own educational journey, now nearly completed, all of the adjectives above do seem to apply, though most of the risks and dangers and a lot of the hard work had to do with circumstances outside of the classroom: the pressures of raising a child as a single parent, of managing a household with limited financial resources. For me, as a native English speaker who embarked on this journey already in possession of a great deal of what Bourdieu (1986) calls “cultural capital,” the experience of being a student, though arduous, was more exhilarating than dangerous.
For the adult learners who participated in this study, the educational journey is infinitely more difficult than mine was for a number of reasons, including the ramifications of class, race, and language. For example, having to negotiate an environment in a foreign language, an environment that may be hostile to one's culture and primary language, adds a tremendous burden, cognitively and emotionally, to the work at hand. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) identify some of the many cognitive activities that all of us engage in, subconsciously, while in a conversation. These include accessing relevant memories; comprehending a stream of sound as being language and dividing it into distinctive phonetic features; assigning a sentence structure out of a vast number of constructions available; picking out words and giving them meanings appropriate to context; making semantic and pragmatic sense; performing relevant inferences; constructing mental images; filling in gaps in discourse; interpreting body language; anticipating the conversation's direction; and planning a response. It is mind-boggling to think of all that goes on, cognitively and beneath the level of consciousness, as we communicate with each other. For those who are operating in a foreign language, or whose literacy skills are minimal, these cognitive activities become infinitely more complicated. With this in mind, the educational experience as a hero's journey seems to be an accurate metaphorical concept for the adult learners who participated in this study.

**Education is Personal Development**

Many of the participants in this study talked about education as being or providing a kind of *personal development*. In the data examined for this section, it is clear that participants know very well what they want from education, as well as what
they think education can give them in terms of personal development. This collection of aspects and qualities, which are detailed in the following paragraphs, includes developing their potential; gaining knowledge, skills, and abilities; learning how to learn; broadening their outlook, understanding the world better, and strengthening their personal opinions and insights; increasing their ability to solve problems, to make informed decisions, and to overcome obstacles, both in and out of school; gaining self-confidence and the ability to express themselves effectively; and becoming better parents and role models to their children. This exhaustive list of what education is and what it makes possible makes one thing very clear: the adult learners participating in this study expect a great deal from education. No matter what their educational experiences may have been in the past, they are demanding consumers who view education in broad, rather than narrow ways. The educational journey described in the previous section may be arduous and sometimes perilous, but it is a journey that can greatly enrich people in multiple ways.

Participants talked or wrote about personal development as helping them both to gain a sense of their potential and to fulfill that potential. As Voces team member Alicia Robert summed it up, being in college has “given me a sense of my potential and what I feel I can accomplish.” Another outcome of personal development was expressed by many participants as “preparing for the future,” as Frances, a college-bound young woman in an ESOL program, said: “The school is your future, which gives the knowledge that everyone of us needs.” Consistent with the data analyzed in the previous section, the community college students tended to give more specific details about what they needed in order to be prepared for the future, as they tended
to have more information about their choice of careers and what was necessary to achieve their goals. The students in ABE programs tended to express themselves in more general terms about what education prepares them to do, as demonstrated by Angela, a teen parent whose goals are somewhat unrealistic, though certainly ambitious: to “get my GED, start my own business, and possibly be a famous artist.”

For participants, personal development often means gaining and developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities that they believe are needed for the workplace, for the demands of parenting in particular and for adulthood in general. For many, the literacy and academic skills they want to develop through education include being able to read and write well, to do college level work, to speak English well, and to prepare for specific careers. Many of the college students participating in the study also talked about the time management and organizational skills they developed and how these can be applied to life outside of school as well as helping them to be successful students. According to Jessie, a college student, [learning about] “time management helped a real lot, it helped me try planning out my day. I use a date book all the time. [It gives me] organizational skills that help me be a better parent.” And Roxanne, a classmate of Jessie’s at the college, believes that “everything you learn in school you can use in your everyday life.”

Other participants said that education teaches them how to learn and continue to learn. As Roxanne, a teen parent in a GED program said, “I’m going to be able to keep learning in whatever career I choose. I’m always going to have the education that I’ve learned.” Carolyn, a community college student in her first semester, wrote, “Coming back to school has shown me that my mind is like a sponge and I’m just
waiting to absorb anything and everything.” And Krystal Recor, a Voces team member, said, “I’ve learned that there’s always new studies, new research, new ideas. You can always learn more . . . once you have those skills for how to learn.” Elena, a student enrolled in the college’s ESOL program put it this way: “Creo que después de estudiar en el colegio mis conocimientos no se detienen allí . . . Si los pongo en práctica van a ir creciendo cada día más.” [I think that after having studied in college my knowledge will not end there. . . . If I put this in practice, it will grow more each day].

Other important aspects of personal development gained through education, particularly for participants at the community college, have to do with broadening one’s outlook, understanding the world better, and strengthening personal opinions and insights. Elena, the community college student quoted above, said, “Uno se entiende más de las cosas que están pasando alrededor de uno . . . puedes expresarte y puedes comunicar tus ideas y opiniones referente a lo que está sucediendo.” [You understand more about what is going on around you, and you learn to express and communicate your ideas and opinions about what is happening]. For many, broadening their outlook comes about because of the opportunities education gives them to interact with new people - - either people with similar experiences to theirs with whom they can identify and compare notes, or through exposure to people who may think differently than they do. Roxanne, in an interview, talked about how her experience at college helped her to “know I can speak my mind and have people listen to me even if it’s not their opinion or their way.” And Paula, another community college student who was interviewed said:
I get a broader look at what I want to do with my life. And I get opinions and insights that I never thought I’d actually see or hear in my classes, and it makes me look at different things in my life and how it relates to my life. . . . Learning about society around you, things that maybe you didn’t see before, why people act the way they act.

Maria Santana, a Voces team member, talked about the profound effect of being around other students who have had experiences similar to hers:

[Education] has helped me a lot, ‘cause I have the opportunity to deal with people that have the same experience that I have now. And I feel like when they talk to me about their experience, it’s like a mirror. I can see myself over their face. I thought that I was the only one. I have a lot of problems and feel depressed and sometimes you get stuck like you no go anywhere cause you have a lot of problems. As soon as I started my classes, you meet new people and be in this program [Mentor Program and Changes Project]. ‘Cause I’m kind of shy, but I think that I do belong. I don’t feel like shame.

Education as personal development also means, for many participants, increasing their ability to solve problems, to make informed decisions, and to overcome obstacles, both in and out of school. According to Voces team member Krystal Recor:

Education helps you solve problems and make decisions about important things [because] you have the education to back it up. . . . [It] teaches me how to deal with obstacles I have to face every day and how to manage the real world . . . [It gives you] a better perspective on things that are happening. It gives you more solutions, and a better understanding of how to come up with solutions.

Betty Falcon, a Voces team member, had this to say:

El regresar al colegio me ayuda a poder tomar con más calma mis problemas, verle siempre una solución positiva a la situación y poder tomar una decisión eficaz sobre el problema.

[Going back to college gives me the ability to address my problems more calmly, to see that there is always a positive solution to any situation and to make effective decisions about the problems.]
Gaining the ability to express themselves effectively was an important aspect of personal development for many participants, and often this ability was linked to another aspect of self-development: self-confidence. Some participants said that education gave them the confidence to express themselves, as Denise, a GED student, put it: “The more I’m learning, the more I’ll be able to know what I’m speaking about. . . . [Education] teaches me how to express my ideas around a lot of people and helps me to voice my opinions.” For others, like Krystal Recor, it works more dialectically: knowledge gained through education increases her self-confidence and her ability to express herself, while opportunities to express herself continues to build her confidence:

Expressing your ideas and opinions, you have more confidence in yourself. You have more of a back: you know what you’re talking about so you feel confident in expressing your opinions and ideas. . . . It gives you the confidence you need because you have the knowledge now to back up your opinion.

Many participants also regarded an increase in self-confidence and the ability to express themselves effectively as benefiting them beyond the classroom. Ana, a GED student who participated in the Mentor Program’s mini-course for college bound learners, said, “being in the classroom setting around different people will help me to express myself when it comes to working,” while Ana’s classmate, Vicky, wrote that education “has given me the confidence to go and seek help and support.”

“Becoming Somebody”

Often the outcome of the personal development education makes possible was expressed by participants as “becoming somebody,” “making something out of myself,” or “becoming useful.” As Rhonda Soto, a Voces team member, said, “I really
do want this education. I really do want to further myself. It makes me feel good as a
woman. It makes me feel strong. I know I can get through life if I have that education
that I need to become somebody.” Laurie, another college student, talked about
wanting to “become someone and to have what I don’t have now.” And for Yolanda,
a teen parent, “My goal is to finish my GED, thinking of a better future, and a good
job that allows me to develop into someone useful and important.” For Nadia, a
learner in a GED program, education means “trying to make something out of
myself.”

Does the prevalence of the idea that education makes it possible for people to
“become somebody” mean that participants believe a lack of formal education makes
them “nobodies”? Some of the data generated for the Changes Project on the topic of
voice can shed light on this question, as the meanings participants associate with voice
aid the understanding of what they mean by “becoming somebody.”

Statements about voice in the data generally entail two levels, a personal or
private voice and a collective, public voice. The personal or private voice expresses
the uniqueness of an individual’s personal experience, perspective, knowledge, values,
history, opinions, and so on, and differentiates itself from other private voices. The
public, collective voice can be used to express an individual’s experiences as well, but
it is connected to a collective voice. For example, individuals express a collective
voice when they vote, engage in public dialogue, publish, or participate in social
action. When speaking in a public voice, individuals are also differentiating themselves
from others, but they are doing so collectively, representing a community to which
they belong. Because the participants in this study come from marginalized, oppressed
communities whose experiences, languages, and cultures are often invisible, stereotyped, demeaned, or threatened with extinction, their private voices are often unheard or discredited, making the development of a collective voice particularly crucial to their empowerment and to the preservation of their private voices. In a poem, Betty Falcón expresses what it feels like to have a strong private voice that nobody listens to:

Tengo voz para expresarme, pero no soy escuchada . . . . Tengo la oportunidad de alzar mi voz y gritar mi opinión cuenta, sin embargo me dicen: ‘tienes que permanecer callada.

[I have a voice to express myself, but I am not heard. . . . I have the opportunity to raise my voice and scream out my opinion, but they tell me: ‘you must remain silent’].

For the adult learners in this study “becoming somebody” means becoming visible and empowered, and gaining access to the resources that visibility and empowerment promises. This process involves the development of a public, collective voice, one that preserves and augments the private voice and the expression of the private experience.

Finally, one of the most frequently documented reasons that participants want to continue their education, and their self-development, was for their children, in order to support them, to guide them through their own educational journeys, and to be good role models for them. “I want to be a good example for my children,” said Melissa, a teen parent, “that’s why I want to get my GED and go to college.” Sandra, an adult learner in an ESOL program said, “Cuando mis dos niños estén mayorcitos quiero que sean alguien en la vida y no cojan mal ejemplo de nadie.” [When my two
As stated earlier, it is very clear from the data analyzed in this section that the adult learners in this study expect a great deal from education. It is also clear that there is a kind of balance or consistency between these high expectations and the kind of effort, sacrifice and risk they believe education requires from them, as indicated by the *education is a journey* metaphor. For these learners, education is indeed a hero’s journey, and, they believe, for those who reach their destinations, their lives will be transformed and enriched for generations to come.

As a conceptual metaphor, *education is personal development* suggests a number of questions, three of which appear to be answered by the data: What personal aspects does education develop? how does it develop them? and what does that personal development make possible? As in the previous section, these questions provide a guide or framework for this metaphor’s entailments, which are outlined below:

- Education helps people develop academic and literacy skills
- Education is self-perpetuating: it helps people learn how to learn.
- Education helps you become somebody. In this sense, education is generative and transformative.
- Education helps people to see things more broadly and to better understand the contexts in which they operate.
- Education helps people in their lives outside of school, as in solving problems and making decisions, and being better role models and providers for their children.
- Education gives you self-confidence, which leads to a greater ability to express yourself and to exercise more control over your life.

The dimensions suggested by the conceptual metaphor, *education is personal development*, include: developed/undeveloped; broad/narrow; skilled/unskilled. Do
these dimensions suggest the belief that, unless they go to school, adult learners perceive themselves as undeveloped, unskilled, and narrow? Although most of the participants in this study, when they talk or write about the topic of education, mean formal education, that is, their experiences in public schools, ABE programs, or college, some make it clear that they think of education in broader ways. Mariluz, a student in a community ESOL program, writes about both the formal and informal educational experiences through which people gain skills, broaden their outlooks, and develop their potential in a variety of ways:

Para muchas personas educación es simplemente ir a una universidad, obtener un título, obtener un empleo bien remunerado y hacerles ver a los demás que son ingenieros, arquitectos, abogados o doctores. Para mí la educación es mucho más. La educación es una puerta que se nos abre a un mundo lleno de oportunidades. . . La educación no solo se obtiene en las escuelas o en las universidades, sino también en nuestro paso por la vida. Tenemos muchos accesos a una buena educación aunque no tengamos los medios para asistir a una buena universidad. Podemos leer libros y revistas. Podemos ver programas educativos en la televisión. Podemos tomar diferentes talleres que se ofrecen en diferentes lugares. Podemos relacionarnos con diferentes personas. La verdadera educación está en nosotros mismos.

[For many people education is simply going to a university, obtaining a title, getting a job that pays well and showing the world that they are engineers, architects, lawyers, or doctors. For me education is much more. Education is a door that lets us into a world full of opportunities. Education is not only obtained in schools and universities, but also in our journey through life. We can have access to a good education even if we lack the means to attend a good university. We can read books and journals. We can watch educational programs on television. We can take various workshops offered in different places. We can meet and get to know different people. True education exists within ourselves.]

As the data analyzed for the previous two sections suggest, the participants in this study conceive of education as a difficult and challenging journey, but one worth taking for the rewards it promises at the end, in terms of personal development and
even, at times, personal transformation. It is important to note at this point who the participants are, to remember their educational histories, and to reflect on the context of adult literacy that frames this study. As I noted in the introduction, education is not a panacea that can magically cure all the ills of a society that has historically and systematically denied many of its members access to educational, economic, political, and social opportunities because of their class, race, language and gender. And all of the participants in this study belong to these historically excluded groups. For those who do achieve their educational goals, whether those goals are to get a GED, to learn English, to improve literacy skills, or to get a college degree, there is still no guarantee that their earning power will be greatly enhanced or that they will achieve economic stability and self-sufficiency.

Does this mean that, as metaphors that shape participants’ conceptions of education, or that reflect common wisdom about what education makes possible, \textit{education is a journey} and \textit{education is personal development} are naive or even false? Does it mean that participants are being sold a bill of goods regarding the life-transforming possibilities of education? The answers, according to the data examined here, are not as hopeless or negative as the questions may suggest. Expecting a great deal from education does not mean participants in this study are naive. They also expect a great deal from themselves, and the hard work they put into their education often has its own rewards. Many of them view education, and the educational journey, as complex, broad, and often life-long, as having multiple outcomes that accrue daily and that benefit their lives outside of school as well. The educational journey’s destinations are also multiple, and economic self-sufficiency is only one of
these ends. It is also clear that, as learners move from adult literacy and GED programs into community college and four-year college programs, their understandings of what education is, what it offers, and what it makes possible become increasingly complex, broad, and explicitly articulated.

**Education is an Investment**

The *education is an investment* metaphor dovetails or overlaps a great deal with the *education is personal development* metaphor, but it is worth examining separately because it reveals a number of distinctive features of its own. In general, participants talked or wrote about investment in two ways. The first meaning associated with investment is a *personal investment* they are making - - through effort, sacrifice, and risk - - in order to reap the benefits and multiply whatever capital they invest. “The time that you’re giving [to school] you’re sacrificing your time, you’re coming to classes, you’re making it on time, you’re doing your homework,” Carolyn, a community college student, said in an interview, “I know that I can go places. I know that I can make a positive difference in a lot of people’s lives.” For many, this personal investment is being made in order to benefit their children, to “get ahead for our children,” to “give them a better future,” and to “be the best role model I can be for my kids.” Paula, another community college student, said, “I came back to school ultimately for my kids. Being able to support them requires a degree.”

Mariluz, an adult learner enrolled in an ESOL program, talks about how her education will benefit her son:

> My goal is to go to college and give my son a better education, an education I never had. My education was hard because I never spoke English. I had to ask teachers to help me speak the language. This year my son knows the
difference about English and Spanish. My son knows when to use it and understand it. I am teaching my son the things my mother never taught me, on having a goal and how to reach it.

The second way participants use the investment metaphor is as a social investment, that is, an investment that society makes in them. In this sense of the investment metaphor, the adult learners are not doing the investing, they are the investment, and the payoff, the benefits of the investment, are that the individuals being invested or invested in will eventually become more valuable to society and will be able to give something back to society, to make a return on the investment.

“People in college should have an opportunity to make it and later on they will pay back what was given to them,” wrote Joanna, a college-bound student in a GED program. Nadia, a teen parent echoes this idea: “the more education that I get, the more I can offer to society,” while Laurie, a community college student said, in a focus group, [I’m getting a degree in human services because] “I want to be able to do for people what’s been done for me and that’s why I’m here. Because of those people who helped me, I want to be there for other people.” It is important to note, also, that most participants conceive of themselves as participating in both kinds of investment, concurrently. In order to make education work, in other words, both a personal and a social investment must be made by and with individual learners.

For many of the women participating in this study, the idea of investment is linked to the idea of time, money, and the limitations placed on both time and money by welfare reform. These concerns are echoed by Paula, a community college student, who wrote:
You only have two years [because of the welfare time limit] and then after that you just don’t have any money, and people depend on this money so they can get their education, so they can get more money later on in life. So they can put back to their community what they have borrowed in the years that they were going to school.

Joanna, another community college student who participated in a focus group, poignantly makes the case for the investment of public assistance in her children’s future:

If you’re bringing this to somebody that will listen to us, let them know that it’s not that we want to live on welfare, we need it for a moment to progress, to keep going for just a moment. I didn’t know too much English so I was left behind [at my job] and then I moved here to try to get a better life. And then I had all these problems. I want something better for my sons, they need it. I don’t want them to be in the same situation that I’m in now, because they have to succeed. I don’t want them being limited. I have two good kids.

The entailments of the *education is an investment* metaphor that are pertinent to this study include the following:

- An educational investment requires capital expenditure (effort, resources) as well as risk, sacrifice, and constant vigilance.
- An investment made in education may or may not pay off in the end.
- The investment can yield benefits that are economic, social, personal, intellectual, and emotional.
- A solid investment requires both an individual investment and a social investment in the individual.
- Often the investment is made in order to benefit a future generation.

**Education is Access**

The final conceptual metaphor analyzed in this chapter is *education is access.* Participants’ individual metaphors relating to access were expressed in three ways: as a window, a door, and a key. Although there were relatively few examples of the access metaphor, it is worth examining in order to complete the picture of education as conceived by the participants.
Many of the same participants who conceive of education as a journey also think of it as the access point for what education makes possible. As an access point, education is seen as the means to an end, as making a variety of opportunities and another kind of life possible.

The window is the most passive of the access metaphors, in that the speaker looks through the window but does not have physical access to education, or to the life education makes possible. “Education is a window I look through to the other side,” Yolanda, a teen parent writes. The door metaphor can also create the image of a passive observer, though it always appears to be fully or partially open in the metaphors examined here, with the speaker presumably standing before it about to enter. Another teen parent enrolled in a GED program, Jennifer, conceives of education as “una puerta abierta a tu futuro” [a door open to your future], while one of her classmates, Susana, writes that “la educación es como una puerta que se abre para darnos infinitas oportunidades” [Education is like a door that opens to give us infinite opportunities]. Vicky, who was preparing to enter college in the coming semester, elaborates her education is a door metaphor this way:

Education is like a half open door. It invites me in, but I can’t see the other side. It’s like walking blindfolded towards a cliff, not knowing if you’re going to fall. Scared to death but . . . walking forward . . . I open the door and pull. The contents of the other side shock me . . . because I did not expect this: a thousand million hands just stretched out waiting to help me. Now I am no longer afraid.

When she wrote the extended metaphor above, Vicky was just completing a three-week mini-course that the Mentor Program offers to college-bound ABE learners every summer, to help prepare them for college level work. Vicky was a
serious and enthusiastic participant who wrote beautifully in both English and Spanish. She developed close ties to several of the mentors during the three weeks she attended the course, and the Voces team was gratified to read her words, as we imagined ourselves as the “hands stretched out” to help her at the community college.

As in the data organized under the previous conceptual metaphors, learners enrolled in ABE programs often express themselves in somewhat general, vague, and passive terms when writing or speaking about education, while the community college students, who have more experience with education, tend to provide more specific details in their metaphors and to imagine themselves as more actively pursuing education. This can be seen in the education is a key metaphor, such as this one, provided by Maria Santana, a Voces team member enrolled in the college’s ESOL program: “La educación es la llave que quita los obstáculos a tus metas” [Education is the key that removes the obstacles to your goals].

Another key metaphor, contributed by Krystal Recor, another Voces team member, both complicates the image further and supplies it with more specific details: “Education is a key, but they keep changing the locks.” During a Voces team workshop for new team members, we used Krystal’s key metaphor to demonstrate the metaphor analysis process. We started by generating questions such as the following:

- What does education open?
- On which side of the door are you standing?
- How can you get the right key?
- Who makes the locks and who is changing the locks?
- Why are they changing them?
- Who benefits from changing the locks?
- What is on the other side of the door?
The key metaphor entails the notions of a key that must fit the door, a key-maker, and a key holder, all of which can be elaborated into dimensions such as doors that are locked and unlocked, keys that fit or do not fit the lock, people who hold, or do not hold the proper keys, and so on. In response to the questions posed above, Krystal and the other team members participating in the workshop generated numerous connotative phrases, some of which I have included below. These phrases are from the transcribed notes I took during the workshop. They provide a great deal of information about the perceptions of education held by Krystal and her teammates, all of whom are community college students, as well as demonstrating how richly rewarding metaphor analysis can be, even with a seemingly simple metaphor.

“Education is a key”:

Education opens doors. It gives people access to information, resources, knowledge, a better life, opportunities for better jobs.

Education is something that only key-holders have access to. Keyholders have the knowledge, preparation, resources, and support necessary to open the door, get through the door, and stay inside.

Keyholders have the necessary language skills to understand the directions for opening the door. They have the confidence to know they belong in school.

It is not necessarily known what is beyond the door that education opens. When you have the key, you may be able to find out what is beyond the door.

Education solves puzzles, as the key can also be interpreted as an answer to a puzzle. Education also gives you the key to resolve problems that hinder you from moving forward, or moving through doors, or moving out of tight places.

The key to education is like a map key. It shows you the way out of dilemmas or difficult places and helps you to interpret the map of life. The map offers countless routes to a better future.
"But they keep changing the locks":

“They” are the gatekeepers, such as those who create educational and social policies and carry them out. The changing locks include the welfare time limit, the welfare work requirement, presence or absence of language barriers (including academic language, institutional language such as the language of financial aid, welfare policy language, and the English language), and personal barriers (such as health problems, lack of resources, lack of confidence, lack of academic preparation).

Adult learners with few resources need allies and guides who know how to find the right keys and how to use those keys to help unlock the doors of education and what it makes possible. They also need more doors (more opportunities to access education and the opportunities it affords) and more keys (a greater variety of educational programs and social services that prepare people for school and job preparation).

In these metaphors, access implies both access to education and access to all of the possibilities that education makes possible. An important entailment is the notion that everyone does not have equal access to education and to the opportunities it makes possible. The data show participants’ concerns about the many barriers keeping them from gaining access to education, such as the language barrier, lack of confidence, lack of academic preparedness, lack of knowledge about how to get into school, lack of support, resources, role models, and allies. Participants are aware that access to education is easier for people who are most academically and socially prepared for it, for people with money and other kinds of resources, for people who speak English fluently, for people who have role models, advocates and other kinds of supports. In other words, the opportunities that education offers are more easily accessed by people who already have access to some of those opportunities. It could also be said that the very people who lack those opportunities and resources, represented by the adult learners in this study, are often the ones who most need what
education offers because they have the fewest resources and opportunities, yet they have the least access to it.

As analysis of the *education is access* metaphor shows, participants know that the ways to gain access to education keep changing. There are political and institutional forces affecting policies about educational access, and thus affecting access itself, although many of the participants do not know, in great detail, how these institutional forces work. For Voces team members, however, learning about how political, social, economic, and educational systems function through their research in the Changes Project played an important role in both increasing their own access to education and maximizing the benefits they receive from formal education. For many, their work as researchers taught them that access to education is a right rather than a privilege, but institutional forces, rather than their own deficiencies, often make it difficult for them to exercise that right.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, four conceptual metaphors related to education have been analyzed: *education is a journey*; *education is personal development*; *education is an investment*; and *education is access*. In the *education is a journey* metaphor, education is seen as an arduous and sometimes dangerous undertaking requiring risk and sacrifice on the part of the learner, but promising great rewards in the end, such as a better life, a different life, and a more prosperous life.

In the *education is personal development* metaphor, participants express what they expect of education, what they believe it will help them to develop in themselves: academic and literacy skills, the ability to continue learning and to better understand
the contexts in which they operate, problem-solving and decision-making skills, the ability to be better role models and providers for their families, self-confidence, and a greater ability to express themselves and to exercise more control over their lives. In this sense the journey itself, with all its risks and sacrifices, can be a transformative experience with multiple and ongoing rewards along the way.

In the *education is an investment* metaphor, participants generated two meanings. The first pertains to the *personal investment* they are making in education, through their own hard work, in order to reap the benefits education can offer them, benefits that are entailed in *the education is personal development* metaphor. The second meaning relates to the investment that society makes *in them*. In this second meaning, participants clearly see themselves as having potential that is worth investing in. They see the investment as paying dividends to the larger society and for many generations to come.

In the *education is access* metaphor, participants regard education itself as an entry point to a variety of possibilities. Like the *journey* metaphor, the *access* metaphor elaborates both the difficulties and the rewards education offers. However, the access metaphor focuses on the early part of the journey and the specific difficulties the adult learners in this study experience with obstacles such as gatekeepers, language barriers, and social policies such as welfare reform.
CHAPTER 6
OF WARS AND WATERMELON SEEDS

Exploring Metaphors About Welfare and Support

In this chapter metaphors about both welfare and support are presented and analyzed. These two topics are linked in that welfare can be viewed as a sub-category of support, as it is a particular form of support upon which participants in this study rely. However, as some of the welfare metaphors reveal, welfare also is perceived as an entity or experience that has little to do with support. Particularly in the welfare is a clock and welfare is a war metaphors, welfare is viewed as a terrain of personal and political struggle rather than as a support. The metaphors about support, on the other hand, broaden the understanding of this topic from a narrowly defined list of supports participants rely upon, such as welfare reform, to the notion of a system or network of interconnected supports that participants give, receive, and create in order to achieve their educational and life goals.

Analysis of Metaphors About Welfare

The metaphors analyzed in this section address the study’s second research question: How has welfare reform affected the educational experiences of low-income female adult learners? Participants in this study generated about half as many metaphors about welfare reform as about education. Of all the metaphors examined in this study, those about welfare, particularly those relating to welfare reform policies, were by far the most negative and passive. Although a few participants expressed their experiences as welfare recipients in positive terms, the majority were negative, and the following interrelated themes appeared repeatedly in the data: time and limits
on time, stress, struggle, lack of respect, stereotyping, hostility, poverty, individual potential and investing in that potential, and support. In this section, the data have been organized into three metaphorical concepts: welfare reform is a clock, being on welfare is a war, and welfare is an investment. I analyzed 29 statements for the clock metaphor, 30 statements for the investment metaphor, and 33 statements for the war metaphor. These data come from interviews, focus groups, and writing exercises. In addition to these data sources, two “metaphor templates,” a Welfare System Tree (figure 1), generated in a Voces analysis meeting, and a Support Wall (figure 2), from a focus group, are examined. A fourth concept about welfare, welfare is a life support, will be analyzed in the second topic section, Metaphors About Support.

Welfare Reform is a Clock

Welfare recipients participating in this study tend to be very preoccupied with time, and they often express this preoccupation with the image of a ticking clock. The welfare policy that sets a time limit on benefits causes a tremendous amount of stress for the recipients in this study, particularly for those whose welfare benefits will end before their educational goals are met. Maria Santana wrote, “Empieza el reloj a correr y no voy a terminar mis estudios” [The clock has started to run, and I am not going to finish my studies], and Eva, another student enrolled in the college ESOL program said, in an interview:

Bueno, a ver el que me esta afectando ahora actualmente es que me estan dando un tiempo de reloj de dos años de dinero. Entonces me estan dando un cambio, me estan diciendo que a los 24 meses me voy a tener que salir. Yo quiero terminar mis estudios. Si me los paran en 24 meses - - ¿como yo lo voy hacer?
[Well, what's affecting me most now is the time clock of two years of benefits. It's going to change things for me, they're telling me that in 24 months I'll be cut off. I want to finish my studies, but if they stop in 24 months - - how will I do it?]

"The program [welfare benefits] is not going to be long. I've got to go to school, prepare myself as a professional, how to do something, because I have family to take care of," writes Melissa, a teen parent in a GED program who wants to go to college. "I just think they should let us go as far as we can go in school," she concludes. Marisol, a student in the college's ESOL program, laments having to drop out before she graduates because her time-limited welfare benefits are due to end soon: "I have just one month left [in the ESOL program]. I came here [to college] and have to end. I need a time to stay in college. To finish, and don't feel the pressure."

A group of teen parents who participated in one of the Mentor Program's writing workshops wrote a poem together in which they compare the welfare time limit to a battery, rather than a clock, though the image is conceptually compatible to the idea of a ticking clock. This is one of the poem's stanzas:

The welfare time limit is a battery.
The battery is going strong now, but it's going to slow down.
It's just for a little while.
Life is like a battery, too, it just keeps going and going.
And then when your time's up, you just die.
I hope there's enough time for me.
I hope it's a rechargeable battery.
Is there any way I can buy a new battery?

When asked how they would change the welfare system to better respond to recipients' needs, most of the participants in this same writing group talked about needing more time to complete their education and thought that the welfare time limit should be extended, especially for students. "I think that if they see that a person is
progressing that they should be allotted that extra time they need to complete their education,” wrote Denise, an eighteen-year-old mother of two. “Welfare is trying to make me run through the GED, as if it were easy. It’s not.” Another member of the writing group, Gladys, had a more positive perception of the welfare time limit: “Welfare reform is motivating me to move faster,” she said, “I think it’s a good thing."

The image of the ticking clock, of time-limited welfare benefits, entails the perception of recipients who are trying to beat the clock and finish their schooling. Eva, the mother of three school-aged children, moved to Massachusetts from Puerto Rico in her late twenties. She enrolled in the community college where she planned to learn English in the ESOL program, make the transition to mainstream, credit-earning college classes in English, and eventually earn an associates’ degree. For Eva, the words “welfare reform” set these stressful thoughts in motion:


[I feel nervous. I ask myself, “What will happen? What will you live on? What will you do? How will it affect me? Will I have to quit school? Will I lose day care? Will I lose food stamps? Will I have no money? What will I do? What will happen? And the rent? Then how will we eat? And clothes? It affects me in every way.”]

For Vicky, a college-bound GED student who was eight months pregnant when she participated in the Mentor Program’s summer mini-course, the image of racing the clock looms over her when she thinks about completing her education: “Once those years are up, I have to make sure I’m on my feet. I’m hoping by the skin
of my teeth I get out [get my college degree] and have a job [by the time my welfare benefits end]”. And Joanna, a community college student, speaking for herself and others like her, places the time a person spends as a welfare recipient into the larger perspective of an entire life: “It’s not that we want to live on welfare. We need it for a moment to progress, to keep going for just a moment.”

One of the most striking entailments of the clock image is the participants’ sense of powerlessness over the duration of their welfare benefits. The battery metaphor is the only example of participants expressing a sense of power over the time clock: the writers ask if they can “get a new battery” or “recharge” the one they have. However, several of the statements analyzed above do entail the notion that participants have a degree of power over their own actions (such as rushing, finishing, progressing, being motivated) within the limits of the ticking clock. The dimensions of the clock metaphor that participants are most concerned with include sufficient/insufficient time and time remaining/no time left. A list of entailments that the clock metaphor generated can be summed up in this way:

- Welfare is time.
- Time is limited.
- What is on the other side of time is unknown and greatly feared.
- Time is needed to complete goals, become self-sufficient, and support families
- The welfare clock represents time and support needed to sustain life and stay in school.

**Being on Welfare is a War**

Many of the participants in this study conceive of being on welfare as a war. In this metaphorical concept, the war is waged between the “system” and the recipients. The entailments of the war, with its “them and us” dichotomy, have a
David and Goliath character: the welfare system is perceived as adversarial, monolithic, authoritative, and faceless, while the recipients are usually perceived as poor, female, debilitated and victimized by war, though sometimes valiant in the face of a mighty adversary. Lack of trust in the enemy characterizes both sides. To a great extent, participants express a sense of hopelessness, isolation, powerlessness, victimization and the weariness that comes from a long engagement in war as they talk about their experiences as welfare recipients. Participants also display a strong sense of right and wrong: though the system seems to be winning most of the time, the welfare recipients involved in this study generally perceive themselves as being on the side of the righteous, that is, they see themselves and their families as having a right to the assistance of welfare benefits and they see the system as trying to withhold that right from them.

Some participants think that the system’s purpose in waging a war is to keep low-income women from obtaining the education that will pull them out of poverty, as Alicia Robert articulates, “The whole thing is put on the backs of poor people and women in general. They’re trying to keep us uneducated and poor. They know there’s not enough jobs out there for everybody to get.”

Another entailment participants often articulate in the war metaphor is one of the welfare system’s most powerful weapons, its propaganda machine, which they understand as being fueled by the press and used to weaken welfare recipients’ unity by employing “divide and conquer” tactics. According to Alicia, who is biracial (African American and Irish):
They’re really using us as scapegoats and they’re trying to make us believe that everybody else [is abusing welfare system], that we’re the cause of the debt, that it’s all minorities on welfare. But really the average welfare recipient is White and stays on two years, that’s the truth. The majority of people on welfare are White Caucasian and the minorities are the ones being branded.

Krystal Recor, a white woman in her twenties, agrees with her *Voces* team mate, Alicia: “They really need to get off this minority thing and they need to look at us as people and help us out.” Alicia and Krystal reflect their awareness that, welfare myths to the contrary, a much higher percentage of the White population receive welfare assistance than any other group, even though the poverty rates for Blacks and Latinos are much higher than for Whites. In 1998, 45 percent of the heads of households receiving welfare benefits in Massachusetts were White, 29 percent were Latino, and 18 percent were African American (Kates 1998). These figures are consistent with national statistics, which show that the typical family receiving welfare benefits is headed by a white woman in her thirties with one or two children. It is also important to note that, nationally, about two thirds of welfare recipients are children (Kates 1998), a fact that is often ignored in the media and legislative rhetoric on welfare reform.

Participants in this study are often keenly aware of the damaging stereotypes of welfare recipients, who are so often portrayed as dependent, irresponsible, intellectually and morally deficient, and untrustworthy. As demonstrated in the metaphors analyzed in the previous chapter that focused on education metaphors, many of the welfare recipients involved in this study think of themselves and other welfare recipients like them in very different terms - - as hardworking, even heroic
shapers of their own and their families’ destinies who are struggling against tremendous odds to pull themselves out of poverty.

Much of the data related to welfare reform in this study is permeated by the perception of being treated as adversaries by the welfare system, rather than as individuals striving to become self-sufficient by using the system’s resources: “They [welfare caseworkers] treat you like you’re the scum off they street – ‘why can’t you get a job? Why you gotta be here?’” said Angela, a teen parent who took part in a focus group. “I feel I’m looked at like I’m below them,” she continued, “and that I can’t make a change, when indeed I can.” Tracy, another teenager enrolled in a GED program and participating in the same focus group, put it this way: “They treat you fucked up . . . like you’re less than them.” Yet, despite the experience of being treated as second class citizens by the system, many recipients in this study maintain a strong belief in their right to be treated with fairness and respect, as Melissa, a teen parent, articulates in an essay: “I don’t think I should be put down as a single parent and a welfare recipient. I know I am going to make it, if not for me, then for my son.”

Another form of assault on welfare recipients’ dignity that participants discuss is the system’s flagrant invasion of their privacy. Yolanda, a teen parent, said in an interview: “Your privacy - they need to know everything - who do you live with, who is in your house? They pry into your privacy.” Disregard for recipients’ privacy is a common occurrence, and the system has been known to employ intimidation tactics along with invasion of privacy. One of the Voces team members, Rhonda Soto, was summoned to the welfare office by her caseworker’s supervisor shortly after she had been on a local radio show with a group of welfare rights advocates. On the
show, Rhonda talked about her own struggles as a welfare recipient, her work as a researcher for the Changes Project, and her role as an advocate for other recipients. She spoke at length about the how the time-limit policy interferes with recipients’ ability to continue their education, and to prepare for work and self-sufficiency. At the time she was summoned to the office, Rhonda was in the midst of an appeal to extend her time limit so she could continue her schooling. The welfare supervisor told her on the phone, “We know who you are, Rhonda. We know what you’re up to. We heard you on the radio.” Frightened, Rhonda called me and I agreed to accompany her to the appointment. My presence at the interview seemed to cause a major shift in the adversarial attitude Rhonda’s caseworker had previously displayed: the caseworker apologized for her supervisor’s threats and was extremely solicitous, outlining a variety of options Rhonda could pursue in aid of her appeal, options she had kept to herself in previous interviews. The caseworker’s supervisor never emerged from his office. Later that month, Rhonda lost her appeal for an extension.

Despite the personal losses Rhonda suffered in her battle with the welfare system, losses that may well have resulted from her visibility as a kind of front line soldier, she continued to fight for other recipients, to be their spokesperson and to inspire them to speak for themselves:

A lot of welfare recipients that are going to be affected by welfare reform have no clue what it’s about. They’re sitting back and taking what’s dealt to them. They won’t know until it hits them. Therefore you don’t hear their voices. You don’t know their stories. I’m just one voice and these welfare recipients have so much to deal with, so you don’t hear their voices, but me, working with them, I hear their voices. I’m just one voice, but now I am trying to be the voices of many.
The entailments of the *welfare is war* metaphor can be summed up in this way:

- Being on welfare is war.
- Welfare involves winners and losers, weak and strong, right and wrong.
- Opposing sides have conflicting values and senses of right and wrong.
- In war, the ownership and preservation of important things are at stake, usually related to resources, power, rights, privileges, and ideologies.
- War is violent.
- War involves struggle, sacrifice, risk, and danger (as seen in the *education is a journey* and *education is an investment* metaphors).
- War hurts people, including innocent bystanders.
- War involves subterfuge, propaganda, the suspension of civil law and civilized behavior, and disregard for the preservation of both human rights and human life.
- War dehumanizes people.

**Welfare is an Investment**

For many of the study’s participants, welfare reform, like education, is seen as an investment. The data organized under this concept present a more positive and empowered attitude toward this topic. As heads of families and adult learners at various educational levels, many of the welfare recipients involved in this study see themselves as a very sound investment for the economic and personal development their educational attainment will eventually yield for themselves, their families, and society as a whole. As in the *education is an investment* metaphor, they often conceive of their own hard work as parents and students as their contribution to the investment, but in partnership with a system that sometimes operates out of bad faith, a system that withholds the resources necessary to make the investment pay off.

*Voces* team member Rhonda Soto is well aware of the economic realities facing women without college degrees, and of the short-sightedness of welfare reform policies that refuse to invest in higher education for recipients: “They should want people to better themselves. They need to allow you to go to a four-year college.
Otherwise you’re going to be in that low-income bracket for the rest of your life.”

Rhonda was thrilled to hear that she was accepted as a transfer student into two prestigious four-year women’s colleges. The same week, she was notified that her welfare benefits would end in two months. The irony of a system that purportedly exists to support people in their efforts to become self-sufficient was not lost on Rhonda: “The name [of the public assistance program known as welfare] has changed to ‘Transitional Assistance.’ What does that mean?” asks Rhonda, “transition to what?” Another community college student, Jessie, told a Voces team member in an interview: “I would only need one more semester to get an associates’ [but my time limit is up]. I’m taking time out of my life to better myself and better my life with my kids and stuff and they’re telling me we can’t give you some time.”

The link between economic self-sufficiency and educational attainment is clearly understood by most of this study’s participants. “If you’re getting cut off welfare, you’re getting cut off financially, you’re getting cut off your medical benefits, and you have children, how are you to live?” asks Gladys, a teen parent who wants to enter college after getting her GED: “You need a good job that’s going to give you benefits and if you don’t have a good education, then you can’t get a good job.”

Many of the teen parents who participated in the Mentor Program’s writing workshops, when asked to articulate the images that came to mind when they heard the words “welfare reform,” wrote about poor people struggling to “better themselves” to “make a better life” or to “get ahead.” “I believe that if the government sees people struggling to better themselves, they should help them” Denise wrote, “Welfare Reform should encourage people, not intimidate them.”
Joanna imagined an extremely distressed person whose potential for growth was being hindered: “I see a person grabbing their hair, screaming. I see a person crying. I see a person wanting and having the potential to do so much and being deprived from that opportunity due to a lot of the changes in welfare. I see sadness.”

An important addition to the welfare is an investment metaphor comes from a “template metaphor” (figure 1), a drawing of a tree representing the welfare system that was completed by Voces team members during an analysis meeting. The welfare tree is an extended metaphor that reveals team members’ knowledge about the welfare system, both from first hand experience and from their work as researchers.

As shown in figure 1, the tree’s roots represent original social welfare policies and the belief that the government is responsible for taking care of people who need help. The trunk represents all the people directly involved in the welfare system, including those who receive public assistance as well as those who work in the system and thus rely on it for their own livelihoods. The bark represents the welfare laws and policies that either protect people (the trunk) or leave them unprotected when it is removed or eroded. The tree’s limbs represent the welfare policies that vary from state to state. The branches represent “ancillary” support services connected to the welfare system and often funded through the same legislative process, such as education and job training programs, food stamps, health care, child care and transportation subsidies. Some of the branches in the welfare tree are broken, representing the fact that important support programs are either missing or inadequate. The leaves of the tree represent recipients who receive public assistance but leave the system before they are able to support themselves and their families. The fruit is the most generative image,
Figure 1:
WELFARE SYSTEM TREE

LIMBS: welfare policies in different states

LEAVES: families who lose their benefits before becoming self-sufficient

BRANCHES: programs and services (health, food stamps, training) linked to welfare

TRUNK: people directly involved with system: recipients, their families, and those who work in the system

BARK: laws & policies related to welfare system that protect families

FRUIT: families supported and nurtured by system who become productive, self-supporting, and able to support others

ROOTS: original welfare policies designed to protect poor families, based on the notion that government is responsible for taking care of people who need help
representing families who are nurtured by the system and able to develop productive, self-sufficient lives as a result of the support they receive. In this extended metaphor, welfare recipients move from the trunk, up through the limbs and branches, leaving the system at some point along the way.

Another powerful and comprehensive image of investment, and investing in human potential, came from Betty Falcón, a Voces team member who, when asked to come up with a metaphor for what it feels like to be on welfare, said this: "I feel like the seed in a watermelon." Through this metaphor, Betty expressed her sense of isolation as a Black, Puerto Rican, Spanish speaking woman and a welfare recipient. At the time she created this metaphor, Betty’s welfare benefits were about to end. After four years at the community college, two of which she spent learning English in the ESOL program, Betty was about to graduate, with honors, with an associates’ degree. Although she had been accepted to a four-year college, Betty knew she would have to interrupt her education and find a job, and she was under considerable stress every day to find work that would support her and her two daughters. Feeling trapped inside the “watermelon” and unable to break through the “rind” that kept her from fulfilling her potential, Betty said that she knew there were other “seeds in the watermelon” who were experiencing difficulties similar to her own, but she felt separated from them, isolated by the immediacy and seriousness of her own difficulties.

Soon after discussing her “watermelon seed” metaphor in a Voces team meeting, a Legal Services attorney helped Betty initiate an appeal with the welfare office to extend her benefits. She won the appeal and her time limit was extended.
This meant that Betty could transfer to the four-year college and work toward a bachelor’s degree. On the day Betty was notified of the extension, she arrived at the Mentor Program office wreathed in smiles, saying, “Someone broke through the watermelon and let me out!” Later, Betty extended her watermelon seed metaphor even further in a poem, “The Watermelon”:

I feel like the seed in a watermelon,
Simply being a seed inside of the watermelon.
The system makes me feel so useless,
though I know I can accomplish so much.

Oh! Oh! Finally somebody decided to open the watermelon and let me out.

But what is going to happen to the rest of the seeds left behind and forgotten inside of the watermelon?

What is going to happen to those seeds that were together with me?

What is going to happen to those that were not given likewise the opportunity to germinate?

As articulated in “The Watermelon,” the most important dimension of the investment metaphor ranges from productive to unproductive. The entailments of the welfare is an investment metaphor, which has much in common with the education is an investment metaphor, include the following:

- The welfare system invests in an individual’s education and the development of his or her potential.
- The individual recipient invests hard work and risk in developing his or her potential.
- The welfare system invests time, money, resources, and other forms of support.
• The investment allows individuals to grow, to generate new growth, and to become more productive members of society.
• Welfare reform policies, especially the time limit on benefits, represent an inadequate investment on the part of the welfare system

Summary of Welfare Metaphors

In the discussion above of adult learners’ experiences with the welfare system, data were organized into three metaphorical concepts: welfare is a clock, a war, and an investment. In the clock metaphor, participants dwell mainly on the notion of time (or lack of it) as it relates to their education. For the most part these two topics, time and education, are in conflict, as many adult learners express frustration about their inability to complete their education within the time they are allotted under welfare reform policies. In the war metaphor, participants are concerned with the daily stress of doing battle with a system they see as adversarial, as opposing their ability to move forward and disregarding their right to be treated with the respect they deserve. The investment metaphor shows participants’ understandings of their own potential and the system’s shortsightedness in denying them the support and nurturing of that potential.

Analysis of Metaphors About Support

The metaphors examined in this section address the study’s third research question: Within the context of welfare reform, what are low-income female adult learners’ perceptions about the supports that they both give and receive in order to achieve their education and life goals? The topic of support is organized into three conceptual metaphors: welfare is a life support, support is a means to an end, and support is a net. All of these fall into the category of “structural” metaphors (Lakoff
I collected and analyzed 75 statements or phrases on the topic of support. Twenty-two of these fit under the life support metaphor, 18 under the means to an end metaphor, and 35 fit under the net metaphor. In addition to these data, which came from interviews and writing exercises, I examined data from a survey given to participants and from two focus groups. Both the survey and focus groups were designed to elicit information about participants' understandings of the topic of support, and the focus groups filled out “metaphor templates” about support (figure 2).

The first metaphor, welfare is a life support, clearly links two topics analyzed in this chapter, support and welfare reform. Support is a means to an end suggests the idea that participants conceive of support as a vehicle to help them move from one place to another. Support is a net is the most complex metaphor in this topic, as it entails the ideas of both giving and receiving support and reveals a great deal about participants’ lives as they create and make use of unique networks of support and are connected to other individuals and institutions through these networks.

Support is an important topic in this study for two reasons. First, it provides a rich picture of the complicated networks of support in participants’ lives that enable them to function in a variety of roles. Second, it addresses one of the most damaging myths about welfare recipients, that they are “welfare dependent” and incapable of making it on their own without being forced out of the system. The data organized under support, especially in the support is a net concept, show a much more complex picture of how participants view support - - as a system or network that they both
depend upon and contribute to, a system in which welfare benefits are only one of many supports.

Many of the participants in this study talk about specific supports that enable them to gain access to education or to stay in school. These supports can be divided into three types: institutional, personal, and internal. Institutional supports include concrete supports that come from institutions. In a survey given to welfare recipients enrolled in ABE programs and the community college, respondents were asked to indicate on a checklist the institutional supports they use that help them to stay in school. Between 70 and 100 percent checked the following supports: teachers, welfare cash benefits, food stamps, health care, child care and transportation subsidies, academic counseling, federal financial aid (for college students only), information about schools and careers, and language translation. The greatest number of respondents indicated that their teachers help them to stay in school (82 percent of the ABE learners and 100 percent of the college students), followed by welfare benefits and subsidized childcare. In addition, 33 percent indicated that they rely on support from personal counseling to stay in school, 18 percent rely on religious organizations, and 17 percent rely on the support of ESOL classes. More than half of the respondents indicated that they would be able to continue their education only if they had an extended time to receive welfare benefits, housing subsidies, more information about educational options, and personal counseling.

Personal supports that participants use include family, friends, and community members as well as the concrete and emotional supports these people provide. The
same survey shows that a majority of respondents rely on support from their families and their friends to help them stay in school.

Internal supports include participants’ values, beliefs, and character traits, such as placing a high value on education, contributing to their communities, being good parents, maintaining cultural values and primary languages, believing in their own and their children’s potential, believing in their right to education and a “better life,” spiritual and religious faith, and the courage, hope, and determination to keep going despite many hardships. A majority of survey respondents said that reliance on their own sense of hope for the future, inner strength, and spiritual faith helps them to stay in school.

Welfare is a Life Support

In addition to the concepts of welfare reform as a clock, an investment, and a war, the adult learners in this study also conceive of welfare as a life support. The life support metaphor entails the notion of recipients being in desperate circumstances, clinging to life, at the mercy of the welfare system and powerless to change it.

As much of the data analyzed in the Welfare topic section show, welfare benefits are perceived by participants as being essential supports that maintain life and keep families together. The dark side of welfare as an essential life support is seen in the participants’ constant preoccupation with the imminent threat of being “cut off” of welfare, an expression that summons up the image of a life support system being threatened: “You don’t feel glad that they’re going to cut you and you’re going to be on your own. You’re afraid because you don’t know what you’re going to do,” said Alicia Robert, a Voces team member who was pregnant with her second child at the
time. “Once I’m cut, that’s it, and I don’t know what’s going to happen. It would be very hard, very hard, to be able to make it and still attend school.” And as Rhonda Soto said, in an interview, “I’m getting cut off this coming December. They’re cutting me off before I even receive my Associates.” For some, however, the prospect of leaving the welfare system and its attendant stresses is positive. A community college student about to graduate put it this way: “Pretty soon I will have to get off welfare. To get off welfare would be nice, a nice feeling.”

Over and over, recipients in this study made it clear that they regard welfare as a transitional support, if an essential one, for those who need it when other supports are not available to them: “Some people, they just need the help,” wrote Maria Santana, a Voces team member and an ESOL student at the community college, “like their husband just left home and just left her with the children. And she wasn’t working and she might need the assistance from welfare in that moment while she’s getting well.” Maria insists that she does not think of welfare as a crutch, but rather as a support to help people help themselves, and she wants her three young daughters to regard it in the same way: “I think that I have to be an example for my daughters. I want them to think that the welfare is the organization that help people when they need it.”

The Voces team facilitated two focus groups, one for community college students and the other for ABE learners. These groups were designed to gather information about adult learners’ perceptions about support. Each focus group was given a metaphor “template” - - a large drawing of a brick wall representing the idea of support - - and asked to list the supports they receive in the square “brick” spaces
and the supports they give in the “mortar” spaces between the bricks (figure 2). The walls had three tiers: the bottom represented survival supports, those that keep people alive. The middle tier represented supports that keep people in school and the top tier represented supports that make peoples’ lives more comfortable. As seen in figure 2, participants listed the following supports in the first tier, those that are essential to maintaining life: welfare benefits or income from jobs, decent housing, transportation, food stamps, health care and good health, accurate information about welfare and other social services, enough time to complete educational goals, inner strength, emotional support from families and others, self-confidence, and hope for the future.

The entailments suggested by the welfare is a life support metaphor include:

- Welfare supports and sustains life.
- Welfare supports and sustains peoples’ talents and potential.
- Supporting and sustaining people’s lives makes it possible for individuals and families to stay alive, to grow and be productive.
- Sustaining life is generative in that the sustenance an individual receives is passed on to others.
- As a life support, welfare is a temporary, but critical measure. People often rely on welfare benefits in times of crisis or desperate circumstances.
- Losing welfare benefits can jeopardize peoples’ lives.
- People who are in great need or in desperate circumstances are relatively powerless over their circumstances and over their access to needed supports.

The life support metaphor is bounded by the dimensions connected/cut off, supported/unsupported, generative/destructive, and life/death. The life/death dimension is not hyperbole: rather it represents the very real threat of families being cut off from the supports that keep them clothed, fed, healthy, and housed. Angela, a teen parent, poignantly articulates this threat and her fear at the prospect of losing her welfare benefits when she asks, on behalf of herself and her classmates: “What’s going to happen to us?”
Figure 2: The Support Wall

**SUPPORTS WE USE TO MAKE LIFE MORE COMFORTABLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A car</th>
<th>time to spend w/friends</th>
<th>time for yourself</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>housing subsidy</td>
<td>time to spend w/family</td>
<td>enough rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extra money</td>
<td>school counseling</td>
<td>extracurricular activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a job that you enjoy</td>
<td>respect from others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHAT WE CONTRIBUTE:**
- **A car:** knowledge about cars, keep car in shape, car seat for kids
- **Housing Subsidy:** do paperwork, explore options, be a good tenant, take care of property
- **Enough rest and free time for friends & self:** take care of yourself, take time for yourself, be a good friend, develop socially
- **Extracurricular activities:** find things that are fun to do but healthy, develop your talents.
- **Respect from others:** Act in ways that people will respect you, respect others

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**SUPPORTS WE USE TO STAY IN SCHOOL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>daycare</th>
<th>health care</th>
<th>enough time to complete goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>transportation</td>
<td>ESOL classes</td>
<td>career counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food stamps</td>
<td>support from teachers, family, and friends</td>
<td>inner strength/will power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>job/welfare</td>
<td>information about welfare</td>
<td>spiritual faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legal services</td>
<td>information about school</td>
<td>self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial aid from school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHAT WE CONTRIBUTE:**
- **Daycare:** explore options and chose good daycare, take children to daycare, talk to providers, have backup childcare, provide childcare for others
- **Financial aid from school:** fill out paper work, do well in classes, follow rules so financial aid isn’t cut
- **ESOL classes:** learn English, study hard
- **Support from teachers:** Be a good student, Ask for help.
- **Information about school:** Ask friends, counselors, teachers. Visit schools. Use the phone or internet
- **Career counseling:** Use available resources. Explore different careers. Do internships.
- **Inner strength/will power:** Keep working hard toward your goals.
- **Self-confidence:** keep working hard, take chances, speak your mind, accomplish goals

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**SUPPORTS WE USE TO STAY ALIVE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>transportation</th>
<th>good health</th>
<th>inner strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>food stamps</td>
<td>legal services</td>
<td>hope for future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>welfare or job</td>
<td>support from family</td>
<td>spiritual faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health care</td>
<td>emotional support from others</td>
<td>self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information about welfare</td>
<td>time to complete goals</td>
<td>“We live for our kids”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHAT WE CONTRIBUTE:**
- **Transportation:** take buses & be on time, save money for a car
- **Food stamps:** go to appointments, do paperwork, responsible food shopping, cook healthy meals
- **Job:** be on time, back up daycare, training, knowledge, experience
- **Welfare Check:** follow rules, paperwork, go to school, keep appointments, do well in college, spend money wisely, pay bills
- **Health Care:** go to appointments, maintain health, understand medical terminology, read notices
- **Time to complete goals:** advance yourself, don’t waste time, set realistic goals, study at home
- **Support from family:** give love & advice, cooking, laundry, cleaning, childcare, raise kids
Support is a Means to an End

In addition to data on the topic of support that directly relates to welfare, other data show that participants also conceive of support in much broader ways, as demonstrated in the metaphor *support is the means to an end*. Sandra, an ESOL learner from a community ABE program, views support as a stairway. “El apoyo es como la escalera que se le brinda al necesitado para alcanzar sus metas.” [Support is like a stairway that gives you what you need to reach your goals]. Gladys, a GED student and teen parent, put it this way: “I’ve gotten support from staff [at my program] to lead me in the right directions, to help me continue my education.” Maria Santana talks about how the support she gets from teachers and peers keeps her in college: “I think if I didn’t have a very good support group I wouldn’t be in school,” she said. In a quote examined earlier in the education section, Maria also talks about the importance of the support she has received from ESOL counselor since she began at the college: “it’s like she push me up, you know: she say, ‘you can do it.’ For Maria, being “pushed up” acts like a springboard to keep her going.

When participants think about support in terms of welfare benefits, support as a *means to an end* connects to the idea of welfare as a transitional support, one that can help people to move from one place, situation, or condition to another. “We need support. We need to hear that welfare is going to stand by us so we can move on with our lives,” wrote Melissa, a teen parent in a GED program. Melissa believes, like many others involved in this study, that an ideal welfare system would offer the kinds of support that help people to support themselves, though in reality it is often administered in ways that debilitate and disempower people. “Welfare should help
people get on their feet,” Melissa concludes. The most important examples in the data of the kinds of supports that help people to become self-supporting include access to educational and job-training programs that suit the diverse needs, talents, and interests of participants and the availability of supports that allow people to take advantage of these programs. Participants in the focus groups discussed above listed the kinds of supports that they need in order to complete their educational goals (refer to figure 2). In addition to the essential life supports listed in the welfare is a life support section (income, transportation, health care, family support, etc.), the list included reliable child care, support from teachers and other students, ESOL classes, academic and career counseling, information about school, will power to keep going, inner strength, spiritual faith, good health, time for yourself, and adequate rest.

This list shows participants’ understanding of the broad range of supports from institutional, personal and internal sources that they need in order to move from one situation or condition to another. It is important to note here that all individuals need a broad range of supports from a variety of sources in order to survive, to move forward, and to reach their goals. Although a few of the specific supports that participants in this study rely on (such as child care, information about welfare, or ESOL classes) are not appropriate for all individuals, most people rely on the kinds of supports listed above, whether they are aware of their reliance or not.

As a means to an end, support is bounded by very similar dimensions to the education is a journey metaphor. These include moving/standing still, support/lack of support, and empowered/disempowered. The entailments of this metaphor include the following:
• Support can be a springboard or vehicle that helps people to move from one place to another, to improve their lives, reach their goals, and become self-supporting.
• Inappropriate or inadequate support can be disempowering and can keep people from becoming productive and self-sufficient.

Support is a Net

Several of the participants in this study conceive of support as a net or network. Gladys, a teen parent, perceives support as a “hammock” that keeps her from falling to the ground. To Vicky, a classmate of Gladys, support is a “safety net” and she is a “tightrope walker” through her own life. As discussed in the profile of Voces team member Rhonda Soto, she thinks of support as a spider web that she creates herself, made of the resources available to her and of her own knowledge and hard work.

The idea of support becomes much more complicated when it is linked to the image of a net or network. The net metaphor is particularly powerful because it entails the notions of both giving and receiving support as well as illustrating how people rely on multiple strands of support, strands that interact in a variety of ways, changing as a person’s needs change, and maintaining or building upon each other. For example, a hypothetical individual’s network of support relating to education might include essential supports such as GED classes in Spanish, child care, information about college, and welfare benefits as well as the supports she provides others through raising her children, helping her friends, and so on. As she transitions from ABE classes to college, becomes proficient in English, and as her children get older and her interests change, both her needs for particular supports and her abilities to give specific kinds of support evolve.
The presence or absence of essential and appropriate networks of support in an adult learner's life at any given moment strongly affects her ability to reach her goals. If a learner’s support strands are strong, reliable, appropriate to her needs, and responsive as her needs and the times change, it is more likely that that she will be able to complete an education, prepare for work, support her family, and so on. By the same token, if a person has inadequate supports to begin with, or if important supports are removed from her net, such as welfare benefits, a housing subsidy, or a supportive teacher, even though that person may be extremely resourceful, talented, and hard-working, her support net becomes fragile, and her entire support structure is jeopardized. This in turn affects her ability to become independent and self-sufficient. There are direct correlations between the supports a person has and the level of independence she is able to achieve and between the supports a person has and her ability to support others.

As discussed above, the net includes those supports participants give to others, to their families, friends, communities, and to themselves, as well as the personal and institutional supports they receive. Examples from the focus groups of essential supports participants give to others and provide for themselves include cooking healthy meals, teaching their children about right and wrong, spending money responsibly, gaining knowledge, setting realistic goals, choosing their friends wisely, caring for relatives, and believing in themselves. Supports participants said they give to themselves and others from the middle tier, those that help people stay in school, include studying, time management, contributing knowledge to the classroom, and helping their children or their peers with homework.
Support given to families is an important topic in much of the data. Yolanda, a teen parent, spoke in an interview about being the family translator, a role that is common for participants whose family members do not speak English. “My grandmother’s ill and I’m the only one who speaks good English. So last time when she was in the hospital, I had to be there every day. . . . What am I going to say, ‘too bad, I got to go to school?’” Angela, another teen parent and Yolanda’s classmate, also discussed the various ways her family relies on her to support them: “My family, all my siblings, my mother: I support them. I talk to them, any problem that they have they call me and say, ‘Can you help me?’ If they have to go to an appointment and they don’t have anybody to help them. I don’t speak good English, but I try, you know.”

As seen in the chapter on education metaphors, participants in this study make the connection between completing their education and increasing their ability to “give support.” Many say they need support to achieve their own educational goals in order to better support their families, to be good role models, to give something back to the community, or to prepare for the kind of jobs in which they can help others. In this sense, support can be seen as a kind of “experiential gestalt” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), in which a multidimensional set of experiences is conceptually structured as a single, or whole experience. In this case, the actions of giving and getting support are inextricably linked, and the constituent parts (to support and to be supported) become a synthesized whole that is more than the sum of its parts, a whole that seems, conceptually, to be basic.
Another example of giving and getting support as an experiential gestalt comes from a group of teen parents at a GED program who were participating in a writing workshop. When asked to brainstorm phrases they associate with the word “poverty,” participants came up with these phrases: “humility,” “helping each other,” and “taking care of your neighbors.” This is a powerful example of how these young mothers view a community’s (and an individual’s) responsibility to care for its most vulnerable members.

Another important aspect of the support is a net metaphor is that it often entails the idea of individual control or volition. When asked to talk about how the notion of support relates to her as a student and a parent, Rhonda Soto said that “being out in the community and making my own network” has been a critical factor in her ability to stay in school and “keep her life together.” And Betty Falcón articulates the interconnected net of support this way: “El formar parte de una comunidad es deber y obligación de todos y para todos. Necesitamos apoyarnos unos a los otros.” [Becoming part of or forming a community means being responsible to all and for all. We need to support one another]. In these quotes, both Rhonda and Betty acknowledge that support networks are, at least in part, created by individuals. This idea is very different from the concept of support seen in the welfare is a life support section, in which welfare is seen as an essential support, but one that the individual recipient has little control over. The net metaphor, however, entails the will of individuals “making their own networks” to suit their individual needs.

The notion of interdependence is closely related to the topic of support. As seen elsewhere in this chapter, when participants talk about wanting to become
independent (particularly from the welfare system), they often link this with their
ability to support others, as when they talk about wanting to get an education so they
can give something back to the community or be role models for their children.

Although participants did not specifically use the term “interdependent” in any of the
data, it is clear that this notion is prevalent in their lives because the ideas of giving
and getting support are so often linked. In a survey that the Mentor Program gave to
welfare recipients who are community college students or enrolled in GED programs,
82 percent of the respondents said they are in school because they want to be more
independent, while 71 percent said they are in school in order to be role models for
their children, and 61 percent are in school to be able to help their children with
schoolwork.

It is important to note once again that all human beings, no matter what their
economic status, both rely on and contribute to complex networks of support. All
individuals need many supports in order to survive and they shape unique support
networks that change and evolve according to their own changing needs and to the
changing contexts in which they live.

For the adult learners participating in this study, however, the makeup of their
support networks differ in some significant ways from those of their middle-class
counterparts. First, because the adult learners in this study have very limited
resources, they have limited or inadequate support networks from the outset and, as a
result, they are often one strand away from a crisis situation. A family illness or the
loss of a child-care voucher, for example, can make such demands on an individual’s
support resources that her entire net of support becomes jeopardized. Second,
because of gender, economic status, language, racial, cultural, and educational backgrounds, the educational experiences of this study's participants, and their support networks, are shaped by various forms of discrimination, lack of academic preparation, and lack of access to the resources and supports many middle-class students take for granted.

Based on the data analyzed above, the support is a net metaphor is bounded by these dimensions: giving/receiving support, adequate/inadequate support network, dependence/interdependence/independence, and control/lack of control over one's support network. The entailments of the net metaphor include the following:

- Support is a net made of institutional, personal, and inner supports and resources.
- Each individual’s support net consists of a unique variety of strands.
- Individuals create their own nets from supports they need and that are available and with supports they are willing and able to give to themselves and others.
- Individual’s nets change, evolve, and grow as their needs, interests, and abilities change, and as the contexts in which they live change.
- Individuals have varying degrees of control over their their nets of support.
- Because the strands of an individual’s support network are interconnected, changes in one strand (such as being added, removed, overtaxed, or strengthened) will affect the other strands in the net.
- Individual’s nets interact with and are connected to other support nets (those of other individuals and of institutions).
- Because each individual’s support net is connected to others’ support nets (including individual and institutional nets), changes in one net affect the other nets to which they are connected.

Summary

In this chapter, participants’ perceptions of the topic of support were organized into three metaphorical concepts: welfare is a life support, support is a means to an end, and support is a net. In the first metaphor, welfare benefits are seen as an essential support that sustains life, helps families who are in dire circumstances,
and allows for individuals and families to grow and be productive. *Support is a means to an end* suggests the idea of support as a vehicle or springboard to help people move from one place to another. *Support is a net* entails a number of important ideas: that an individual’s ability to both give and receive support are inextricably linked, that the specific supports and resources an individual has in her life at a given time are connected to and affect each other, that an individual’s support needs change over time, and that individuals are connected to each other and to institutions through their networks of support.

Taken together, these three metaphors are dialectical in that they create an overall image of the participants in this study out of a variety of ideas and images that are often antithetical. This antithesis relates to the dimensions of powerlessness and empowerment, moving from the former to the latter. For example, the *welfare is a life support* concept creates an image of participants as dependent on welfare benefits to keep them and their families alive and powerless over the policies and politics that govern this vital source of support. In much of the data participants talk about being in desperate need and fearful of what will happen to them when this source of support is cut off. In short, they see themselves as relatively powerless victims. In the *support is the means to an end* concept, however, participants see themselves more as actors who have a measure of control over their lives as they use a variety of supports (including their own inner resources) to help them achieve their goals. The *support is a net* metaphor provides the most empowered set of images, as participants see themselves as actively involved, as receivers, providers, and creators of the complex support networks in their lives.
CHAPTER 7
FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose of the Study

Women who are raising families with the support of public assistance, and trying to obtain an education at the same time, face multiple obstacles to the completion of their educational and life goals. The passage of the policies collectively known as welfare reform, which became law in 1995 in Massachusetts and in 1996 on a federal level, further complicated the lives of low-income women and their families. Welfare reform brought sweeping changes to the welfare system, drastically limiting the amount and duration of welfare benefits that people are eligible to receive within their lifetimes.

The changes brought about by welfare reform are particularly challenging for adults who lack basic educational or literacy skills, workplace skills, or English language skills because they are generally at a severe disadvantage in the job market compared to people with higher skill levels and educational attainment. In addition, gender, language, ethnicity, and race further exacerbate the inequality in earning potential among adult learners, as they do within the general population.

It was within the context of welfare reform and adult literacy that this study took place. The limited research currently available dealing with the effects of welfare reform, both in Massachusetts and nationally, tends to offer opposite, polarized views of the impact of these policy changes. Few studies, to my knowledge, look specifically at the impact of welfare reform on adults enrolled in, or in need of Adult
Basic Education services, and I know of no current study that approaches this subject from the point of view of the welfare recipients themselves.

This study attempted to fill that gap. The research participants, all women, current or former welfare recipients, and students who are enrolled in or graduates of Adult Basic Education Programs, were directly affected by the issues being investigated. This study documented the educational experiences of women students who were current or former welfare recipients in one geographic location, and it sought to do this by engaging these women as co-investigators into the ways these issues affected their lives and the lives of others in the area.

In addition to increasing knowledge about social, economic, and political issues that affect adult learners, this study added to the knowledge about language research (particularly about metaphors), about critical pedagogical strategies for language arts classrooms, and about classroom-based research. Another important outcome of this study was that the adult learners participating in this research benefited by improving their own literacy, critical, academic, social, and political skills as a result of their participation.

Finally, a unique feature of this research study is that, though the area of investigation (the impact of welfare reform on the educational experiences of adult learners) could easily be perceived as unrelentingly negative, the approach to the research was in many ways extremely positive. While the study did not intend to minimize the often devastating effects of current social welfare policies on the educational and economic prospects of many of the region’s most vulnerable residents, it was the intention of this study to document some of the very positive
aspects of people's lives, such as their creativity, courage, and resilience as they adapted to these changes. It is my belief that the topics explored in this study—adult learners' experiences with welfare reform and education and their networks of support—place the participants within a much larger and more complicated set of contexts than welfare reform alone. Investigating these topics, as they emerged from the study participants' words, allowed for a privileged view of participants' lives within multiple contexts. These topics highlighted the resilience of marginalized and endangered communities as they find the necessary strength, hope, and unity to renew themselves once again; the resourcefulness of families as they strive to remain intact; and the daily heroism of low-income women who are determined to reach their goals as they struggle to balance the enormous, often conflicting demands of caring for their families and staying in school with very limited resources.

The purpose of this study was to gain understanding of the experiences of adult women learners in Western Massachusetts, enrolled in Adult Basic Education or college programs, within the context of welfare reform. The primary research question guiding this study was: What are the educational experiences of low-income female adult learners, who are current or former welfare recipients enrolled in or graduates of ABE programs, during the early years of "welfare reform"? In order to explore this question in depth, the following three sub-questions were articulated:

Question 1: What are low-income female adult learners' perceptions of the meanings of education and what it makes possible for them?

Question 2: How has welfare reform affected the educational experiences of low-income female adult learners?
Question 3: *Within the context of welfare reform, what are low-income female adult learners’ perceptions about the supports that they both give and receive in order to achieve their education and life goals?*

The three questions above reflect three topics, *education, welfare,* and *support,* identified by *Voces* team members in initial data analysis activities as important topics recurring in the data that were worth exploring for what they could reveal about participants’ experiences as learners, parents, and welfare recipients. In addition, a fourth sub-question addresses the implications of using metaphor analysis as a pedagogical strategy:

*Question 4: How can metaphor analysis be used to foster critical pedagogy and multicultural learner-centered curriculum development?*

This chapter presents nine major findings that were generated by this study. Significant implications of each finding are discussed as well as recommendations for educators, policy makers, and researchers.

**Framework for the Study**

The framework for this study consisted of three areas of literature: 1) multicultural education and critical pedagogy; 2) welfare reform and its impact on the educational experiences of welfare recipients; and 3) metaphors and metaphor analysis. The study was grounded in the theories and practices of multicultural education because it shares one of its major goals, access to high quality education for all students. In addition, the study was informed by the principles of critical pedagogy, another important characteristic of multicultural education. Critical pedagogy is an approach that offers both learners and teachers opportunities to learn about and reflect on the sociopolitical contexts in which they operate and to link their learning to social action.
in order to bring about social change. This literature was a helpful framework because this study engaged a group of adult learners in research activities and educational experiences that addressed critical issues in their lives and gave them opportunities to take significant social action while learning about the larger contexts of these issues.

The study was also grounded in and informed by literature about the implementation of welfare reform policies and their impact on adult learners as well as literature about women and poverty. This literature consisted mainly of newspaper and journal articles, documents from legal services organizations and other advocacy groups, reports from studies, and several books and articles about women’s economic issues as they relate to education and welfare.

This study also drew on literature dealing with metaphors and metaphor analysis, the main analytical approach for this study. This literature offered a theoretical framework for analyzing participants’ spoken or written metaphors as they relate to cognition and aided analysis and interpretation of language data collected for this study. Locating the study within a body of literature about metaphors informed the analysis of both the content of the metaphors studied and the cognitive processes people use to make metaphors, and thus furthered knowledge and understanding of peoples’ experiences and perceptions about the topics addressed in the study as well as how participants conceptualize and categorize their experiences. The literature relating to metaphors addressed three themes: 1) definitions of metaphors; 2) theories about the relationship between language and thought; and 3) the cognitive function of metaphors.
Methodology

One important aspect of this study was that it employed a participatory action research (PAR) approach, involving participants as partners in all aspects of the research and supporting political and social action as an intended outcome of the research. A second important aspect of the study was its use of metaphor analysis as the main tool for analyzing data. The Voces team members who participated in this study took part in several important aspects of the research, including question generating, survey, interview and focus group development, data collection and analysis. They also participated in “member checking” at key points during data analysis and the writing of this dissertation.

The use of metaphor analysis, the study’s main analytical tool, provided a framework for analyzing how participants think about, categorize, and express their experiences and ideas according to a particular set of conceptual principles. Metaphor analysis is an appropriate tool for examining language data generated by participants from different language groups and literacy levels because all human beings use metaphors. The ability to create powerful metaphors does not depend on a person’s language, culture, or literacy level, especially if people are explicitly taught what metaphors are and how to create them.

This study used a variety of data collection methods, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, classroom writing assignments, and field notes. Fifty-five participants were involved in one or more of these data collection activities. The use of several data collection methods helped to offset some of the obstacles to communication associated with each individual method. Interview data consisted of
22 interviews with 15 interview participants, for a total of twenty-three hours of interviewing. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and I translated the Spanish excerpts used in this study, with the help of two Voces team members, Betty Falcón and Maria Santana. Data from three focus groups (with 19 participants) were also used for this study. Participants in focus groups were all women, current or former welfare recipients, heads of households, and learners currently enrolled in or graduates of ABE programs. These groups focused on themes related to the experience of being both a student and a welfare recipient, and were carefully facilitated by Voces team members.

Data from writing classes consisted of writings generated by study participants over a two-year period (from January 1998 through December 1999). The writing assignments were designed to elicit information about the topics explored in this study (education, welfare, and support), and the data from these classes amounted to approximately 200 pages of writing by 21 participants.

In addition to interviews, focus groups, and writing assignments, data for this study included information taken from two surveys conducted with 41 participants in the spring and fall of 1999, as well as data from a survey conducted with 30 ABE practitioners from the region. Finally, data sources also included my ethnographic field notes and journal entries that were generated during the course of the study.

**Major Findings and their Implications**

In this section the study's major findings are presented, based on the data analyzed in Chapters 5 and 6. Each of the four research sub-questions is stated, followed by a discussion of important findings and implications related to each
question. This chapter ends with a list of recommendations for educators, policy makers, and for further research.

**Research Question 1:** *What are low-income female adult learners' perceptions of the meanings of education and what it makes possible for them?*

Analysis of data related to the topic of education was organized into four conceptual metaphors: education as a *journey*, as *personal development*, as an *investment*, and as *access*. In the *journey* metaphor, participants articulate their understandings of the physical, mental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual demands that education requires of them, demands that are often extremely challenging. In this metaphor, participants conceive of education as a linear process, with a beginning and an end, with specific steps to follow and particular challenges and obstacles along the way. In the *education is access* metaphor, participants perceive of education as the entry point to the educational journey and elaborate some of the barriers they face to educational access. The *education is personal development* metaphor reveals participants’ complex understandings of the impacts education has upon many domains of their lives, as learners, parents, welfare recipients, and members of society, particularly in terms of the academic and personal growth they believe education fosters. In the *education is investment* metaphor, participants perceive of education as an investment they make in themselves and that society makes in them, one that potentially yields economic, social, intellectual, and emotional benefits for individuals as well as for their families and communities. This study generated the following three major findings related to the first research question:
1. Adult learners participating in this study perceive of education as a complex, difficult, and obstacle-ridden endeavor that is, nevertheless, worth the effort, risk, and sacrifice it requires because of the many rewards it can yield.

2. Adult learners participating in this study have a broad, rather than a narrow understanding of education. This understanding is expressed though their high expectations regarding the multiple benefits and outcomes of education.

3. Adult learners participating in this study perceive of their education as generative in that it helps them to develop their own potential and productiveness, enriches society, enhances the productiveness of future generations, and requires social resources in order for it to bear fruit.

Finding 1: Adult learners participating in this study perceive of education as a complex, difficult, and obstacle-ridden endeavor that is, nevertheless, worth the effort, risk, and sacrifice it requires because of the many rewards it can yield.

The above finding is grounded in a sociopolitical context that includes specific characteristics relating both to the participants in this study and to the social and political climate at the particular time and place during which the study was conducted. Analysis of the data shows that this context involves five common features or experiences of the study participants that have had a powerful impact on their educational experiences: 1) they have very limited resources and supports; 2) they have significant responsibilities as heads of their households; 3) they are welfare recipients during the era of welfare reform; 4) they are members of dominated and socially marginalized groups because of their gender, race, culture, economic class, or primary language group and 5) they are enrolled in or graduates of ABE programs. Participants are or have been enrolled in ABE programs either to learn English or to gain basic literacy skills and/or to prepare for the GED examination because they left public high schools before graduating. These five features are an important part of the
social context that frames participants’ educational experiences and shapes their perceptions of these experiences.

In describing their education as a complex endeavor, participants reveal their perceptions about how the educational process is undertaken, what it entails, where it leads, and why it is undertaken.

1) How education is undertaken: According to participants, education is arduous, takes a long time, and may present many obstacles that interfere with educational progress or bring it to an end. Education is seen as a linear process that moves learners forward through life or upward from one educational level to another. In order to move through education, learners require guidance, support, and encouragement from others and determination, faith, hard work, and courage from themselves. Education is also seen as requiring risk and sacrifice on the part of individual learners and their families.

2) What education entails: The educational endeavor presents many barriers and obstacles, according to participants. Barriers can prevent access to education and obstacles can interrupt education, slow educational progress, or keep people from reaching their educational goals. The data show that barriers occurring most frequently at the beginning of an educational undertaking include fear, uncertainty, lack of confidence, feeling like an outsider, and lack of knowledge on the part of individuals. On the part of communities and educational institutions, barriers include inadequate supports, lack of appropriate educational programs or information about them, language barriers, and “gatekeeping” policies that prevent people from accessing education. Obstacles that can occur at any stage of the educational process
include the lack or loss of adequate supports and resources (such as money, welfare benefits, transportation, child care, family, educational and community support), overwhelming personal and family responsibilities, personal or family crises, failing classes, and the requirements of welfare reform (such as time limits on benefits, ineligibility for child care subsidies, being required to work in a paid or volunteer job, or being required to participate in job-search programs rather than education).

3) Where education leads: Participants perceive of education as leading them to a "better life": to knowledge, skills, English language acquisition, access to jobs, economic security, the ability to provide for their families, and to participate in meaningful ways in society. They believe education can increase their self-confidence and their ability to solve problems, to express themselves, and to exercise control over their lives. They see education as benefiting their children as well as themselves. The completion of educational goals is often seen as a linear process, as leading to increasingly higher levels of educational attainment. By the same token, participants believe that many obstacles, detailed above, can keep them from reaching their educational goals.

4) Why education is undertaken: According to participants, education is worth undertaking, despite the many difficulties it presents, because of the potentially life-transforming rewards it promises, many of which are listed above. For a majority of participants, their desire to be good role models and providers for their children motivates them to undertake education. Another reason participants believe the educational endeavor is worth taking is because formal education is seen as one of the few routes available that will offer them the economic, social, and intellectual growth
and development they want to foster in themselves and their children. As mothers and heads of their households, many participants think of their own education as benefiting their children in multiple ways as well.

Finding 2: Adult learners participating in this study have a broad, rather than a narrow understanding of education. This understanding is expressed through their high expectations regarding the multiple benefits and outcomes of education.

The data analyzed for this study show that participants expect a great deal from education and from their own abilities to work hard in order to reap the benefits of education. Many participants, particularly the adult learners who have made the transition from ABE programs to college, are able to articulate in specific detail what they expect of education. Their expectations cover a broad range of outcomes, and can be divided into five categories: knowledge and skills, social benefits, economic benefits, emotional and psychological benefits, and benefits to family.

Knowledge and Skills

The participants in this study expect that, through education, they will develop the following skills, knowledge, and abilities:

- literacy skills in English
- job and career related skills in their chosen fields
- academic skills and knowledge that help them both to fulfill short-term educational goals and to continue learning throughout their lives
- the "cultural capital" necessary to function well in social, academic, and economic arenas previously closed to them
- the ability to think critically and analytically: to understand social contexts, to ask critical questions, and to understand and analyze information from a variety of perspectives
- the skills, knowledge, and self-confidence to help them solve problems, to set realistic goals, to find information they need and answers to important questions, and to have greater control over their lives
Social Benefits

According to participants, the social benefits they expect from education include the following:

- the ability to “give back” to their families and communities, to contribute to society in productive ways and to help others in the community
- opportunities to get to know a variety of people and to work in groups, to develop relationships both with people who have similar backgrounds and with people from very different backgrounds
- opportunities to become role models for other members of the community, particularly for people in circumstances similar to their own, such as welfare recipients, women of color, people learning English, and adult learners in ABE programs
- the ability to advocate for themselves and others, particularly for people from dominated, oppressed, and marginalized groups
- developing a public voice and the ability to participate in society in meaningful ways (through the ability to express themselves well, the confidence to speak out in public, and the sense that they have knowledge to share publicly)
- the ability to understand the workings of and to navigate a variety of social institutions, including academic, social service, civic, workplace, media, and political institutions

Economic Benefits

Participants also expect considerable economic benefits for themselves, their families, and their communities, as a result of education. Although adult learners enrolled in college programs tend to have more realistic and explicitly articulated economic expectations than those learners enrolled in GED and ESOL programs, all of the participants who discussed this issue expect that completing their educational goals will yield significant economic benefits. These benefits are articulated in the following ways:

- economic benefits for themselves and their families through their ability to make a transition from welfare to work, to use their education as a way to prepare for jobs and careers that provide them with decent pay and financial security
- an ability to develop and make use of networks of resources, supports and people
• economic benefits through increased access to and information about community resources, supports, and opportunities that will help participants continue their education and prepare for careers
• economic benefits to society through their ability to be self-sufficient, to be less reliant on social services and programs such as welfare, and to contribute their skills, knowledge, and abilities to create a healthier economy

Emotional and Psychological Benefits

Many participants believe that education yields emotional and psychological benefits in addition to the more concrete outcomes listed above. These benefits include:

• self-confidence, pride in accomplishments, belief in their own abilities to succeed
• an ability to solve problems and to make important life decisions effectively and the emotional and psychological benefits that come from exercising more control over their lives
• open-mindedness and intellectual stimulation that comes from exchanging knowledge and engaging in meaningful ways with people from different backgrounds and experiences
• a sense of hope that results from the belief they are working toward a “better future”
• a sense that they are making progress in life
• learning to understand and develop their potential and talents

Benefits to Family

All of the adult learners who participated in this study, because they are mothers and heads of their households, have a strong sense of responsibility to their children, and often to other members of their extended families as well. Many say that they are motivated to be in school because they expect education to help them in the following ways:

• to be able to provide financial security and economic upward mobility for their children
• to make their children proud of them
• to be better role models to their children, instilling in them the value of education and hard work

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• to support their children academically (help them with homework, inspire them to continue school)
• to be more effective advocates for their children, particularly in their schools
• to support other family members through their ability to speak English, to be role models, and to share knowledge, information, and access to opportunities they have received as a result of their education

Finding 3: Adult learners participating in this study perceive of their education as generative in that it helps them to develop their own potential and productiveness, enriches society, enhances the productiveness of future generations, and requires social resources in order for it to bear fruit.

Participants in this study perceive of education as generative in that it is capable of bearing fruit in their own lives, in their children’s lives, and in the contributions to society and to the economy that education allows them to make. One of the four metaphorical concepts for education analyzed in Chapter 4 was education as an investment, that is, a co-investment that adult learners make through their hard work, time, and energy and one that society makes in them by investing resources that will help to develop their potential as productive citizens. As in most investments, many participants know that there is risk involved, that the investment may or may not pay off in the ways they envision. Some of the reasons they articulate for this risk include the many obstacles they encounter to completing their education, many of which are outlined in the “education is a journey” metaphor, including lack of adequate resources and supports for themselves and their families, language and literacy barriers, lack of access to information and opportunities, the legacy of negative past school experiences and the inadequate academic preparation they may have received, and the fear and discouragement that many experience because of social, cultural and linguistic marginalization within their educational institutions.
Participants also know that sufficient “capital” must be invested in order to minimize the risks and maximize the potential benefits of education. On their own part, this capital consists of personal resources such as talent, intelligence, patience, determination, faith in themselves, and a belief in the value of education, as well as the time and effort they expend on their education. On the part of society, capital consists of sufficient time, adequate resources (such as welfare benefits, affordable educational programs, financial aid, high quality learning opportunities), adequate and appropriate supports (such as child-care, transportation, counseling, language translation and ESOL classes, supportive people), a strong belief in the ability of adult learners to succeed academically, and the implementation of social and educational policies and practices that are based on that belief.

Research Question 2: How has welfare reform affected the educational experiences of low-income female adult learners?

Adult women learners participating in this study think about the topic of welfare in terms of four conceptual metaphors, a clock, a war, an investment, and a life support. Together, these metaphors reveal a complex understanding of and relationship to the welfare system that participants in this study are or were dependent upon. The clock metaphor reveals participants’ constant preoccupation with the time-limit on benefits, one of the most sweeping changes that came out of the policies known collectively as “welfare reform.” In the clock metaphor, time often becomes the enemy of education, that is, it hinders or halts participants’ ability to complete their educational goals. This metaphor sets up a tension between the amount of time
needed to complete goals and the limited time available from the welfare system for supporting adult learners who are welfare recipients.

The *war* metaphor reveals participants' perceptions of their relationship to the welfare system as being dramatically adversarial. The *war* metaphor calls up images of a welfare recipient waging a daily battle with the welfare system, a battle characterized by struggle, subterfuge, risk, danger, violence, dehumanization, loss, and harm caused to innocent bystanders. The *investment* metaphor, on the other hand, reveals participants' perceptions of the welfare system as investing resources and supports in recipients in order to allow people to grow, to generate new growth, and to become more productive. The *life support* metaphor reveals participants' understandings of the welfare system as supporting and sustaining life as well as supporting and developing recipients' abilities and potential. As a *life support*, welfare is perceived as a temporary, transitional, but often critical support that people rely on when they need it. The *life support* metaphor also calls up images of people in desperate circumstances who are, because of their desperation, relatively powerless over their circumstances. Based on this analysis, the following two major findings were generated in relation to the second research question:

4. Adult learners participating in this study, because of their experiences with welfare reform, perceive of time as an enemy to the completion of their educational and life goals.

5. Adult learners participating in this study experience a number of psychological tensions on a daily basis as a direct result of being welfare recipients. These tensions create tremendous emotional and psychological pressures that affect their ability to care for their families and to complete their educational goals.
Finding 4: Adult learners participating in this study, because of their experiences with welfare reform, perceive of time as an enemy to the completion of their educational and life goals.

The theme of time as an entity that is measured, apportioned, and limited, is a constant preoccupation for the adult learners in this study. As seen in the education is a journey metaphor, the participants perceive of education as a long and arduous undertaking. For the majority of adult learners who participated in this study, two years is a woefully inadequate amount of time to receive the support they need to complete their educational goals.

This study’s participants represent a full range of ABE learners: they are acquiring basic literacy skills, learning English, preparing for the GED exam, making a transition to college, enrolled in developmental college courses, or have transitioned to community college degree programs. The two-year time limit on benefits is a “one size fits all” policy that does not take into account the vast differences in recipients’ literacy, English language, and academic skills, their academic preparation, nor the variety of educational and career goals to which they aspire.

In addition, there are important differences in the kinds of supports adult learners may need as well as in the length of time they may need these supports in order to complete their educational goals. In general, welfare reform policies do not take these differences into account. In fact, by adopting a “one-size-fits-all” approach, offering the same supports and the same time-limited benefits to everyone regardless of their different educational needs, these policies assume that the playing field is level. But the playing field is not level: adults who have a limited ability to read or write, limited English proficiency, or who lack a high school diploma or a GED are at
a severe disadvantage in the job market compared to people with higher skill levels and educational attainment. In addition, gender, language, ethnicity, and race further exacerbate the inequality in earning potential among adult learners, as they do within the general population. By assuming a level playing field, welfare reform policies, particularly the time limit on benefits and the work requirement, benefit those learners who are at the highest educational, literacy and English acquisition levels (particularly those who are White males whose primary language is English), while they discriminate against learners who need more time to acquire the literacy skills, English skills, workplace training, or educational degrees necessary to support themselves and their families.

Because of welfare reform's time-limited benefits, welfare recipients affected by this policy perceive of time as their enemy, as forcing them to acquire only a minimum of literacy and work-related skills before their benefits are cut off. Many of the participants opt for a short-term education or job training program that will, at best, prepare them for low-wage work, even though their long term goals may be to continue their education in order to become economically self-sufficient. Some of the participants enrolled in college leave school before completing a degree because their benefits have ended or because they know they will not be able to graduate before their benefits end. Many of the participants enrolled in GED programs chose not to go to college after passing the GED exam for the sole reason that they will not have sufficient time to get a degree within the welfare time limit. In this sense, participants view the welfare system as forcing recipients to make important life decisions that are not based on their own choices, their own needs, or their best interests.
Because they are parents, time is an important theme in participants’ lives as they engage in the long-term undertaking of raising their children while trying to complete their own educational goals. It is striking that even the teen parents who participated in this study have a heightened sense of time as a limited commodity, unlike other teenagers who do not have children and who often perceive of time as relatively limitless because most of their lives are ahead of them. Participants in this study, when they think about time in relation to welfare reform, understand it as being linked to support of individuals and their children, to economic security, and to progress (particularly through education). The participants’ sense of powerlessness over their access to sufficient support, security, and progress is poignantly expressed in their question: “What’s going to happen to us?”

Finding 5: Adult learners participating in this study experience a number of psychological tensions on a daily basis as a direct result of being welfare recipients. These tensions create tremendous emotional and psychological pressure that affects their ability to care for their families and to complete their educational goals.

Because their relationship to the welfare system, on which they rely for support, is often fraught with conflict, the participants in this study experience psychological tensions in the following ways:

- between their need for welfare benefits and their perceptions of the welfare system’s hostility toward them
- between their own sense of purpose and of exercising power over the course of their lives as parents and students and their sense of powerlessness over welfare reform’s policies
- between their experiences as providers, supporters, and protectors of their families and the social stigma of being on welfare that brands them as dependent, immature, and irresponsible
between their belief that it makes sound economic sense for society to co-invest its resources in their education and their belief that the welfare system is unwilling to make this investment.

For all of the adult learners in this study, welfare benefits are only one of several supports and resources they make use of in order to support their families and go to school, though it is usually a critically needed, essential support. As the data for this study suggest, the participants rely on welfare benefits in order to sustain life, to help them support and protect their families, to help them develop their potential, and to increase their ability to become economically self-sufficient. For these reasons, the welfare system plays an important role in participants’ lives, yet most of them have had a common set of negative experiences with the system: being treated as adversaries, having adequate support withheld from them, being stigmatized, and experiencing a lack of faith on the part of the welfare system in their ability to make their own decisions and important life choices.

These experiences amount to a set of basic tensions the welfare recipients in this study have had that affect their daily lives as parents and learners. They experience the system that provides them with critical support as being hostile to them, as hindering their ability to achieve their educational and life goals, and as withholding the support they and their families need to survive. They experience a psychological and emotional conflict that has many negative consequences, engendering a sense of hopelessness, powerlessness, isolation, defensiveness, and fear, all of which sap their energy and undermine their confidence. These
consequences can be as destructive to recipients’ well-being as the more concrete, physical challenges of supporting families with minimal resources.

For some participants, the experience of being on welfare is so stressful they decide to give up their benefits before their time limit is up, opting for the insecurity of the unknown over the daily stress of dealing with the system. As Krystal Recor reported in her profile in Chapter 4, she gave up her welfare benefits because “the pressure of constantly verifying [supplying documents to prove her income, assets, children’s school attendance, and her own attendance at school and work, etc.] and having to report to the office all the time was too much stress. . . . They repeatedly stripped me of my dignity and literally made me beg and fight for aid.”

Participants expressed the tensions they experience as welfare recipients as a kind of tug-of-war undermining their sense of themselves as caring and responsible parents and heroic travelers on an arduous educational journey. However, the extent to which participants became aware of these tensions, and of the social and political contexts in which they are situated, had a direct correlation to their ability to de-internalize the negative perceptions about welfare recipients that surrounded them. Participants found it painful to confront these negative stereotypes about welfare recipients, particularly those targeting women of color and Spanish-speakers.

Nevertheless, this study has shown that those who did confront the stereotypes and who learned to challenge the ways the welfare system mistreats its clients, were able to achieve a critical understanding of the systematic institutional oppression at work against them. The Voces team members in particular, because of the opportunities they had as researchers to explore the issue of welfare reform in depth within a very
supportive research community, were able to move through the pain, despair, fear, and anger these issues provoked and to become empowered advocates for themselves, for their families, and for others in similar circumstances. As Krystal Recor summed it up: “The project interested me because it involved me. I wanted to educate myself so that I could educate others on the new welfare reform policies. I also needed the support that I received from everybody involved.”

Research Question 3: *Within the context of welfare reform, what are low-income female adult learners’ perceptions about the supports that they both give and receive in order to achieve their education and life goals?*

As discussed in Chapter 6, the participants in this study conceive of the topic of support using three conceptual metaphors; *welfare as a life support, support as a means to an end,* and *support as a net.* The topic of support enriches the understanding of the adult learners in this study and their experiences, perceptions, and actions as they rely upon and contribute to a variety of supports that keep them alive, maintain their families’ well-being, and allow them to stay in school. The data on welfare as a support reveals participants’ understanding of welfare as a vital support structure that both sustains them and allows them to grow and develop.

*Welfare as a life support* is often viewed as a transitional support that people need at critical points in their lives. However, because of the pressures of welfare reform policies like the time limit on benefits, as well as inadequate academic preparation and a lack of other vital supports in many participants’ lives, a sense of desperation and fear accompanies this notion of transition: as Rhonda Soto asks: “Transition to what?” For the participants in this study who know that their educational journeys will be long and arduous, the amount of time they are allotted to make the transition
from welfare to work is usually woefully inadequate. The notion of support as a
*means to an end*, however, functions in similar ways to the metaphors about
education and welfare as an *investment* by expressing a combination of hopeful and
empowering ideas - - individual potential, forward movement, growth, social
investment, and human volition - - underlying participants’ motivations to stay in
school. The *net* metaphor implies complex relationships between all of the metaphors
examined in this study, as *support is a net* reveals how adult learners relate to their
educational institutions, to the welfare system, to their families, communities and each
other.

The third sub-question above generated the following two major findings:

6. Although the adult learners who participated in this study have much in common
with each other, each participant, like all human beings, has a unique set of needs
for support, including institutional, personal, and internal supports. These needs
change and evolve as participants (and their dependents) develop new abilities and
interests and as their life circumstances and the contexts in which they live change.

7. Like all human beings, the adult learners who participated in this study rely on,
create, and contribute to complex networks of support that help them to live, to
support others, and to set and achieve goals. The presence of these support
networks reveal that participants’ lives are characterized by *interdependence*
within multiple contexts, despite the fact that welfare recipients are often viewed
as “welfare dependent.”

Finding 6: Although the adult learners who participated in this study have
much in common with each other, each participant, like all human beings, has a
unique set of needs for support, including institutional, personal, and internal
supports. These needs change and evolve as participants (and their dependents)
develop new abilities and interests and as their life circumstances and the
contexts in which they live change.

Although, in a general sense, the adult learners who participated in this study
have much in common regarding their needs for support as parents and learners, there
are also important differences in participants’ needs. Three factors stand out about
participants’ understandings of support, especially within the context of their experiences as welfare recipients: 1) the scope and variety of supports participants use; 2) the uniqueness of each participant’s set of needs at a given time; and 3) the evolving nature of participants’ needs for support over time. Each of these factors, discussed below, has a bearing on participants’ experiences as welfare recipients, particularly because welfare reform policies tend to take a narrower view of recipients’ needs and abilities than did pre-reform welfare policies. The current welfare system in Massachusetts offers fewer and more narrowly defined educational opportunities and fewer supports for people who want an education than it did prior to welfare reform.

1) **The scope and variety of supports participants use:**

The participants in this study identified a long list of supports they use to help them reach their goals. These supports can be categorized in three ways: *institutional*, *personal*, and *internal* supports. Institutional supports include those from social institutions such as schools, health care organizations, and the welfare system. Personal supports include the people within an individual’s personal network (family, friends, and community members) and the particular kinds of supports provided by these individuals. Internal supports refer to an individual’s inner resources, such as their values, beliefs, knowledge, abilities, and their emotional and psychological resources.

The presence or lack of appropriate and adequate supports in participants’ lives has a direct correlation to both their ability and their motivation to achieve their educational goals. Appropriate supports are those which meet the specific needs of an
individual. For example, an educational program may offer counseling services to its learners that are not culturally or linguistically appropriate for everyone, which could cause more harm than good to the learners. Adequate supports are those which are offered to adequately meet the needs of individuals, such as a child-care agency that is open at night for learners enrolled in evening classes. Whether or not supports are appropriate or adequate is up to the individual receiving those supports to decide.

Many adult learners who participated in this study have problems completing their education because they do not have adequate supports or the appropriate kinds of supports in place when they need them. When a person lacks appropriate and adequate supports, both their economic and emotional states become jeopardized. For example, ambition and motivation are weakened when a person lacks support. This affects the ability to stay in school, to work, to care for one's family, and ultimately, to become economically self-sufficient.

The comprehensive list of supports identified by participants has important implications in terms of welfare reform. Because welfare benefits are just one of many supports participants use, some adult learners have a variety of other resources to draw upon to help them achieve their goals. The data from this study, particularly from the surveys, interviews, and focus groups that addressed the topic of support, show that participants who have adequate personal supports but inadequate institutional supports are usually better able to stay in school than those with inadequate personal supports and adequate institutional supports. This may be because personal supports tend to be more flexible than institutional supports and are better tailored to meet different and changing individual needs. Participants in this
study with adequate supports from both institutional and personal sources were best able to complete their educational goals. This suggests that the personal resources adult learners have access to are at least as important as institutional supports in helping them to achieve their educational goals.

2) *The uniqueness of each participant’s set of needs at a given time:*

Many of the current welfare reform policies do not differentiate between the various needs and strengths, individual interests and goals, levels of educational attainment and language backgrounds that welfare recipients have. Even among the group of adult learners in this study, who have much in common in social and economic terms, there are many critical differences in their educational and life profiles. Welfare policies tend to take a “one size fits all” approach to meeting clients’ needs, resulting in “serious mismatches of needs and resources” (Kates 1998, 15) between the welfare system and its clients. Across the state of Massachusetts, welfare recipients represent a wide range of educational backgrounds. In 1998, nearly half (47 percent) of the state’s recipients who were female heads of households did not have a high school diploma or GED, while the other half had completed high school or passed the GED, and 9 percent had some college experience (Kates 1998). Yet current welfare policies (such as the two-year time limit on benefits and the “workfare” policy requiring recipients with school-aged children to work 20 hours a week in paid or volunteer jobs) are geared to benefit those recipients with the highest levels of educational attainment, English language acquisition, and work experience, as well as those who have access to other personal and institutional supports besides welfare benefits, such as supportive families and friends, scholarships, or work-study
jobs. This implies that those learners with the fewest supports and the greatest needs for a variety of educational services (and who are, thus, the most vulnerable members of society) benefit the least from current welfare policies, especially those relating to education.

Because of the mismatch of recipients’ needs and the welfare system’s allocation of resources, recipients are often forced to make important life decisions that are not based on their own choices, needs, or best interests. For example, recipients with school-age children often must work or volunteer for twenty hours a week rather than completing the educational program they need in order to get a good job. Or a recipient may be forced to choose a quick educational path, such as a short-term job training program, because of the two-year time limit, even though her goal may be to earn a college degree.

Welfare reform’s “one size fits all” approach to the support it gives adult learners has had an affect on the state’s educational system as well as on students. Current welfare policy has had a negative impact on both community college enrollments and transfers from two-year to four-year colleges among welfare recipients across the state. From 1995 to 1997, the fifteen community colleges in Massachusetts reported an average drop of 46 percent (ranging from 29 percent to 82 percent) in enrollments of TAFDC recipients (Kates 1998). Although similar data are not available tracking low-income women’s transfers from two-year to four-year colleges, Kates (1998) has observed a marked trend in the reduction of transfers, citing one four-year college that reported a 28 percent decrease in TAFDC recipients transferring from community colleges in 1996-97.
3) The evolving nature of participants' needs for support over time:

Finally, the element of change over time is seen as an important factor in participants' needs for support. For example, as adult learners transition from ABE programs to college and then to jobs, as their children move from daycare to public school, as their circumstances change for better or worse due to a myriad of forces, both their needs and abilities shift, change, and evolve. Just as current welfare policies ignore important differences in recipients' needs for support at a given moment, they also do not take into account how people's needs change over time as they progress through life. For example, recipients with associates' degrees who transfer to four year colleges are no longer eligible for child care and transportation subsidies, as they were before welfare reform was instituted.

The adult learners who participated in this study have shown that they are in a much better position than welfare policy makers to articulate the particular supports and resources they need in order to complete their educational goals, because they are intimately familiar with their own and their families' evolving needs, abilities, and life goals. Yet they have virtually no input into the decisions that are made regarding the ways the welfare system's resources are allocated.

Finding 7: Like all human beings, the adult learners who participated in this study create, contribute to, and rely on complex networks of support that help them to live, to support others, and to set and achieve goals. The presence of these support networks reveal that participants' lives are characterized by interdependence within multiple contexts, despite the fact that welfare recipients are often viewed as "welfare dependent."

Although most of the participants in this study stated that one of their goals as learners was to become more independent, the data reveals that the concept of
interdependence underlies their thinking about the topic of support. Many participants in this study conceive of support in a holistic way, as a give and take proposition, thinking about the supports they receive as critical to their ability to provide support to others. For most of the participants in this study, their children are a major motivating factor for completing their education because they believe education will enable them to be better providers for their children. In addition, many participants said that being in school helps them to be good role models for their children, enables them to help their children with homework, or to advocate on behalf of their children with their teachers. Many of the teen parents stated that they never really thought about the future until they became parents. Thus, the fact that participants’ needs for support are predicated on their desire to provide support to others reveals a powerful sense of interdependence that structures their thinking on this topic.

The notion of interdependence is also often implied when participants talk about the communities they live in, as seen when a group of teen parents participating in this study associated the ideas “helping each other” and “taking care of your neighbors” with the word “poverty.” The fact that these young women (all of whom had grown up in poverty) connect the ideas of poverty with helping each other stands in stark contrast to stereotypical notions about welfare dependency. The support is a net metaphor, in particular, shows how adult learners utilize, provide, and create multiple, interconnected, constantly evolving supports to help them complete their educational journeys, to care for their families, and to improve their lives in a variety of ways. The net is perhaps the most hopeful and empowering of the ten metaphors analyzed in this study, as it entails the ideas that even those human beings whose
support networks are relatively fragile have multiple sources of support to draw upon, a measure of control over those supports, and a variety of mechanisms to help them connect with other human beings and institutions.

Adult learners’ first-hand knowledge and understanding of the complex networks of support that they need, use, and create on a daily basis can provide an important framework for educators and policy makers who are interested in providing the kinds of supports that will enhance learners’ achievement, help them to complete their goals, and help them to support others. Rather than viewing adult learners as either dependent or independent, or as moving from dependence toward independence, this study shows that participants’ lives are characterized by interdependence, a concept that is more complex than either the ideas of dependence or independence and more hopeful in terms of adult learners’ abilities to achieve their educational and life goals. Approaching learners as interdependent actors in their own lives, paying close attention to the particular dynamics of learners’ interdependent systems of support, and assessing their strengths and weaknesses within a variety of shifting contexts, can help educators and educational policy makers to support adult learners in constructive and effective ways.

Research Question 4: How can metaphor analysis be used to foster critical pedagogy and multicultural learner-centered curriculum development?

As this study shows, a close examination of the metaphors people use in everyday speech or create to express unique situations can reveal a great deal about their experiences, perspectives, relationships to the world, and the conceptual structures that guide their thinking. In addition, this study found that some of the
same techniques used to analyze metaphors can be used as a powerful pedagogical and curriculum development tool for writing classrooms. A close examination of the metaphors learners use and the conceptual underpinnings that structure their perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, behaviors, and actions, can also be a valuable guide for shaping educational policy that responds to learners’ needs and strengths.

Metaphor analysis was used in this study in three important ways: 1) as a strategy for generating both text-based and oral data, 2) as a conceptual structure for organizing data and the main tool for analyzing data, and 3) as a pedagogical strategy for generating learner-centered knowledge and building critical thinking and writing skills in writing classrooms. Because the research methodology for this study was classroom-based participatory action research, these three objectives for using metaphor analysis overlapped and supported each other, as did the study’s pedagogical and research objectives. Thus, findings relating to this question must take both research methodology and pedagogy into account, as they are inextricably linked in many ways. They are linked both in relation to the research process (that is, to the particular strategies employed both to carry out the research and to develop curriculum) and in relation to the content of the topics and questions that were investigated. This study generated two major findings related to critical pedagogy and multicultural curriculum development, as articulated in the fourth research question posed above:

8. The use of metaphor analysis as a pedagogical and curriculum development strategy in writing classrooms can foster critical pedagogy in that it provides access to learners’ unique knowledge and perspectives, promotes critical thinking, develops critical reading and writing skills, and offers a guide for learner-driven social action.
9. Because metaphor analysis offers unique insights into the conceptual structures that govern people’s thoughts, attitudes, assumptions, and actions, it can provide a powerful framework for understanding learners’ motivations and helping them to reach their educational and life goals.

Finding 8: The use of metaphor analysis as a pedagogical and curriculum development strategy in writing classrooms can foster critical pedagogy in that it provides access to learners’ unique knowledge and perspectives, promotes critical thinking, develops critical reading and writing skills, and offers a guide for learner-driven social action.

In addition to its usefulness in analyzing language data, metaphor analysis can be a powerful tool to enhance learner-centered teaching and curriculum development. In the early stages of data analysis for the Changes Project, Voces team members chose to explore the use of metaphor analysis, and this technique became one of the main analytical tools used by the team. Because the team was also facilitating writing workshops at participating ABE programs during the same time that we were developing analytical expertise, we began to explore ways to incorporate what we were learning about metaphors into the writing exercises we used with ABE learners. During this time, Voces team members also facilitated what we called “metaphor workshops” in a variety of other settings, including a series of English Language Arts curriculum development workshops for literacy practitioners, a conference workshop at Smith College, and a multicultural education class for public school teachers at Westfield State College. In all of these settings, we found that metaphor analysis was a useful tool for helping participants to develop and expand their ideas, to explore in depth the unique meanings they associate with broad concepts such as education and welfare reform, to generate group knowledge, and to provide a springboard for discussions that helped to locate individual experiences within broader sociopolitical
contexts. In these ways, making use of participants’ knowledge as a starting point served our purposes as researchers, educators, and learners.

The Metaphor Workshop Process

The metaphor analysis process developed by the Voces team to analyze data evolved into a technique for generating poetry in writing classes, metaphor workshops, and curriculum development workshops with literacy practitioners. The classes and workshops usually began with a general discussion about metaphors, after which participants would be asked to create metaphors for the particular topics that they wanted to write about. Then facilitators would question the participants in order to expand the meaning of the original metaphor, the same process that was used to generate a list of entailments for the metaphors analyzed in this study. In classes and workshops, generating entailments was a group effort in which each metaphor and its expanded list of entailments became the stanza of a poem. The following poem, by a group of teen parents from a GED program, was written using the process outlined above, in which the writers generated metaphors for the following topics: *my life, my children, education, and the future*.

Metaphors of My Life

- My life is a tree.
  It is strong,
  it bears fruit.
- My life has roots.
  The roots are the force that makes the tree grow.
- My life has branches.
  They are the members of my family
  and my different experiences.
- The leaves of my life change color.
  Throughout the winter they fall on the ground.
  In spring my life returns to flower again.
My children are my sky.  
One is a star that shines brightly through the night.  
The other is a beautiful morning  
or a dove that flies through the air.  
Sometimes my child is a twister,  
other times she is the sun that warms my life on cold days  
or the rain that falls like tears to the ground.

Education is a key  
that opens doors toward the path of my future.  
At times it is difficult to find  
the right door for my life.  
Other times it is easier  
when the doors offer me opportunities.  
The doors of my mind also open  
with education.

My future is a road  
to paradise,  
to the world  
and toward happiness.  
This road goes every which way.  
My future moves like the waves  
that are the wings of the sea.

Expanding or “unpacking” metaphors is a process that allows writers to explore, reflect upon, and create ideas as a group. In addition to revealing a great deal about participants’ understandings of the topics addressed in the poem above, writing activities like this one can greatly enhance learners’ literacy skills by giving them insights into the often hidden richness of everyday language and helping them to tap their imaginations. Many of the writing workshop participants developed a new appetite, as well as an aptitude, for reading and writing through their heightened awareness of metaphors. Like the Voces team, several learners were bitten by the “metaphor bug,” continuing to write poetry on their own using the techniques they learned in workshops. They became highly attuned to the metaphors that began to
leap out at them from the pages of their books. The Voces team was thrilled to learn that our own enthusiasm for these richly imaginative linguistic expressions was so contagious, and that this contagion could have such a positive effect on participants' abilities and desires to read and write.

The writing classes for research participants served a number of research and pedagogical purposes, providing the following opportunities for those involved:

- Opportunities for participants to learn to conduct research
- Opportunities to generate data for the study
- Opportunities for learners to build and strengthen connections with their peers, whose lives were similarly affected by the issues being explored
- Opportunities for Voces team mentors to develop supportive mentoring relationships with ABE learners
- Opportunities to identify, learn about, reflect upon, and take action relating to issues of critical importance to participants' lives
- Opportunities to develop literacy, critical thinking, and other academic skills through their heightened awareness of the richness of language and their own imaginations

Metaphor Analysis as a Guide for Action

In addition to providing the opportunities listed above, using metaphor analysis in writing classrooms can also guide learners to engage in social actions that are based on their own interests, desires, and capabilities. A powerful example of this possibility took place in one of the first writing groups the Voces team facilitated with ABE learners. Writing group participants wrote a poem, *My Struggle, the Time Limit, My Future, and My Love for My Child* (part of which appears in Chapter 4, page 158), based on metaphors about their experiences as parents and welfare recipients. The poem addresses the intertwined themes of participants' struggles as learners and parents living in poverty, the stress of trying to complete their education within TAFDC time limits, and the boundlessness of their love for their children.
After writing the poem, participants decided that an effective social action would be to write a letter to accompany their poem, articulating their experiences as welfare recipients, students, and parents. The letter, entitled “What’s Going to Happen to Us?”, was sent to schools, local newspapers, Massachusetts legislators, given out at conferences, and attached to their school’s annual Mother’s Day fundraising letter. In response to the letter, a reporter from a local newspaper came to their school, interviewed the writers about their experiences, and published an article and a photograph of the group the following week. As a result, the writing group participants saw how their life experiences could be used as the subject matter of essays and poems. They learned that by working as a group and developing a collective voice, they could inform the public about their experiences. Not only did they enhance their writing skills, they also got a real sense of how the written word can make people listen and, possibly, change their minds. They took action that involved writing and compiling a letter, identifying an audience, sending it out, and dealing with the media. The writers learned to work together, to listen and learn from each other, to think about their own lives within larger contexts, and to examine the role education plays in their lives.

Finding 9: Because metaphor analysis offers unique insights into the conceptual structures that govern people’s thoughts, attitudes, assumptions, and actions, it can provide a powerful framework for understanding learners’ motivations and helping them to reach their educational and life goals.

In addition to allowing teachers and learners opportunities to explore together their understandings of particular topics of interest to them, this study found that metaphor analysis can provide powerful insights into what motivates learners by
revealing the conceptual structures and processes that govern the way they both construct reality and act on that reality. These insights can be used as a guide for developing educational policy and practices as well as curriculum.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors both act as “principal vehicles for understanding” and “play a central role in the construction of social and political reality” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 159). Whether a metaphor is conventional, such as the image of education as a journey, or a completely novel construction, as in the “seed in a watermelon” metaphor, their function is to aid the expression of human experience and, as a result, to govern both thought and action.

The notion that metaphors guide human action furthers the analysis of the metaphors examined in this study by suggesting a cause and effect relationship between people’s experiences, the metaphors they use to express those experiences, and the actions those metaphors inspire. For example, the data examined in this study shows that participants conceive of education as a journey that is arduous, risky, long, and full of obstacles, and these ideas provoke particular responses: some may decide to throw themselves wholeheartedly into preparation for the journey, while others may be so daunted by its prospect that they choose not to embark on it at all. Other data show that participants believe education yields rewards that are personal, social, economic, lifelong, and generative, and, as a result, they may decide the journey is worth taking, despite the risks and sacrifices it entails. Others conceive of education as an investment in themselves and their families, or as access to resources and opportunities otherwise unattainable, and, as a result, this, too, may inspire them to prepare for, embark on, and continue their educational journeys. Thus, the analysis of
metaphorical concepts about education reveals a great deal about the multiple motivations and expectations that guide adult learners’ educational experiences, and can provide a framework for examining and shaping the ways educational institutions respond to those motivations and expectations.

Analysis of metaphors about welfare in this study complicates the picture of adult learners’ educational experiences by detailing a particular set of obstacles and tensions in their lives that potentially keep them from completing their education. These obstacles include strict limits on the amount of time and support participants receive to help them complete their goals, as well as the debilitating, daily battle many recipients wage with a welfare system that they perceive as hindering their educational progress and jeopardizing the well-being of their families. Other data show that participants view welfare as a mutual investment, in which the welfare system invests its resources in them and they invest in themselves as individuals, parents, and members of society. When people conceive of the welfare system that supports them and their families as adversarial, when they understand the system as having immense power and see themselves as powerless, they may, as a result, behave in ways that help to maintain this unbalanced power relationship. They may behave as victims and accept their lot without challenging the way they are treated. On the other hand, if they conceive of the welfare system as an investment in their potential, they will be more likely to utilize its resources, however meager, and to behave as co-investors in their own futures.

Finally, metaphors about support analyzed in this study reveal a great deal about participants’ strengths, weaknesses, motivations, and aspirations as parents and
learners by offering insights into the support systems they rely on, need, provide, and create. In particular, the concept of interdependence that underlies the way participants view support reveals the complexity of adult learners’ relationships to the institutions, individuals, and communities to which they are connected. Engaging in metaphor analysis can provide educators with a valuable guide for examining and reshaping policies and practices in ways that utilize learners’ knowledge, meet their expectations, help them to overcome obstacles, and suit their values, interests, aspirations, needs, and strengths.

Recommendations for Educators, Policy Makers, and Researchers

This section presents recommendations based on the findings and implications discussed above. The study’s main research question was: *What are the educational experiences of low-income female adult learners, who are current or former welfare recipients enrolled in or graduates of ABE programs, during the early years of "welfare reform"?* Three sub-questions were articulated to answer this question, and a fourth question guiding this study addressed the potential usefulness of metaphor analysis for educational purposes such as critical pedagogy, curriculum development and educational policy making. In response to these questions, the following nine findings were generated:

1. Adult learners participating in this study perceive of education as a complex, difficult, and obstacle-ridden endeavor that is, nevertheless, worth the effort, risk, and sacrifice it requires because of the many rewards it can yield.

2. Adult learners participating in this study have a broad, rather than a narrow understanding of education. This understanding is expressed though their high expectations regarding the multiple benefits and outcomes of education.
3. Adult learners participating in this study perceive of their education as generative in that it helps them to develop their own potential and productiveness, enriches society, enhances the productiveness of future generations, and requires social resources in order for it to bear fruit.

4. Adult learners participating in this study, because of their experiences with welfare reform, perceive of time as an enemy to the completion of their educational and life goals.

5. Adult learners participating in this study experience a number of psychological tensions on a daily basis as a direct result of being welfare recipients. These tensions create tremendous emotional and psychological pressures that affect their ability to care for their families and to complete their educational goals.

6. Although the adult learners who participated in this study have much in common with each other, each participant, like all human beings, has a unique set of needs for support, including institutional, personal, and internal supports. These needs change and evolve as participants (and their dependents) develop new abilities and interests and as their life circumstances and the contexts in which they live change.

7. Like all human beings, the adult learners who participated in this study rely on, create, and contribute to complex networks of support that help them to live, to support others, and to set and achieve goals. The presence of these support networks reveal that participants’ lives are characterized by interdependence within multiple contexts, despite the fact that welfare recipients are often viewed as “welfare dependent.”

8. The use of metaphor analysis as a pedagogical and curriculum development strategy in writing classrooms can foster critical pedagogy in that it provides access to learners’ unique knowledge and perspectives, promotes critical thinking, develops critical reading and writing skills, and offers a guide for learner-driven social action.

9. Because metaphor analysis offers unique insights into the conceptual structures that govern people’s thoughts, attitudes, assumptions, and actions, it can provide a powerful framework for understanding learners’ motivations and helping them to reach their educational and life goals.

The nine findings and their implications, discussed in the previous section of this chapter, resulted in the following recommendations:

1. When developing curriculum, educators need to take into account the diverse experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, interests, values, needs, strengths, and aspirations learners bring to the classroom in order to meet
the needs of the particular learners in their classrooms and to effectively foster their learning and achievement. It is also critically important for educators to understand the social, economic, political, and educational contexts in which learners operate, to pay attention to the ways these contexts affect learners in all domains of their lives, and to work together with learners in developing this knowledge in order to provide educational experiences that are relevant and effective.

In order to best serve adult learners, educators must look beyond their literacy or academic needs and understand the particular experiences, larger contexts, and the ways these experiences and contexts affect learners’ lives. Educators must recognize that learners’ educational experiences are affected by issues that may appear to have little to do with education. This includes their cultural and social backgrounds, their goals, interests, and aspirations, their prior educational experiences, their economic and support needs, their family situations, and their relationships to social service institutions such as the welfare system.

Understanding the larger social contexts of education is an important consideration when developing curriculum for all kinds of learners, and it is particularly critical when working with low-income adult learners because they are especially vulnerable to these contexts. For all of the adult learners who participated in this study, their educational experiences were profoundly affected by multiple, interconnected contexts, including welfare reform, the ABE field, and the ramifications of language, culture, race, gender, and class. In order to best serve adult learners, educators and policy makers need to have a good working knowledge of these contexts. For example, hiring staff who are knowledgeable about the welfare system and making connections with organizations such as local DTA offices, employers, and legal services agencies can help an educational program advocate
intelligently and effectively on behalf of learners who are welfare recipients. It is also critically important to provide learners with information on support agencies, educational institutions, and other avenues to help them negotiate the systems they rely on or need in order to meet their goals. Engaging learners themselves in researching the various contexts that affect them, as this study did, can provide them with empowering opportunities for social action while furthering their educational goals.

2. In order to effectively support learners in meeting their goals, both educators and policy makers need to pay attention to what adult learners themselves have to say about their goals, aspirations, and needs.

Adult learners are adults. They know best what they and their families want and need, where they have been, where they are headed, and what kinds of supports will best help them to get there. The adult learners who participated in this study were able to articulate in great detail what they wanted and needed from the various educational and social institutions to which they were connected. Educators and policy makers who ignore this valuable source of knowledge and information run the risk of wasting precious economic and social resources by creating support services that do not match the needs of those they are supposed to benefit.

3. When developing both educational and social service policies for adult learners, the diverse and evolving nature of their needs, abilities, and interests must be taken into account.

Educational and social service institutions need to provide adult learners with a broad and multifaceted range of opportunities for education and job-training programs as well as a variety of support services that are responsive to their diverse and evolving needs and interests. This study showed that the adult learners who
participated have very diverse needs, abilities, and interests, and that their needs for support evolve as their circumstances and the contexts in which they live change.

4. Educators, educational and social policy makers, and researchers who are addressing the needs and experiences of low-income adult learners should view adult learners as interdependent beings within their families, schools, and the larger society.

Viewing adult learners as interdependent within society, rather than as dependent upon social or educational systems (or as moving from dependency toward independence from these systems) allows educators, policy makers, and researchers to understand the complex ways that these learners make use of, contribute to, and create support systems that help them to meet their goals as well as how they respond to the changing contexts and circumstances of their lives. Using a framework of "learners as dependent" can lead to a perception of adult learners as passive receivers of support and educational services, fostering a "deficit" view of their abilities that can result in policies, programs, practices, and research agendas that further disempower learners. A dependency view can also perpetuate damaging stereotypes about adult learners, such as the notion that welfare recipients are "welfare dependent," and can foster a sense of powerlessness in learners. Viewing learners through a dependency framework obscures the dynamics of the rich, varied, and complex social, educational, and institutional networks of support in their lives.

On the other hand, approaching adult learners as interdependent beings can help those who work with them, or those who work on their behalf, to devise responsive solutions and interventions to the challenges they face. For educators working with adult learners, an approach in which both teachers and learners explore
together the dynamics of their interdependent lives can empower learners to further
develop their own strengths and help educators to better understand and make use of
the resourcefulness of the learners in their classrooms.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study reported here examined the educational experiences of a small
group of women in a particular time and place, illuminating their experiences within a
set of interrelated contexts, namely welfare reform, adult literacy, and the implications
of race, ethnicity, language, gender, and poverty. Further research in other locations,
with other participants, would add to an understanding of how these contexts, and
other related contexts, affect the learning and achievement of other groups of adult
learners who are current or former welfare recipients. Because welfare reform is a
relatively new phenomenon, and because it has been instituted differently in other
states, further study is sorely needed in order to document its effects and to
effectively advocate for change. Longitudinal studies are needed to document, over
time, how welfare reform is affecting adult learners’ ability to complete their
educational goals, how it affects their families’ educational experiences, as well as the
economic impacts of welfare reform on communities, regions, states, and nationwide.

This study also illuminated the multiple benefits - to learners, educators,
policy makers, and communities - of engaging in classroom-based participatory
research. Further studies that link research to learning would provide opportunities to
tap into and explore learners’ knowledge, enhancing learners’ literacy and academic
skills while engaging them in social actions that are relevant to their lives. Such
studies are needed to inform educational practice and foster critical multicultural
approaches to teaching and learning, and to guide the development of educational policy in ways that can better support learners, based on their individual and collective needs, interests, perspectives, and aspirations.

Epilogue: Tree of Letters Revisited

I began this report with a story about my own experiences with beginning literacy. As a young reader and writer, I took great pleasure in forming letters and words, whether I read them in the branches of an elm tree or wrote them with pencil and paper. I did not experience acquiring literacy in English as an arduous journey, nor did I ever have to wonder whether or not I would have the supports I needed to help me learn.

As a college student, an adult learner, a single parent, and a welfare recipient, I had my share of challenges. The challenges I faced were related to the responsibilities of adulthood, to being a parent, a woman, and a welfare recipient while pursuing an education. But I never questioned my right to go to college, nor doubted that I would have access to higher education if I was willing to work for it. I never thought about the privileges I enjoyed as a white English-speaking person, nor the advantages these aspects of my life gave me, until I graduated from college and began working with low-income Puerto Rican women in Holyoke. It was there that I began to understand how the playing field that is educational access has many levels. I learned that people end up on particular levels for reasons that have nothing to do with their innate abilities as learners and over which they have no control, such as their native languages, cultures, races, genders, and economic classes.
For the participants in this study, doubts about their access to education hover over their lives. In addition to the difficulties of raising children with few resources, these adult learners are engaged in a political struggle to acquire education — be it basic literacy, English language acquisition, a high school equivalency diploma, or a college education — though they are citizens in a democracy that purports to offer education as a basic right. But the right to education is an empty one if the supports that would allow people to exercise that right are withheld, whether through legislative actions that limit people’s access to public assistance or through entrenched and insidious social patterns of racism and discrimination against particular groups in this society. This study sought to illuminate the political struggle for education and its impacts on the experiences of a heroic group of women as they tried to exercise their right to pursue education, provide economic security for themselves and their families, develop their tremendous individual and collective potential, and participate fully in the democratic society to which they belong.
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