PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHING AND LEARNING
IN CAREER EXPLORATION PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN

by

KATHLEEN ANN MULLINS
B.A., University of Washington, 1987

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Department of Educational Studies)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
June 1996
© Kathleen Ann Mullins, 1996
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced
degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it
freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive
copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my
department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or
publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written
permission.

Department of EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date 8/14
ABSTRACT

This study provides detailed accounts of the perspectives on teaching and learning experienced by the instructors and participants in three career exploration programs for women. One of the programs was located at a community college, one at a private college, and one was offered through a non-profit agency. The perspectives of the women are represented by each individual’s expressed attitudes, feelings, and ideas about how they experienced teaching and learning. I also examine and relate the accounts of the women to the ways in which teaching processes and learning objectives were created, influenced, and/or constrained by the broader social and administrative context in which the programs take place. Therefore, the study addressed the following broad questions: (1) What values and attitudes toward teaching and learning are expressed by instructors and how do they shape the pedagogical interactions that take place in these career education programs? (2) What has been the participants’ experience of learning in these programs? And, (3) In what ways does the social, institutional, and political context in which the programs take place affect the teaching/learning environment?

This study originates from my interest as a feminist educator to gain a greater understanding of how critical and feminist pedagogical approaches are manifested in actual practice, in this case, three particular career exploration programs. Information for the study was gathered from program instructors through semi-structured interviews; through an informal focus group in each program with volunteer students; and by reviewing relevant program related materials.

After providing detailed accounts of the perspectives of the instructors, participants, and descriptions of each program, the external factors which create, influence, and constrain the nature of the programs, and the voices of the instructors and participants are explored in relation to the literature reviewed for the study. This analysis revealed that the instructors employed teaching approaches which are consistent with the values and aims of critical feminist pedagogy. However, teaching approaches were also applied which appear to reside within traditional educational approaches. Thus, in these particular contexts, the instructors created and acted within a teaching-learning environment which both reproduced and challenged the status quo.

The methodological approach utilized in this study illustrated how adult educators concerned with the liberatory possibilities of adult education must invariably operationalize these ideas in complex, constrained, and often contradictory social sites which act to shape the
possibilities of instruction. It did so by directing attention to both the social actors and the social
and political processes that act to create and organize specific adult education activities.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................. ii
Table of Contents ........................................ iv
Acknowledgments ........................................... vi

CHAPTER 1: SITUATING THE STUDY ............................ 1
  Introduction to the Study .................................. 1
  Background to the Study .................................. 3
  Significance of the Study ................................ 5
  Overview of Chapters. .................................... 6

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................ 7
  Women, Adult Education, and Employment ................ 7
  Studies of Teachers ...................................... 11
  Feminist and Critical Pedagogy ............................ 14
  Summary .................................................. 21

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ....................... 23
  Feminist Research Perspective ............................ 23
  Ethics, Dependability, and Transferability ............... 24
  Site Selection ............................................. 25
  Information Gathering Strategies ........................ 26
  Information Analysis Strategies .......................... 34
  Limitations of the Research Design ...................... 35

CHAPTER 4: THE NATURE OF THE PROGRAMS ................. 37
  Program One .............................................. 37
  Program Two ............................................. 42
  Program Three ........................................... 49
  Summary .................................................. 55

CHAPTER 5: THE INSTRUCTORS’ PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHING 58
  Aims of Teaching ........................................ 58
  Values and Beliefs about Teaching ........................ 61
  Instructional Strategies .................................. 66
  Summary .................................................. 71

CHAPTER 6: THE PARTICIPANTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING 74
  The Teaching/Learning Environment ........................ 74
  Inter-Relationships ........................................ 76
  Knowing One’s Self ....................................... 79
  Accessing Information and Skills ........................ 82
  Changing Perspectives ..................................... 84
  Summary .................................................. 86
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 7 : DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>88</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative and Organizational Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Approaches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Political Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Adult Education Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References .......................... 103

Appendices ......................... 108
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I must give my thanks to the women, both instructors and participants, who participated in my study from the three career exploration programs. The instructors graciously spent hours speaking with me about their programs, about their values and beliefs as instructors, and allowed me into their classrooms. It was a privilege for me to meet and learn from such vibrant and committed educators. The students also gave their time and generously shared their personal experiences during a very challenging and thought-provoking period of their lives.

I would also like to thank the members of my research committee - Kjell Rubenson, Shauna Butterwick, and Tom Sork. Throughout all of our individual and group meetings, each has gently supported, guided, and encouraged me in a constructive manner which provoked further thought and a more questioning analysis. They have been instrumental in making this the most enjoyable and profound experience of schooling that I have experienced. In particular, I would like to thank Shauna Butterwick. The two courses I took with her were stellar examples of applying a feminist approach to education in a constrained and often contradictory educational setting. Further, her patience assistance, passion for her work, and knowledgeable insights have greatly enriched my educational development and the shape of this thesis.

Other colleagues in the Department of Educational Studies have also provided support, and thoughtful conversation which helped to shape my study and my educational experience at UBC. Notably, Dr. Allison Tom has been both a mentor and a model for me in applying a critical feminist perspective to social research. I also wish to extend my thanks to my classmate, Lucy Alderson, for her friendship and encouragement, and to mis compañeros Kate Sweeney and Jeff Broihier for remodeling their house, and for providing endless hospitality and loving friendship over the last couple of years.

Finally, I would like to express my love and thanks to my family. My husband, Jim Sussex, remarkable ability to listen, analyze, and provide stimulating and insightful comments helped me to clarify my thoughts and greatly improved this work. He and my family also provided support and encouragement and always made me feel entirely capable during the difficult moments - (months!) of writing.
CHAPTER 1: SITUATING THE STUDY

Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and provide detailed accounts of the perspectives on teaching and learning held by the instructors and participants in three career exploration programs for women. Through in-depth interviews with program instructors, focus groups with participants, and by reviewing program-related materials, the perspectives of the women, represented by individuals' attitudes, feelings, and ideas about how they experience teaching and learning, are presented. Further, though most educators are largely responsible for creating the learning environment of the classroom and for the manner in which curriculum content is transmitted, they and their programs are also subject to external forces from institutional, political, and social structures in society. Therefore, I examine and relate the accounts of the women involved in this study to the ways in which teaching and thus learning processes are created, influenced, or constrained by external factors.

My interest in this study originates from two sources. The first source stems from my academic interest to strengthen the linkage between the theoretical discourse on feminist and critical pedagogy and actual practice by illuminating the conditions of teaching and learning in these particular career exploration programs for women. Accordingly, my goal is to gain an understanding of the social context in which the program takes place, the aims of teaching, the nature of the pedagogical relationships which occur among the women in these classrooms, and the educational consequences of those relationships.

The second source stems from my interest in gaining a greater understanding of the experiences of women in relation to the processes of decision-making for education and employment. This interest is based on my personal concern about the lives of women, my desire to work towards the advancement of women in our society, and my own particular beliefs as a feminist educator concerned with the emancipatory possibilities of adult education, therefore, it is necessary to make clear my stance on the meaning of bringing a critical feminist perspective to this inquiry.

Feminists and feminisms are commonly categorized according to particular ideological and epistemological positions but, fundamentally, feminism is a social and political movement that is concerned with issues affecting all women and is premised on the concern of advancing
women’s interests in society and empowering individual women. Furthermore, feminists see
gender, along with race, class, sexual orientation and other expressions of difference as basic
organizing principles in the shaping of consciousness as well as in the distribution of power and
privilege in society (Lather, 1986). And as Rubenson (1989) says, “the role of education as an
integral part of social movement’s broader struggles for social change is central” (p.58).
Consequently, feminist and, indeed, all adult educators who want to challenge or change existing
social power relations should adopt teaching approaches that contribute to the achievement of
that goal. Thus, it is my personal desire to gain a greater understanding of women’s experiences
and issues related to education and employment, along with my interest in advancing my own
and others’ understanding of everyday practices which appear to reside within critical and
feminist traditions, which has led me to undertake this exploration of the perspectives of women
involved in three career exploration programs.

During the course of my study, some of the educators involved explicitly identified
themselves as feminists and some did not. However, I do think it is safe to say that all of us
“share a commitment to taking women students seriously, a consciousness of the extent to which
gender is embedded in our social structures, and an understanding of the differing educational
needs of different groups of students” (Maher & Tetreault, 1994, p.13). I bring this forward
because the goal of my study is not to add to the discussions on differences in ideology that may
exist among feminist and critical pedagogues nor is it to judge whether these instructors are
acting in a particularly “feminist” manner, rather, following Gore (1993) an exploration of
pedagogy means:

a kind of a focus on the processes of teaching that demands attention be drawn to the
politics of those processes and to the broader political contexts within which they are
situated. Therefore, instruction and social vision are analytical components of
pedagogy; insofar as the concept implies both, each requires attention (p.5).

Moreover, because the context and processes of teaching are inseparable from the experience and
outcomes of learning (Conti, 1985), a study of pedagogical values and expressed experiences
should also include an examination of the ways in which students and teachers interact with each
other in the classroom (Gore, 1993). Accordingly, this study is concerned with exploring the
following broad questions in the hopes of providing insights into teaching and learning in career
exploration programs for women:
• What values and attitudes toward teaching and learning are expressed by instructors and how do they shape the pedagogical interactions that take place in these career education programs?
• What has been the participants’ experience of learning in these programs?
• In what ways does the social, institutional, economic, and political context in which the programs take place affect the teaching/learning environment?

**Background to the Study**

Career exploration courses fit into the realm of adult education commonly called “bridging” or “pre-employment” programs. Career exploration programs and other bridging programs are preparatory programs concerned with providing participants with some combination of information relevant to making future short and long term career, education, and training decisions. Curricular areas may include developing skills related to employment interviewing and job search; pursuing academic upgrading, or technical and shop skills; providing hands-on work placements; providing professional development in the form of communication, problem-solving, computer, research, and team-building skills; and personal development with an emphasis on assertiveness, self-confidence and self-esteem building and other life management topics. According to a recent report by the B.C. Labour Force Development Board (1995), the aim of learning in bridging programs is to “assist women to overcome the educational, attitudinal and structural barriers they face in reaching their full labour market potential” (p.21).

Women who elect to participate in career explorations programs and attempt to overcome the educational, attitudinal, and structural barriers they face defy an easily generalizable profile. They can be women who are seeking to change careers, those who wish to return to school or work after some period of absence, or those who are entering the workforce for the first time. They are broadly diverse in their socio-economic, age, and racial backgrounds, physical and mental abilities, and previous educational and career experiences. They may be single, divorced, married, with or without partners and family supports, and with or without children. They may be one of the one women in four in Canada who has been sexually abused at some time in their lives, or one of the one women in ten that is a victim of domestic violence (National Action Committee Review, 1991). They may be recovering from addictions, or have experienced a corrections background. They may be from a women-headed household, 57% of whom currently
live below the poverty line; they may be one of the 17.5% of Canadian women who have less
than a Grade 9 education, or they may be college graduates (National Action Committee Review,

The reasons that women give for wanting to participate in career exploration programs
and education and paid employment are broad, ranging from a need or desire to become
financially self-supporting to being interested in finding new jobs or careers that may offer them
greater economic and/or personal satisfaction. Many women must combine the role of student
and/or worker with the responsibilities of being a partner, single mother, caregiver, or a
combination thereof. For single mothers, incorporating paid work into their lives can be
particularly difficult. In addition to coping with arranging for adequate childcare and the financial
difficulties which often occur during the career development or change process, they may be
faced with guilt or social pressure to spend more time with their children, at the same time,
women often face social stigma and/or overt pressure from the social services system to return to
work or school.

There are also institutional impediments which make education and training plans
difficult for women to achieve once the decision is made. Some women are at a disadvantage for
participating in full-time or day-time studies because they have to work to support family
members or because responsibilities at home preclude full-time enrollment. Eligibility
requirements and admissions policies such as Graduate Record Examinations and other tests,
procuring letters of recommendation, or the age of previous credits may be an issue for women
who have been away from school or other degree granting institutions for a length of time
(Lewis, 1988). Moreover, many women who are exploring a career change or are in the process
of re-entry often express self-doubt about their abilities to perform in school or employment
situations (Marienau, 1995). In fact, some social assistance recipients and employment
counselors say that the social assistance system actually creates or deepens such individual
problems as low self-esteem and lack of confidence which can make taking the steps necessary
for (re)entry difficult and traumatic (Lord, 1994). Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly
difficult to access funds for tuition assistance or financial aid due to the federal government’s
policy of “fiscal restraint” on transfer payments to the provinces for post-secondary education,

Even though women are entering and re-entering the Canadian work-force in ever
increasing numbers and women have greater access to higher education and more varied
employment opportunities than ever before, economic restructuring since the 1980s has led to an increase in the creation of low-paid, part-time and temporary jobs primarily in the sales and service sector where 84% of women already work (National Action Committee Review, 1991). During this same time, the unemployment rate in British Columbia and Canada as a whole has tended to move upwards and projections predict slow economic growth in most sectors in the future (B.C. Labour Force Development Board, 1995). Therefore, despite women's increased participation in the work-force and many women's need to have a wage sufficient to support dependents, the route to self-sufficiency through employment remains precarious and difficult (Lord, 1994).

To conclude, it is important to remember that the timing for participation in career exploration programs is not solely a function of motivation because the women who elect to participate are not a homogenous group, nor can one make a definitive statement about their socio-demographic location, or the impact of previous life experiences. Rather, a woman's entry or reentry into (further) education, training, or the work-force is related to the web of complex interactions of relationships and events which occur in each woman's life (Lewis, 1988).

Significance of the Study

Numerous scholarly studies have considered feminist and critical teaching/learning processes in youth and adult classrooms in formal educational institutions, but there is very little research associated with adult education programs which focus on issues directly related to job training and employment and which explores the perspectives of both teachers and students. Indeed, I was unable to find any studies set in career exploration programs. Therefore, by providing an opportunity for the women in these programs to voice issues and share knowledge and reflections about their teaching and learning experiences, this study helps to illuminate specific adult education practices which, I believe, are located within the realm of possibilities suggested by the literature on critical and feminist pedagogy. Moreover, this approach elicited knowledge that contributes to the body of adult education literature concerned with how critical/feminist approaches to teaching and learning occur in practice, in this case, career exploration programs for women.

The questions asked in the context of this research attempt to elicit responses which originate from the perspective of each woman's experiences. By striving to portray the
perspectives of the women involved in these particular programs, the study contributes to the body of feminist literature concerned with looking for a deeper understanding of women’s realities by exploring the meaning women make of their own experiences in different spheres and at different moments of their lives (Chester & Grossman, 1990; Lather, 1988; Smith, 1987).

And finally, it is my hope that this study contributes to the ongoing discussions regarding the practice of adult education, its relationship to social and popular movements, and the extent to which adult education activities can “find ways to stimulate the development of critical consciousness and thought, ... [and thus hopefully] contribute to a more equitable, peaceful and just society” (Cunningham, 1988, p.144).

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter Two, I review the literature which helped me to determine the conceptual and theoretical framework for exploring the teaching/learning context in these career exploration programs and for analyzing the interview and focus group information. Chapter Three discusses the methodology used to collect the information for the study. Chapter Four provides a thorough description of the three programs that are a part of the study and the factors which act to frame the teaching/learning environment. Chapter Five presents the instructors’ perspectives on teaching in these career exploration programs. Chapter Six presents the perspectives of the students who volunteered to take part in the focus groups. And Chapter Seven discusses the perspectives of the instructors and participants in conjunction with an examination of the effects of the frame factors on the teaching/learning environment. This chapter closes with a discussion of the implications for adult education practice and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Given my desire to illuminate the perspectives of women who take part in three career exploration programs and to explore the social and structural forces extant within and around these programs, several areas of literature were drawn from in order to gain an understanding of why the pedagogical orientation in these programs takes the shape that it does. I begin by examining a broad body of research that discusses women, adult education programs, and employment. This research provides an overview of the social structural context in which career exploration programs are located in order to gain an understanding of the issues involved for adult women who are entering, re-entering, or in the workforce.

Next, I turn to the literature on studies of teachers which explores how educators think about and act in their work. This area of research provides the conceptual framework of this study. I include a discussion of frame factor theory which links the micro-analysis of individual’s teaching approaches and objectives back to the broader social context in which they reside. Finally, I examine the literature which explores the theoretical concerns and actual practices of feminist and critical pedagogues. This literature provides the theoretical heart of this study and is the lens through which I ultimately filtered the voices of the women. During this discussion, I present what is common to both critical and feminist pedagogical concerns and what is seen as particular to feminist pedagogy, including its relationship to theories of women’s development.

Women, Adult Education, and Employment

Much of the research on women, adult education and training, and employment is concerned with the barriers women face in accessing basic training and education, returning to higher education and further job training, and participating in the workforce. However, as several of these studies reveal, women are often constructed as being the bearers of the educational, attitudinal, and structural barriers which impinge upon their ability to participate as full and equal members of the work force rather than the structure of the work force presenting barriers to women which may impair or prevent their entry or mobility (Federal-Provincial-Territorial Joint Working Group, 1994; Gittell & Moore, 1989; Harlan & Steinberg, 1989; Pateman, 1989). Overall, these studies suggest that the fundamental issues facing women in accessing and participating in further education, training, and employment are demographic variables (such as
age, race, family constellation, physical abilities, and educational levels) together with occupational education and training policies which generally ignore most adult women’s limited access to financial resources for education and training, and support services and systems such as childcare and counseling. Further, education and training policies tend to ignore the reality that these variables and issues differ per individual and are also related to physical location and the range of employment opportunities available in any given area.

For women who are poor or on welfare, Harlan & Steinberg (1989) maintain that public training and employment policy in the United States has been driven by the goal of transforming participants into self-supporting workers. However, they assert that the meaning of self-sufficiency appears to be different for men and women:

To the extent that there is any consensus on the meaning of self-sufficiency for women, under current welfare and training policies, it has come to be defined not in relation to women’s living standard, but in relation to a program’s capacity to reduce the burden female-headed families place on society. In short, it means getting women off the welfare rolls (p.39).

Similarly, Pateman (1989) argues that the dramatic shifts in the number of women entering the paid work force have not been sufficient to make women full, self-supporting members of the employment society. She views the welfare state as not only based on class structure but argues that it is also constructed in a sexually divided way. Basically, both historically and currently, in the “patriarchal welfare state,”

the civil right to work is still only half-heartedly acknowledged for women. Women in the workplace are still perceived primarily as wives and mothers, not workers. ...Women’s wages are viewed as a ‘supplement’ to those of the breadwinner. ...Women, it is held, do not need wages in the same way that men do (p.190).

That women are prominent as welfare claimants is because they are poorer as a whole than men and perhaps the reason why women are poor is that it is hard for many women to find a job that pays a living wage. Thus, economically disadvantaged adult women as social welfare recipients are stigmatized and blamed for their poverty and for living within social norms of the gender division of labour, however, they are generally not provided with the types of education, training, and support programs that would enable them to become full members of the employment society.

Related studies on women and employment concentrate on the social and educational reasons for women’s employment in specific labour sectors and the barriers faced by women to
access employment in trades and technical occupations (Johnson, 1988; Schom-Moffett & Braundy, 1989). These studies point out that the persistent lack of women in many sectors of the workforce continues to be a stubborn problem that is perpetuated by numerous factors. Some of these factors relate to men’s socialized resistance to women entering trades and technical occupations, expressed by hostility, social isolation, or sexual harassment; some relate to women’s sex-role socialization. Other factors relate to women’s greater likelihood of having responsibility for arranging early morning childcare frequently necessary for tradeswork, general child rearing, maintaining the household, and their lesser likelihood of having taken high school math classes (Haignere & Steinberg, 1989).

Overall, these studies contend that uneven labour sector employment is exacerbated by a lack of informational outreach services targeted explicitly to women and by generally inadequate support, training, and educational opportunities for women who wish to enter work arenas which are not traditionally arenas in which women are employed. Further, these authors suggest that non-traditional career exploration and job training programs, in concert with self-esteem and assertiveness training, extended periods of hands-on skill development, role modeling and mentoring by other women, and on-going and follow-up support to make informed career choices are essential to assist women who wish to enter or re-train for participation in non-traditional sectors of the workforce.

Increasingly, studies on woman, adult education and training, and employment stress the importance of considering both personal characteristics and social forces in the shaping of women’s educational and employment choices and roles. To illustrate, McLaren’s (1987) study explored the life and educational experiences of adult women who had made the commitment to enroll in an adult education program in England. Her work critiqued traditional theories of socialization, which attempt to explain how people define and accept their differentiated roles in society, by stressing the importance of exploring the process of human agency within the context of social structural constraints. She found that her subjects had ended up pursuing traditional female employment arenas not so much because of female socialization or personal desire but because of the subtle and not so subtle ways that institutional and social barriers had impinged upon their education and employment experiences and opportunities as women. She argues that socialization theory implies that the individual, rather than social structures, is to blame for whatever befalls them and is, therefore, inadequate by itself for helping researchers to understand consequences of social structural constraints upon human agency.
Gittell & Moore (1989) conducted a study which explored the perspectives of women on social assistance who were enrolled in education or training programs in three cities in the United States and the various education and training policy makers who were involved with serving this low-income population. They found that the strongest reason that the women articulated for pursuing education and training and wanting full-time employment was to be financially independent and to have control over their lives. When the women spoke of work, they were clear that their personal goal of having a “real job” meant secure employment (not temporary, part-time, or low-paid) with reasonable benefits and an adequate income, and work that was interesting to them. On the other hand, policy makers (and the public) generally seemed to accept the notion that having any job is better for women on social assistance than being on welfare.

Hence, while there was general agreement among policy makers and those affected that economic independence is preferable to welfare, there was not agreement about whether any employment constitutes independence or whether the social costs of longer-term training and education is a reasonable alternative to encouraging more immediate employment because it offers greater opportunity for economic independence in the future. Gittell & Moore conclude by arguing that public policies must be altered to produce longer-term training and educational opportunities for low-income women in order to increase their possibility of gaining true economic independence. They call for increased incentives for states to enhance effective programs and create new opportunities that are thoughtfully developed and tailored to specific target populations. In particular, they suggest that integrating student financial aid for education and training with welfare payments would reward rather than punish women for electing to pursue a longer-term investment in their future.

In a 1991 study, Nettles showed how intractable the opportunities for accessing gainful employment for some women can be when she examined the prospects of U.S. African women on welfare to become self-sufficient and for those with low income to increase their incomes. In general, she found that participation in basic education, higher education, and job training programs have only a small impact on increasing the self-sufficiency and upward mobility of African American women. However, the more education and training women have, the more likely they are to be advantaged in the labour market. But, for the most part, even if African American women do find jobs after education and training experiences, they may become “self-sufficient” in terms of being off welfare but still live relatively impoverished lives.
Nettles attributes most African American women’s low wages to a combination of their early experiences of race, sex, and class bias in education, and to their relative location as women workers in the labour market. She proposes that women’s labour market location stems partly from general sex-role socialization within the home and society, and the need to pursue jobs that will have the least impact on familial obligations. It also stems from African American women’s marginal access to training and employment in higher-paid occupations, and a social system in which women of color still suffer racial discrimination. Nettles suggests that the opportunity for poor African American women (and other poor women) to become self-supporting depends on several factors: the quality and range of available training programs; their willingness and ableness to participate in available education and training programs and the process of job search; the availability of supports from family and local government; the availability of job opportunities requiring the skills they have and have learned; and the willingness of employers to hire them.

Studies of women, adult education, and employment provide much knowledge about the realities of women’s employment lives, and the social and physical barriers women face in accessing education and job training which can lead to meaningful and economic viable employment from many perspectives. However, I was unable to find any studies which specifically explore what or how career exploration programs may contribute to adult women’s education and employment choices and experiences, or any that illuminate the perspectives of the women who participate in such programs. Therefore, I now turn to the literature concerned with exploring the contexts and cultures of teaching. These studies provided the conceptual framework of my research.

**Studies of Teaching**

Research which tries to understand how groups of educators think about their work can be characterized as studies of ‘the cultures of teaching’ (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). These studies suggest that teaching cultures are shaped by the contexts of teaching and are embodied in the work related beliefs and knowledge that teachers share and their beliefs about appropriate ways of acting on the job. Consequently, studies of instructors and their teaching processes should not only be concerned with what teachers think, they must also include an understanding of the constraints and opportunities that impinge upon them (Clark & Pederson, 1986).
Studies concerning individual teachers generally explore the ways in which knowledge is actively acquired and used by teachers and the circumstances that affect its acquisition and employment such as the theories, beliefs, and values teachers hold about their role and how these guide their practice (Caulderhead, 1987; Gudmundsdottir, 1990). In other words, these studies "purport to study 'the personal', that is the what, why, and where of individual pedagogical action" by investigating the ways in which teaching is conceptualized in order to make explicit the frames of reference through which teachers perceive and process information (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, p.487). Related research on teachers' knowledge has explored such issues as the conceptions which shape and direct the work of teachers (Elbaz, 1983; Larsson, 1983; Pratt, 1992), and how teachers' personal values influence teaching processes (Halkes & Deijkers, 1983).

Clark & Peterson (1986) developed a model in which they suggest that there are two domains involved in the process of teaching. They are teachers' thought processes and teachers' actions and their observable effects. Teachers' thought processes include teachers' interactive thoughts and decisions, teachers' theories and beliefs, and teacher planning. Teachers' thought processes can be illuminated by the following kinds of questions: "what are teachers' intentions, what are their interpretations of events, what value do they attach to certain kinds of student teacher relations, what personal needs do they have, and what rules [personal values and beliefs] do they follow in their actions" (Halkes & Deijkers, 1983, p.150). Clark (1986) encourages researchers to pursue this sort of questioning in studies of individual teachers and teacher's cultures by suggesting that "we must come to understand teachers' ways of knowing and their beliefs about the nature of knowledge itself before we can begin to understand the role of knowledge and curriculum in teacher thinking and in education more generally" (p.11).

Teachers' actions and their observable effects include teachers' classroom behavior, students' classroom behavior, and student achievement. The relationship between these three variables and the variables in the domain of teachers' thought processes is assumed to be inter-related and reciprocal and circular. In other words, there is the possibility that teacher behavior affects student behavior, which, in turn, may affect teacher behavior and ultimately student achievement and so on.

Studies of teachers emphasize that teachers' beliefs, intentions, actions and their observable effects along with the context in which the teaching is taking place influence teaching approaches and thus learning. Further, teaching conceptions are dynamic; they evolve
continuously through interactions with students and peers, and through responses to context which act to confirm or challenge thinking and beliefs (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Pratt, 1992).

**Frame Factor Theory**

Another useful theoretical tool for analyzing teaching approaches and linking them with broader social and structural components of the teaching context is frame factor theory. Broadly defined, frame factor theory analyzes the ways in which teaching processes are chosen, influenced, and constrained through various social, physical, administrative, and economic decisions and realities (Lundgren, 1981). Basically, frame factors represent the conditions under which the instructor has to do her job (Dahllöf, 1977). Frame factor theory thus links the system of classroom activities with larger social processes. Examples of frame factors are the size and physical structures of the school, the ability to access the school by students, the available supply of teaching materials and time for teaching, class size and groupings of students, time constraints such as the length of school program and school day, and time needed by individual students to achieve program goals (Dahllöf, 1977).

In addition, Lundgren (1981) has further developed the notion of frame factors to include the time needed by students to master content, and course goals and objectives which are inextricably linked to larger social processes. These factors may restrict the amount of freedom that the instructor has in such matters as the number and pacing of lessons in a given subject, and classroom interactions, which therefore impacts content selection and teaching processes. In his later research, Lundgren (from Nesbit, 1995) also included more conceptual factors such as the instructor’s personal competencies and their attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Studies of teachers and teachers’ cultures and frame factor theory emphasize the importance of examining not only individual teacher’s beliefs, values, and actions but the larger social, economic, and political context in which they take place. In addition, Gore (1993) suggests that teaching approaches contain within them a social vision, perhaps not an explicit vision, but often one that is based on notions of individual development and tacit sense of mission. Therefore, I now turn to the literature on feminist and critical pedagogy which is premised on the notion that schooling is not and cannot be a neutral enterprise and emphasizes the necessity of working toward social change. This literature provided the study’s theoretical framework which guided my analysis of the perspectives on teaching and learning experienced by the women in the career exploration programs involved in this study.
Feminist and Critical Pedagogy

Feminist and critical pedagogies have their roots in particular political and theoretical movements. Feminist theoretical concerns have grown from the world-wide women’s movement, primarily since the 1960s. Feminist pedagogy has developed from feminist theoretical concerns, recent academic critiques of critical pedagogy’s theory and practice, and through the development of Women’s Studies programs in colleges and universities. Feminist theory and pedagogy is also closely related to and has developed in conjunction with recent scholarship on theories of women’s development.

Critical theory grew from the early work of critical social and educational theorists, primarily from Germany, and from Italy, United States, and England, as a response to the political and social events which took place in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. Critical pedagogy developed from two strands: the “liberation” model of pedagogy developed by Freire and others which links education to political and economic social power relations based on an analysis of class; the other strand resides with academic attempts to develop a critical theory of education. Consequently, the literature on feminist and critical theory and pedagogy displays considerable latitude in emphasis, however, commonalities are also revealed.

Generally, critical theories of education are constructed as oppositional theories which draw from two theoretical traditions: resistance theory which is concerned with the ways that individuals and classes assert their own experiences and contest or resist the ideological and material forces imposed upon them in various settings; and reproduction theory which is concerned with analyzing the processes through which existing social power relationships are maintained (Giroux, 1983; Weiler, 1988). Feminist educational theorists have contributed to the class-based discussions of critical theorists with their concern for utilizing resistance and reproduction theories in order to analyze gender, race, and class under the system of patriarchy (Weiler, 1988). Thus, Lather (1991) defines a critical feminist pedagogy as “that which attends to practices of teaching/learning intended to interrupt particular historical, situated systems of oppression” (p. 121).

Traditional educational theories, on the other hand, generally see schooling as “the means of rationally distributing individuals in what is conceived as a basically just society. Reforms are seen as adjustments of a fundamentally sound system of the social allocation of human beings”
(Weiler, 1988, p.5). In the traditional world view, the dominant assumption is that schools as instructional sites are the major mechanism for the development of a democratic and egalitarian social order. That schools are equally influential as cultural and political sites which reproduce “the logic of capitalism through the ideological and material forms of privilege and domination that structure the lives of students from various class, gender, racial, and ethnic groupings” is largely ignored (Giroux, 1989, p.128). Thus, the task of critical educational theorists has been to make traditional educational assumptions problematic by questioning the social structural relations which exist in the production of knowledge, power, and domination.

Consequently, feminist and critical (hereafter referred to as liberatory) pedagogical approaches operate from the premise that education is not and cannot be a value-free or neutral enterprise, and share a basic ideology as to the necessity of social transformation through linkages with social and political movements. Both share the foundational assumption that the structures of repressive unequal social power relations exist both in the classroom and in society. Therefore, concern about the structures and consequences of teacher’s authority play a central role in these discourses.

For example, Weiler (1991) suggests that liberatory educators should accept their power as an authority but consciously attempt to construct their pedagogy to recognize and encourage the capacity of their students to theorize and thus create their own meanings and understand their own social positions of power. According to Hayes (1989), the recognition of difference and the examination of self and social power structures in and outside of the classroom necessitates a commitment by liberatory educators to teaching processes that seek to incorporate collaborative, participatory, and experiential approaches into the learning process. However, as Briskin (1990), Giroux (1989), and others point out, the ideology and practice of sharing power as authority and of validating student experience can act to reproduce rather than challenge power relations in classrooms. Therefore, Briskin advocates a strategy of “teaching leadership” which recognizes the authority of the teacher and yet rejects authoritarianism, and “seeks to equip students to use power (for those unused to it), to acknowledge their power (for those to whom power has accrued by virtue of their class, race, or gender) and to develop an appreciation of collective power” (p.11).

Both approaches also share a common vision or goal as to the possibility of using some form of authority-with rather than authority-over, or as Giroux (1989) terms it, “emancipatory authority,” for the empowerment of individuals and groups (and teachers themselves) through the
process of consciousness-raising. In other words, they “emphasize the need to develop critical consciousness as well as the need to change society as it is presently constructed” (Weiler, 1991, p.6). Thus, according to Hart (1990), a liberatory educational process proposes to foster a theoretical consciousness which is capable of understanding and criticizing individual experience in the light of larger social forces, as well as in terms of bringing to life the richness of individual and social differences, thus producing a desire both to dwell in, appreciate, and transcend these differences in a process of mutual understanding (p.135).

The aim of liberatory approaches and their concerns about the uses of authority and the goal of empowerment is to encourage adoption of reflective and reflexive educational practices based on the analysis and illumination of women’s and men’s multiple and different roles, experiences, and realities in relation to classroom topics and materials in the hope of creating an affective teaching/learning environment (Giroux, 1991; hooks, 1989; Weiner, 1994).

What makes feminist pedagogy different from critical pedagogy is its attention to the particular needs and experiences of women and its grounding in feminist theory as the basis of knowledge. Feminist approaches were/are premised on the notion of “making visible the real experience of gender in society, in the school, and in the classroom” (Briskin, 1990, p.22). Moreover, recent feminists, women of color, and postmodern theorists have contributed greatly to the discussions on the theory and development of liberatory pedagogy by revealing that it did not (some think still does not) address “the possibility of simultaneous and contradictory positions of oppression and dominance... [instead] oppression was implicitly assumed to be uniform for all the oppressed” (Weiler, 1991, p.453). These theorists and practitioners have created and demanded an awareness of the importance that expressions of difference based on gender and race, class, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation play in the shaping of life experiences and positions of knowing. As Ng (1995) states, “educationally, it is the responsibility of critical teachers to begin to explicate [sexism and racism], so that we can confront our own racism and sexism, and work towards eradicating them in all spheres of social life” (p.135).

Two practice-based studies which explore the work of feminists concerned with the liberatory possibilities of education are Weiler (1988) and Maher & Tetreault’s (1994) works set respectively in high schools and higher education institutions in the United States. Weiler’s study explored the beliefs and practices of women teachers and administrators in two public high schools who profess a feminist epistemology. Her study attempts to locate the struggles and
actions of these individuals in relation to larger social and economic forces that impinge upon them.

Weiler stresses that all educators are actors and agents in complex social sites where social forces shape the possibilities of transformative work. Moreover, teachers and students alike are “historically situated beings, ... both have experienced and participated in relationships of domination, submission, oppression, and privilege which have helped to shape who they are and how they interpret the world” (p. 125). Thus, the recognition that individual women are subjects with conflicting gender, race, and class interests and knowledge is vital to understanding the reality of interacting and conflicting forms of power and resistance in educational settings.

Weiler observes that while educators (and students) are profoundly bounded by social and institutional constraints, they also have room to negotiate, analyze, and create their own meanings in the social world they inhabit. Though critical teaching in dominant institutions means that teachers are constantly living a contradiction, she argues that the possibilities for critical work exist within that very contradiction. Her subjects, for example, though they work in institutions which arguably act to reproduce and justify the contemporary social structural relations of the U.S., also sought to encourage opportunities for the development of critical consciousness by raising questions about texts, by encouraging a critical examination of the roles of men and women, and by making their classrooms places where accepted social norms and realities based on different forms of oppression are questioned. Thus, the empowerment of students in this context meant encouraging them to explore and analyze the forces acting upon their lives and respecting and legitimizing their voices in the classroom.

Maher & Tetreault’s (1994) study focused on interviews and observations with seventeen feminist instructors and their students at six colleges. Their goal was to document the pedagogical approaches and dynamics that occurred in these classrooms by exploring the shifting subject positions and roles that teacher and student alike create and live which then shape the transactions of the classroom. They developed four broad themes to encompass the events and concerns they saw reflected in the relationships between the instructors, their students, the course materials, and the larger social contexts in which these relationships take place. They are mastery, voice, authority, and positionality.

In the feminist classrooms involved in Maher & Tetreault’s study, the theme of ‘mastery’ is concerned with describing the processes by which teachers and students make increasingly complex interpretations of the materials and experiences of the classroom rather than reaching
definitive conclusions to be measured by some fixed or ‘objective’ academic standard. In
developing mastery, they found that these feminist teachers encouraged students to seek
knowledge on their own terms as well as in concert with others so that individual knowledge
became part of a social construction of knowledge.

The theme of ‘voice’ is concerned with exploring the processes and consequences of
bringing personal questions and perspectives to the classroom by both teacher and student. Based
on each class’s composition of individuals, expressed by their gendered, raced, and classed
differences and their lived experiences, they found that each synthesis of voices creates both
possibilities and limitations in terms of how and which topics of discussion are developed or
repressed.

The theme of ‘authority’ is concerned with exploring the uses and construction of a
teacher’s authority by herself, her students, and the university community. They found that
authority was not represented by scholarly expertise, but was grounded in each teacher’s own
teaching motives, intellectual experiences, and life histories, and that the varying use of authority
affects the processes of knowledge creation. In general, Maher & Tetreault’s subjects tried to
utilize their position of and as ‘authority’ in order to encourage and assist students in taking more
responsibility for their own learning rather than waiting to receive a designated body of
knowledge from a professorial source.

The theme of ‘positionality’ considers how specific teaching contexts reflect the shifting
relationships of power both within and outside of the classroom and how these positional factors
shape how knowledge is conveyed and received. In this study, more than any other single factor,
what they call ‘positionality’ influenced the construction of knowledge. For example, whether
teachers and students were male or female, white or Hispanic, where they were located
geographically and where they came from culturally, made a difference in the way that classroom
dynamics were expressed.

Although Weiler and Maher & Tetreault’s studies and others show that many educators
accept and are working to contextualize in practice the main tenets of liberatory pedagogy, and
discussions on gender and the recognition of shifting subject positions have been incorporated
into more recent writing on critical pedagogy (see Giroux, 1991), some post-structuralist/
modernist feminists are calling into question some of the fundamental elements of liberatory
pedagogy itself. These analyses can be viewed as part of the broader shifts in the women’s
movement from emphasizing commonalities among women to a perspective which attends to the
differences in lived experience among women. Further, they are in response to the postmodern concerns which focus on addressing the shifting conditions and circumstances which ground critical practices in relation to their changing historical conditions and make knowledge both possible and problematic (Lather, 1992).

For example, in Luke & Gore’s (1992) collection, Ellsworth (1989) questions the concepts of empowerment, student voice, use of dialogue, and critical reflection as authentic means of enabling teachers and students to give voice to their experiences and reach common understandings. She argues that strategies such as student dialog and empowerment give the illusion of equality while leaving the “essentially paternalistic project of education itself” (p.306) intact because critical education is always “predicated on the interests of those who are in the position to define utopian projects” (p. 308). Further, she argues that critical pedagogy assumes a commitment on the part of the teacher toward ending the student’s oppression and assumes that students are willing or able to engage in authentic self-expression and the exchange of ideas. Ellsworth argues that these assumptions do not problematize the realities of the sexual, cultural, race, and class-related social positionalities inherent in each classroom.

In essence, Ellsworth calls upon liberatory educators to reflect upon what the concepts of critical pedagogy facilitate and what they may silence and marginalize. She suggests that the recognition of different social positionalities and the shifting social relationships of power which occur in educational settings requires an ongoing examination of role and authority by instructors within any given classroom in order to facilitate and support a contextual, political, and historically situated practice (Ellsworth, 1989; hooks, 1989).

Gore’s (1990) discussion in the same collection about liberatory pedagogy’s ultimate goal of empowerment was also particularly thought-provoking. Her concerns are similar to Ellsworth in that she argues that liberatory discourses conceive of power as something the teacher has and can give to the students. Gore proposes that the construction of “empowerment” in critical and feminist discourses “attribute extraordinary abilities to the teacher, and hold a view of agency which risks ignoring the [institutional and social] context(s) of teachers’ work” (p. 57). Gore argues, based on Foucault’s conception of power as “exercised” and “circulating” and existing “only in action,” that to ‘empower’ cannot mean the giving of power, but it could mean “the exercise of power in an attempt (that might not be successful) to help others to exercise power” (p. 59). Moreover, conceiving of power as exercised requires that the work of empowering be considered context specific and related to actual practice. Gore explains,
"...Context must be conceived as filled with social actors whose personal and group histories position them as subjects immersed in social patterns. Thus, contexts for the work of empowerment need to be defined historically and politically with acknowledgment of the unique struggles that characterize the exercise of power at the micro levels" (p.61).

Theories of Women's Development

An important and distinctive feature of feminist pedagogy is its linkage to research which is specifically concerned with theories of women's development. Though this research is related to some of the previously discussed research which examines the process of socialization and power of agency, I have located it here because many feminist pedagogues suggest this work gives feminist pedagogy its "epistemological emphasis on the subjective roots of our thinking processes, on the relation of personal experiences, emotions, and values to what we know" (Maher, 1987, p.96). Within the literature on women's development the ideas of Gilligan (1982), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986), and the more recent work from the Stone Center (e.g., Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991) have been particularly influential.

Gilligan's study was concerned with how women and girls resolve serious moral dilemmas in their lives. She found that in resolving disputes, women (and women as learners) speak in a "different voice" than men. Women, she noted, have a greater orientation than men towards involvement in empathetic and compassionate relationships that may lead to a creative consensus about how each participant's needs can be met in dispute resolution. Her study demonstrated that much of the female experience of morality is organized around issues of responsibility for other people within the context of investment in relationships. As a result, this early work revealed the inadequacy of psychological theories based on measuring women's (and men's) development in terms of separation and autonomy.

Belenky et al.'s study explored how women learn and the experiences of women in educational environments. Though they emphasize that their work is not gender-specific, they refer to it instead as gender-related, it is has become a developmental model that is closely associated with "women's ways of knowing." The authors describe five epistemological perspectives or developmental positions of knowing: silence, received knowing, subjective knowing, procedural knowing, and connected knowing. Each position describes a developmental framework for how a woman thinks about herself and how she experiences the contexts of her life.
The focus of these perspectives on women’s intellectual development utilizes the concept of the development of ‘voice,’ generally defined as the capacity to speak up about how one understands and makes meaning from the world. In addition, the women in this study spoke of a preference for developing ‘voice’ in learning environments which emphasize opportunities to make personal connections between oneself and the material, oneself and the instructor and other students, and between what one learns and one’s life. Thus, it is argued that cooperative or collaborative discussions about ideas, and educational events which highlight personal and experiential modes of learning are preferred by women.

The emphasis in all of these studies is on women’s experiences as unique from men as learners and knowers. Similarly, the work of the authors from the Stone Center further explicates the necessity of developing new language and concepts which describe the nature of women’s development as different than men’s development. Their work describes a theory of women’s development based on “self-in-relation” which recognizes that, “for women, the primary experience of the self is relational, that is, the self is organized and developed in the context of important relationships” (Surrey, 1991, p.52). This is a significant shift from the emphasis in previous developmental models which were almost exclusively based on analyses of men’s development. The ‘masculine’ model is premised on the values of individualism in which the processes of developing autonomy, self-reliance, and independence are focal. In contrast, the self-in-relation model assumes that self-development (e.g., creativity, autonomy, assertion) occurs within the primary context of developing deepening capacities for various kinds of relationships (Surrey, 1991). The authors suggest that women’s disposition towards participating in and fostering relationships is a source for growth, satisfaction, and empowerment which then act as the wellspring for inner motivation and personal development (Baker-Miller, 1991).

Summary

This study sought to understand women’s perspectives on teaching and learning in career exploration programs and the broader social context in which these adult education programs take place. It also sought to gain an understanding of whether and/or how critical feminist practices are manifested in these particular career exploration programs for women. Thus, the wide body of research on women, adult education, and employment provided the context for my awareness of the social structural environment which, through the processes of socialization and
the structure of opportunity, affects women's experiences and opportunities in adult education and employment. Importantly, these studies also stressed the importance of taking into account women's agency in the shaping of educational and employment choices and roles.

Studies of teachers, along with frame factor theory, provided the conceptual framework of this study by emphasizing the importance of developing an understanding not only of teaching processes, but of also exploring the external factors which frame the work of adult educators and tie their activities to broader social and political structures where they take place. The overall goal of this analysis is to "disclose for women how our own situations are organized and determined by social [and economic] processes that extend outside the scope of the everyday world and are not discoverable within it" (Smith, 1987, p.152). In addition, though I did not observe teachers' actions and their observable effects in this study, I sought to illuminate the nature of the relationship between teachers' thought processes and actions and the learners, and between the learners themselves, by presenting the participants' perspectives on the teaching and learning they say they experienced during these career exploration programs.

Finally, the literature on critical and feminist pedagogy's theory and practice, and feminist pedagogy's concern with simultaneous and contradictory positions of knowing and its epistemological basis in theories of women's development, provided the theoretical lens through which I analyzed the voices of the instructors and participants. Liberatory pedagogy's concerns with the processes by which knowledge is produced; the uses, positions, and roles of authority; and the notion and objective of 'empowerment,' were of particular interest in my attempt to explicate the pedagogical approaches and conditions for teaching and learning which existed in these career exploration programs for women. In the following chapter, I explain the research methodology I used to gather information.
CHAPTER THREE : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I begin by outlining the concerns raised in current discussions about applying a feminist perspective to social research. Next, I discuss ethical considerations and the issues relating to reliability and validity in qualitative research. I then outline the process through which the research sites were selected and methods that were used to gather information. I also provide a description of the women who took part in the study and a sketch of my observations about the interview and focus group process. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the research design.

Feminist Research Perspective

Applying a feminist perspective to social research necessarily "centers [the research] on the importance of women... reclaiming and validating the learning that comes from life experience as women" (Tisdell, 1993, p.98). However, Smith (1987) asserts that in order for social research to be useful to women, it should also explicate how women’s life experiences are organized as part of the larger complex of social relations beyond the scope of any one individual’s experience. Moreover, recent feminist writings have revealed the inadequacies that emerge in any attempt to carry out critical social research that assumes a universality of women’s experiences based solely on gender. As hooks (1984) declares, “individuals who fight for the eradication of sexism without supporting struggles to end racism and classism undermine their own efforts” (p.39). Lack of acknowledgment and examination of personal and political differences among women “means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable. It is only through learning of our differences that we can make them strengths and bring about genuine change towards creating a world in which we all can flourish” (Lorde, 1984, p.110).

Harding (1987) and Lather (1988) argue that though there is no specific research method or particular feminist epistemological standpoint from which to accommodate these concerns, the emphasis on exploring and portraying the uniqueness and contextualized nature of women’s experiences necessitates that the researcher’s epistemological and methodological orientation should be made explicit in order to clarify her perspective on representing the ‘Others’ who are a part of the frame of inquiry. This requires a reflexive approach whereby “researchers examine their own values, assumptions, characteristics, and motivations to see how they affect the
theoretic framework, ...data collection, sampling, and interpretation of findings” (Hall & Stevens, 1991, p.21). Moreover, Fine (1994, p.74) proposes that constructing texts collaboratively by “creating occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is and what is not,” while at the same time “self-consciously examining our relations with/for/ despite those who have been contained as Others, we move against, we enable resistance to, Othering.” Consequently, I took back my interpretations of the material gathered during the study in the form a document draft and discussed it with the women from which it was derived in order to ask them if the interpretations were plausible and to further clarify their perspectives.

Ethics, Dependability, and Transferability

Social science research is vulnerable to ethical malpractice due to the often personal nature of the conversations which can develop between research participants and researcher. Consequently, “when we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination” (hooks, 1989, p.43). Since I am deeply concerned with carrying out ethical and non-exploitive research, my role as a researcher and the purposes of the research were clearly communicated to all of the instructors and students in the programs. I have respected the right to privacy and confidentiality of all participants by keeping them anonymous in the interview transcripts and by using pseudonyms in this document.

My goal has been to carry out ethical research that is neither dominating nor exploitive by striving to honor the perspectives of the women who are involved in the study. I have tried to accomplish this in three ways: by sharing and discussing my interpretations on the nature of each program with its respective instructors; by sharing and discussing my interpretations of the perspectives on teaching with the instructors; and by presenting the voices of the women from the focus groups in as thorough and un-edited a manner as possible.

Due to the personal nature of the interview questions asked of a small number of educators and participants at a particular time and place, I am making few claims that this study produced generalizable findings that can be applied to other similar research situations. However, information was collected at several different programs and with numerous participants in order to enrich the perspectives across multiple sources. Moreover, transferability of the study should
be enhanced by the provision of detailed descriptions of theoretical frameworks, information collection, and interpretive procedures.

Richardson (1994) and Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that reliability in qualitative research can be more appropriately conceptualized by considering the “dependability” or “confirmability” of the design and results. Dependability is concerned with “the changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study as well as changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of the setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Dependability in this study was enhanced by checking the plausibility of interview interpretations with the program instructors over a period of time, and by maintaining an ongoing discussion about the interview and focus group information and information analysis process with my research committee members.

Confirmability is based on providing clear descriptions of the social context, participant characteristics, the documents used, and by providing explanations of the assumptions and theoretical biases behind the study. By thoroughly describing the processes through which the information was gathered, by accurately making use of study participant’s language during analysis and reporting, and by making my position and my relationships to the participants clear in the context of the study, other researchers should be able use this report and the interview protocols as a means by which to reassess or reanalyze confirmability (Anderson & Burns, 1989).

Site Selection

My initial research as to the availability of ‘bridging’ or ‘employment’ programs for women in the metropolitan area where I live determined that most programs currently being offered are oriented toward exploring career and educational options rather than providing training in specific skill or employment areas. Career exploration programs are intended to provide people with information relevant to making future short and long term educational, training, and employment decisions, and assist them in developing skills related to employment interviewing, job search, and personal and professional development. I telephoned eight such programs located within one hour’s drive of my home to determine the level of interest in participating in my study. Four programs expressed interest during the initial telephone contact.

After the four programs had expressed initial interest, an information letter was sent to the program directors and teaching staff outlining the nature of my study and what would be
involved if the staff and students decided to participate (see Appendix A). Follow-up phone calls were made with directors and several staff during which time one program elected to withdraw. At that time, convenient times and places for the interviews with the staff members who elected to participate were arranged and the dates for explaining the study to the students were determined.

The decision to work with the three particular programs involved in this study was influenced by two factors other than just gaining access. First, while there are many similarities in topic areas between the programs, each program also has distinct curricular elements. Secondly, the group of women served differs somewhat between each program, as does the length of time the programs are offered, and the nature of the institutions where they are located. For example, one of the programs is offered at a public higher education institution and serves the general community; another is offered at a college and serves women who have experienced abuse and/or addictions and seek academic upgrading; and the third is offered through a non-profit agency and serves women who have experienced abuse, addictions, corrections and/or mental illness. While all are full-time, daytime programs, one program is 16 weeks long, another is 12 weeks, and the third is 20 weeks. Third, the programs are taught by differing numbers of instructors. One program is taught by one instructor, another by three, and the other by four. Of this total I was able to interview seven instructors. I felt the diversity in student populations, program length, curricular elements, and instructors among the three programs would enrich the variety of perspectives on both teaching and learning.

**Information Gathering Strategies**

Merriam (1988) states that in all social research, “it is important [for the researcher] to understand the perspective of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening” (p.168). Providing a holistic interpretation required that the study use different methods of information gathering. I elected to carry out multiple in-depth interviews with instructors, a focus group session with the students, and limited document research in order to more accurately portray the multiple perspectives that exist in the research frame and to provide a clear picture of the institutional context in which the programs operate.
In-Depth Interviews

Since the purpose of the thesis was to explore perspectives on teaching and learning in career exploration programs for women, the most important information gathering strategy was talking with the women involved in the programs. Therefore, I conducted individual in-depth interviews with seven educators for a total of ten interviews; two interviews with three instructors, one with four instructors. ¹ Prior to each interview, a consent form was given to each instructor (see Appendix B). Each interview was one to one and half hours long. All the interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and kept in separate coded computer files. The tapes of the interviews were destroyed after transcription.

The interviews were purposefully oriented with open-ended questions which I hoped would elicit “rich” responses that permitted the participants to express options and explain why those opinions were held (see Appendix C). The interview questions were intended to provide me with thorough descriptions of the programs and explore the nature of the instructors’ values and beliefs about the teaching/learning environment and the instructor-student relationship. The questions also explored instructor’s beliefs regarding the nature and selection of teaching strategies they apply, and their perceptions as to the learning needs of adult women students in career exploration programs.

Oakley (1981) encourages feminist interviewers to view interviewees as collaborators rather than as “subjects.” In this manner, the interview acts to provide the context for the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Alcoff (1991) recommends that “[feminist researchers] should strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others” (p.23). Therefore, the interviews occurred at the time and place of the instructors’ choosing, in their offices at their respective institutions. Further, because I had not met any of the instructors prior to our scheduled interviews, I began our meetings by stressing that my objective was to create a portrait of their perspectives on teaching in career exploration programs for women which they felt accurately reflected their values, beliefs, and experiences. Consequently, I offered to return copies of interview transcripts for review, however, only one interviewee elected to receive hers. We also discussed my commitment to return a draft of the thesis document to them so that they would

¹ Two of the instructors I interviewed one time gave me written comments of the initial draft on the instructors’ perspectives on teaching.
have the opportunity to change or withdraw any comments or withdraw all together from the study if they wanted at any time.

As I met the instructors for the initial interviews one by one in their offices, I was surprised to discover how much we had in common as a group. For instance, we are all white, proficient English speakers with post baccalaureate degrees or coursework. All of us, with the exception of one instructor, are between 35 and 49 years of age. We have all participated in paid work throughout most of our adult lives. Also, in casual conversation before or after the interviews, I found that I shared common hobbies, interests, and political views with several of the instructors. Perhaps as a consequence of these similarities or perhaps because the instructors seemed to me to be warm, friendly, and articulate women, I felt our conversations occurred quite comfortably and I had no hesitation in asking for further clarification on certain comments or offering observations drawn from my own experiences.

However, as a researcher I cannot escape interpreting the instructors’ language through the lens of my own beliefs and understandings. My beliefs include a socialist feminist epistemology, and a philosophy of education grounded in critical theoretical concerns. My understandings are founded on my experiences as an English as a Second Language instructor for adult immigrants and refugees and my own varied employment experiences in non-traditional arenas for women. Indeed, when I returned the second time to speak with the instructors, two made important personal clarifications to the drafts of ‘The Nature of the Programs’ and ‘The Instructors’ Perspectives on Teaching.’ In particular, we conversed at greater length about the philosophical and epistemological perspective that they each bring to their classroom practice, and Maria brought forward her notion of the “orientation to task” which became an important addition to the segment which covers the Aims of Teaching. However, for the most part, I received comments on the drafts such as, “the paper reflects the program and my views and values excellently,” and, “I was really pleased to discover through reading your paper that I am living with integrity, that what I do and what I say and believe are the same.”

I have provided a brief sketch of each of the instructors interviewed and their educational and employment backgrounds below.

**Program One**

This program has a single instructor. Maria is a Canadian born woman in her early 40s. She has a bachelor’s degree in sociology. She has also completed the provincial instructor’s
diploma and an adult education diploma. She has over ten years of experience working with a non-profit women's organization developing training programs for job reentry. She also worked with adolescent street kids and pregnant teens, and with immigrant women. As she says, “a focus on women and their needs has been a thread throughout my working career” (1M.2). She has been with the program for two and a half years.

Program Two

This program had five instructors, I was able to interview three. Nel is a Canadian born women in her late 30s. She has a master’s degree in social work and bachelor’s degree in psychology. Nel worked with street kids for four years as a child care counselor, and then ran a treatment program for 9-13 year olds for two years. In her social work degree, she placed an emphasis on women’s issues and social policy analysis. She has been with the program for seven years.

Germaine is a Canadian born woman in her late 40s. She has a master’s degree in social work. Germaine has worked with women for the majority of her career. She began working with women in a halfway house and then worked at a transition house. She also worked with mentally handicapped adults and people with psychiatric problems but “still liked the idea of working with women... [this job] combines my whole background plus it is what I want to do” (1C.1). She also has a certificate to teach English as a Second Language. She has been with the program for seven and a half years.

Gloria is a Canadian born women in her mid 30s. She has a bachelor’s degree in education. She worked with juvenile delinquents in a group home and seniors before taking a master’s degree in social work and family counseling. Gloria was a family counselor for over a year but found that she really wanted to find a position where she was working specifically with women. She has been with this program five years.

Program Three

This program has three instructors. Doris is a Canadian born woman in her late 40s. Doris worked in banking for 15 years, and then as a job recruiter, eventually starting her own company and managing other small companies. Then, she became an English as a Second Language teacher. Doris began at the college where Program Three is located as an ESL instructor, but now
teaches the career focus and readiness part of the women's program. She has taught in the program for three years.

Ruth is a Canadian born woman in her early 40s. She is the director of the women's program and teaches professional and personal development. She and Doris also counsel students nine hours a week.

Alice is Canadian born woman in her 50s. She has taught as the academic upgrading instructor for four years. Alice is retired from a career as an elementary school special education teacher. She worked with children up to the age of 14. She has also taken several graduate-level adult education courses. She feels that her extensive experience in special education, particularly her expertise in reading strategies, is extremely helpful when working with the students in her program.

Focus Group Approach

The other method of talking with women that I used to gather information was the focus group approach. Focus groups were carried out with volunteer students during the last two weeks of each program. While the dynamics of focus groups provide limited in-depth information from individual women, it does offer the opportunity to gather a variety of spontaneous perspectives in a limited period of time with minimal disruption of class time (Morgan, 1988). The disadvantage of the focus group approach utilizing a self-selection volunteer process at the end of the programs is this may have limited opportunities for individual and/or dissenting voices to be heard, or excluded the perspectives of women who prefer not to speak in group discussions.

The intent of the focus groups was to give student participants an opportunity to express and explain their insights and perspectives about the content and instruction they experienced while in the programs (Bertrand, Brown & Ward, 1992). Therefore, the questions asked were concerned with their attitudes regarding the teaching processes and activities they experienced during the program, and how they felt those processes and materials influenced their experience (see Appendix D). The focus group sessions lasted one hour and were audio-taped. Once the audio-tapes were transcribed, they were destroyed.

In order to communicate with the students directly about the purpose and nature of the study, I went to the classrooms of Programs One and Two about a month before the end of the class. I explained who I was and what my study was about, that participation in the focus group was voluntary, that they would remain anonymous in the thesis document, and that the program
instructors would not be present during the focus group sessions. The time and date for the focus group was decided by the instructors. For the Program Three focus group, I went to the class on the date arranged by myself and the program director and explained who I was and the nature of the study, and those women who didn’t wish to participate were free to leave the room or sit and observe. Prior to beginning each focus group, I read a consent form and passed it around so that the students could initial it (see Appendix E). Approximately 45% of the students from each program participated in the focus groups.

My relationship with the students consisted of a brief meeting to explain the study and the one hour group discussions, however, I think the opportunity to observe the interactions among the women who volunteered to take part contributed to my sense of classroom interpersonal dynamics and thus enriched my synthesis of their voices. I began all the focus groups by restating what my study was about and by asking if there were any questions. I also stressed that though I would be asking questions, I would like the participants to consider our meeting more of a conversation than an interview and to please feel free contribute observations or remain silent at any time.

The atmosphere in all three focus groups felt very casual and comfortable to me. I think this atmosphere was enhanced by the fact that I am a woman and they were accustomed to having people other than their instructors come into the classroom, as well as the fact that the women in each group were so familiar with each other. We also spoke the same language. Further, I believe I have a great deal of empathy in terms of understanding the emotional and financial trials and tribulations of making education and career decisions after having myself experienced four significant career shifts, two university degrees, and two employment training programs. However, I am not a mother or a single mother, and particularly in relation to the women in Programs Two and Three, I can never fully understand how their experiences with abuse and addiction, their experiences with the social services system, or their experiences of race and class shaped their lives. My own particular position of privilege as a white, educated, financially independent (albeit unemployed) woman in my late 30s certainly had to affect how I perceive the voices of the women.

I have provided a brief sketch of the women who participated in the focus groups and an account of my impressions below.
The Focus Group - Program One

I arrived for the focus group as class was finishing at the end of the day. After the other women had left, our group gathered around a couple of tables at one end of the classroom, one woman perched on the window sill slightly in back of the group. Nine of the sixteen women in this program volunteered to speak with me. All of these women were proficient in English. All of the women appeared to be white. Of the nine, two mentioned that they were single mothers. Their ages ranged from mid 20s to mid 40s, with the majority in their 30s. Three of the nine mentioned that they had undergraduate college degrees. None of the women appeared to be physically disabled. None of these women made any mention of their sexual orientation.

I found the atmosphere during our discussion to be quite respectful. By respectful I mean that the women didn’t interrupt each other while speaking, nor were there side conversations or other activities going on. Everyone in the group contributed to the conversation though some spoke more than others. At one particularly animated point in the discussion, the woman sitting on the sill observed that another had been trying to say something for a couple minutes. That comment stilled the others so that she could softly speak.

Another strong impression I had was the sense of camaraderie, though not necessarily the kind of friendship that would extend outside of class. For example, the women frequently spoke about how much the support and feedback from other women had meant to them, and made comments such as “we have been really personal with each other” and “we know each other in a special way.” There were also moments of shared laughter over classroom memories and humorous answers to questions. However, the women also seemed to felt free to respectfully disagree with one another and there were a couple times where the discussion was oriented around a point of clarification between focus group members.

The Focus Group - Program Two

I came into the lobby area of Program Two as class was dispersing, a student came up to me to say the rest of the group was waiting around a table in the library room. This group consisted of five of the fourteen women from the program. One of the women was First Nations and a mother, and the other four appeared white and did not mention if they had children. All were proficient in English. The women ranged in age from late 20s to late 40s. One women mentioned that she had a college degree. None of the women appeared physically disabled. None of these women made any mention of their sexual orientation.
My impression of this group's interactions was also one of respect, camaraderie, and thoughtfulness. The women were careful to let one another speak and not to interrupt. All of them offered observations and frequently another would then say something like "I agree with that" or "that was really good what you just said." Perhaps because this was the smallest group, we also stayed on the question topic more specifically and usually two or three women would thoughtfully respond to each question. I also remember a couple times when one woman would support the observation of another with her own comment, at these times there were direct looks and often smiles between them.

The Focus Group - Program Three

After Ruth introduced me to the class, I stressed that participation in the focus group was voluntary and asked those women who were interested in participating to bring their chairs forward in the room so we were closer together and my tape recorder could pick up their words. The rest of the class stayed in their seats and did schoolwork or listened. Over the course of the discussion two women who had elected not to move forward with the others contributed observations. Their comments became part of the group conversation and the distinction between those who were ‘in the focus group’ or not was further dissipated.

I spoke with nine of the eighteen students in this program. All but one of the women said they were mothers. One woman was First Nations, another was East Indian, one woman was of mixed race, and the rest appeared white. All were proficient in English, although I know this class has two women who are learning to speak English more proficiently. One woman looked to be in her late 50s, and the rest ranged in age from early 20s to late 30s. None of the women appeared physically disabled. None of these women made any mention of their sexual orientation.

The women in this class were lively and humorous, spontaneously bursting into applause and laughter two times when one of their group made a comment they wished to support. I did notice that it was necessary to catch the eye of three of the women before they would speak because two other women had a tendency to dominate the conversation. My sense from the group interactions was that some of the women had developed close and supportive friendships, and several made comments about friendships with classmates that extended outside of class. While the women were for the most part attentive when others were speaking, there were a number of times when one woman interjected comments into other speaker’s words and toward the end of
our discussion a few side conversations developed that required stilling by other members of the discussion group.

Document Review

The last method that I used to gather information was a limited document review. I examined program funding proposals where they were available, institutional brochures about each program, and some course materials and handouts. Information was 'mined' from these documents that I felt illuminated the goals and objectives of the programs, and the administrative, institutional, and organizational frames in which the instruction was taking place (Lundgren, 1981; Merriam, 1988).

Information Analysis Strategies

The analysis of the information gathered from the focus groups, interviews and program materials began once individual interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed. The voices of the students were considered separately from the voices of the instructors. I employed a comparative approach to the transcript analysis in order to identify commonalities as well as differences among the voices of the instructors and students. During this process, I attempted to strike a balance between identifying persistent concepts across the texts and treating each woman's words as unique. The initial coding concepts were derived from the theoretical considerations drawn from the literature reviewed for the study and from the actual content of the teacher and student responses.

Initial drafts of Chapters Four and Five which describe the nature of each program and the perspectives on teaching were then given to each instructor and they had five weeks to consider adding, changing, or withdrawing comments.² I then returned to speak with an instructor in each program during which time the focus was on clarifying and negotiating meaning in the chapter on the perspectives on teaching and checking for accuracy and enriching the descriptions on the nature of the programs. At this time we also discussed my emerging analysis.

² I tried to be sensitive to the complex relations of race, class, ethnicity and culture among the students during information analysis, however, none of the students identified themselves or spoke of their experiences in terms of their expressions of difference, therefore, I decided not specifically note differences in race or culture in the thesis.
From these discussions and comments I modified and refined the chapters on the perspectives of teaching and the nature of the programs. Once these chapters along with the perspectives on learning had been developed, the second phase of information analysis began. Themes which emerged from a consideration of the concepts and categories which had been developed in the first phase were incorporated into a discussion which revisited and reconsidered the conceptual and theoretical framework utilized for the study.

Limitations of the Research Design

The scope of this study is partial and limited in a number of ways. First, and most significantly, I did not observe the instructors or participants “in action” during the programs. My observations of interactions between instructors and students and between instructors was limited to visits when I went to do the interviews and focus groups. In the case of Program Two, it would have been inappropriate to observe intermittently because the program requires a high degree of self-disclosure and commitment to group process on the part of the students to foster building relations of trust. Also, the option of acting as a participant observer was not a possibility for me due to program scheduling and personal time restrictions.

Another limitation concerned the information gathering process. I have tried to accurately present a balanced view of the perspectives of participants and instructors in the frame of inquiry, however, I did focus more directly on the perspectives of the instructors in that I was able to return my interpretations to them in order to receive clarification and discuss additional topics. I focused on the instructors’ perspectives because they and the institutional and social context within which they work significantly shape the processes of creating knowledge in career exploration programs. This is not to say that I felt the perspectives and experiences of the participants were less important, however, because I spoke with them in the final week of their respective programs, there was no time to review and analyze the material and return my interpretations to them. In further research, I would pursue more in-depth discussions with the participants and build in opportunities for clarification.

Finally, this study involved a small number of women in a small number of programs in a particular culture at a particular time and place. Therefore, the value of this study lies in the richness and depth of the information presented from this group of women rather than in
producing findings that can be generalized to other women's lives or other career exploration programs.
CHAPTER 4: THE NATURE OF THE PROGRAMS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a thorough description of each of the three career exploration programs in order to gain an understanding of the external factors which frame how the teaching/learning environment is created, influenced, and constrained by social, physical, administrative, and economic realities. First, I provide background on each program by describing its physical setting. Second, I discuss the roles and responsibilities of the instructors. Next, I discuss the administrative and organizational features of each program. This is followed by a description of participant eligibility. Finally, I provide a summary which describes the factors which frame each program.

Program One

Physical Setting

Program One takes place at a college which offers a wide variety of vocational programs and academic courses for women and men. The college is located in an urban center and has excellent access by public transportation for students. The program takes place in one spacious, well-lit classroom, approximately 8 m x 12 m. The classroom contains large rectangular tables arranged in a U shape, so the women are able to face each other for the most part. The walls are decorated with many posters of working women in various occupations and an abundance of colorful collages. The participants have access to various student services, a computer lab, library, learning center, and cafeteria in other parts of the college. Although the classroom is close to a hallway lined with lockers that fills with the animated discussions of men and women on occasion, the entry door to the classroom is set back in an alcove so the classroom is quiet and relatively private.

The instructor thinks that this program’s college location offers herself and the participants many advantages. First, there is access to the college’s many and varied resources. Secondly, the program is situated in a higher education environment so women can begin to “learn the ropes here” that are necessary for returning to school “so it just makes the whole institution [of school] far less intimidating” (2M.3).³

³ (2M.3) denotes that this quote is from the second interview transcript with Maria, the 3 is the page number.
The Instructor

Maria is the only instructor for this program. She reported that she is able to act quite autonomously in both her teaching and in curriculum development. Originally, she was hired by the college to teach on a term by term basis but after two years and a successful evaluation, she became a regularized, full-time employee of the college.

As well as instructing, Maria is available to talk with women during her office hours. While her role is not to act as personal counselor, she noted,

...I think all instructors have to walk a fine line between what is instructional and what is counseling, so, yes, I do counseling. If students want to speak to me about issues related to the program often they will develop into more personal issues, there’s no way of getting around that. You can’t separate what is happening to them in the program with all the other things that are happening to them in their lives. So I am certainly willing to do whatever I can with students on an individual basis, time permitting, and I then draw the line when I feel ...this is going to get quite involved in a personal situation as opposed to something that is impacting on the program and their ability to finish the course. [If] the problem is significant, I will refer them to the counseling department [at the college] (2M.1).

In addition to Maria, another factor shaping the teaching/learning environment is the numerous other women and men who come to the classroom as content specialists on various topics, sometimes for only a few hours, sometimes for 1 or 2 days. These people are members of discussion panels on various occupations, particularly in trades, technologies, and science, and self-employment. Others come to class to give short courses on such topics as self-defense, vocational assessment tests, stress management, and small business development. Maria is responsible for selecting and making arrangements for all of the visiting panelists and other content experts. She commented that she has ongoing discussions with these resource people so that they know what she wants and to clarify what information they want to bring to the class. Maria reported that while she does have a budget she must stay within, there have always been sufficient funds to bring in the people she wants and “do what needs to be done in the program so that it is a good program for the students” (2M.4).
Administrative and Organizational Features

Program One is located in the college’s Academic Adult Basic Education department. This program is five years old, however, it is based on a similar program offered at another college that has been in existence for sixteen years. The program is funded through the college’s base fund, therefore, it is not dependent upon procuring funds from external agencies, nor is it required to meet curricular or clientele requirements set by or government Ministries. Maria stated that it is unlikely the program will be discontinued by the college unless there is chronic under-enrollment; a situation which has not occurred thus far.

The stated goal of the program is “to help women identify and act on realistic short- and long-term career goals. In short, the program supports their capacity to become economically independent and make informed choices about their career, training and employment goals” (college brochure). Two programs are offered per year; each program is 16 weeks long. Classroom hours are from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

This program is organized into ten short courses. These courses cover career options in trades, technologies, sciences; options for self-employment; making career decisions and action plans; job search techniques; effective communicating and interviewing; assessment and career options; self discovery and esteem building; practical skills; and an individual project. The individual project is an opportunity for participants to design a personal project, in consultation with Maria, that is related to career exploration. The individual also project provides Maria with a means of assessing time management, planning, and goal setting skills (2M.5). Six weeks of the program are also spent in work or study placements. These topic areas aim to provide “opportunities for self-assessment, improving self-confidence, gathering relevant information, making effective decisions, and pursuing a plan of action” (college brochure).

The work or study placements are broken into 3 - two week periods over the sixteen week program. Work placements are meant to give the women an opportunity to observe and assist people who do work that they may want to pursue. The other option is a study placement based at a training institution or college. In this instance, the women sit in on classes in a program that they may be considering and “talk to students and instructors, get to know the school and what the workload is like” (1M.6). Though students are largely responsible for finding and setting up the placements during their self-directed time every Wednesday, Maria will assist the women by providing contacts and suggestions, if necessary, as do other students. The placements are flexible, participants can opt for 6 - one-week placements, 3 - two-week placements,
placements, or they can stay at the same placement for the entire six weeks. Maria is enthusiastic about the work/study placements; she feels they are a "really a great way for students to evaluate whether it is really something they love or hate" (1M.6).

Numerous participants also mentioned that the work/study placements acted as a beneficial winnowing process. "We got a lot of choices from [placements], a couple of us really know what we are doing and some of us have done some eliminating as well" (fgl.5). For example,

I went to [a school] and I decided that I didn’t want to do [a particular program of study], which saved me and the government some money. I mean I didn’t have to get a student loan, get into [the school], and probably just screwed around, not finish the course and owe the government $10,000 dollars that I’d probably never pay back because I’d never get a decent job anyway... so it sort of saved everybody a lot. (fgl.5)

Participant evaluation and program completion are based upon "class participation, attendance, and successful completion of course assignments" (college brochure). Though the program takes place in a higher education institution, participants are assessed at the end of the course on a pass/fail basis, they are not graded. Course assignments are varied; some are assigned from the course text which is concerned with exploring student’s career interests, skills, and abilities. Other assignment examples are: oral presentations on their work/study placements, the work/study placements themselves, required readings on various topics, a personal journal, attending workshops, carrying out informational interviews, and completing vocational assessment tools (2M.4). Maria expects the participants to complete 80% of the course assignments and miss no more than six days of class. However, each person is assessed on an individual basis so if other circumstances arise that lead to greater absenteeism, she makes an individual determination. For those women who are being sponsored by Canada Employment Centers (CECs), if a serious problem arises with a woman being able to complete the program, Maria is expected to fill out a form and indicate the source of the problem for the CEC.

Maria carries out program and participant evaluations a number of different times during the course of the program. These evaluations are not mandated by the college, they were established by her. First, there is a mid-point program evaluation at which time the women fill out an open-ended questionnaire regarding their assessment of the teacher’s performance, how they feel about the course to that point, what they liked, what they did not like, and what the most significant learning experiences were. There is also a mid-point participant evaluation where the women evaluate each other in relation to program expectations established at the beginning of
class. The expectations are concerned with attendance and punctuality, application to tasks assigned in the program, participation in class, relationships with other participants, and application to tasks each woman has set for herself as goals in the program.

At the end of the program there is another participant and program evaluation in the form of a conversation between Maria and each woman. This conversation is primarily concerned with “asking how successful they feel this program has been for them and in what ways” (1M.8). It is also concerned with discussing how well Maria thinks each woman has done in meeting the previously described expectations.

The participants also receive an evaluation by their host employers regarding, in some cases, their hands-on experience, or if they just observed, their attendance and attitude. Further, there are ongoing informal feedback sessions after workshops where the participants are encouraged to discuss what they did and did not feel was useful about the presentations. And finally, Maria has designed a confidential evaluation form which is mailed out by the college nine months after the women complete the course. From this evaluation, she wants to discover what participants feel may be absent from the program, what they found beneficial after a period of reflection, and how their employment and training plans are progressing.

The Participants

The program is open to 16 women and recruitment comes via self referrals and referrals from places such as non-profit agencies, government agencies, social service agencies, Canada Employment Centers, and through word of mouth, advertising in newspapers, and public service announcements on the radio. Women who are interested in taking the program must attend an information session at the college so that “they know what the program is about” prior to enrolling. It is recommended that students are “self-motivated and reliable,” and profess a “willingness to explore new and different ideas” (1M.2).

There are several factors which can affect a woman’s entry into the program. Students must be 18 years of age or older. They should have the equivalent of Grade 9 English proficiency. If they don’t have proof that they have their Grade 9 English, then they have the option to enter as a mature student. This option may also apply to women who speak English as a Second Language.

Secondly, applicants must be able to pay for the course (tuition is approximately $640.00) or meet financial criteria determined per individual which are set by CECs or social assistance in
order to qualify for full or partial sponsorship. Alternatively, participants can apply for an Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Program (ABESAP) grant through the college Financial Aid office. ABESAPs are need-based grants which are assessed by considering an individual’s income versus their living and educational costs. Women with children in their care can also receive a childcare subsidy through Ministry of Social Services or Ministry of Skills, Training, and Labour if they meet the financial criteria.

And finally, though the participants did not bring up these issues during the focus group, Maria commented that women often mention arranging for childcare and personal finances as significant factors which limit participation in this program and other education and training programs:

... Students who are on UI in this program, often their UI is extended while they are taking this program and then they are cut off three weeks after they finish the course. And a lot of time the training programs that they want to go on to don’t start immediately... so although CECs says that they are committed to helping students who are on UI, in reality it doesn’t always work out that way.

...There are always these deadlines hanging over [the women’s] heads, there’s always worries that the little bit of money that is trickling in is going to end and how am I going to make ends meet for those three months between when I finish here and when I start there. ...Having to run to their financial assistance worker for every single little thing, I mean the amount of energy and time that it takes to wheel and deal for the little bits of money that they require to keep them going is unbelievable, it’s just unbelievable, it really wears the women down (1M.4).

Program Two

Physical Setting

Program Two takes place in a multi-storied office building in an urban center close to public transportation and other services. After exiting the building elevator, one must enter a glass security door that beeps whenever opened to gain access to the program’s offices. There is a reception area and an adjacent spacious lounge with two couches and large plants. The office suites all have windows so there is a great deal of natural light. The staff and students have separate coffee break rooms. The main classroom is a long, somewhat narrow room, 6m x 10m, with padded office chairs with arms, some with foot stools, arranged in a circle. There is a whiteboard and flipchart arranged at the end of the room away from the entry door. Off of the reception area there is a small computer room for student use. Besides the main classroom, there are two other small classrooms. One is used as a resource library with tables and chairs, the other
is a study area. Each of the four teaching staff have separate private offices down two hallways off the main reception/lounge area. All of the instructors and focus group students expressed satisfaction with the program premises and location.

**The Instructors**

This program has four instructor/counselors and one instructor/office administrator. In addition, other women come to class to speak to the students about different professions. They may include previous students, now employed or in other education and training programs. I spoke with three of the instructor/counselors: Nel, Gloria, and Germaine.

These educators all professed a strong feminist epistemology which grew from their “life experiences as women,” educational experiences during their social work degrees, and from their years working with women and in women’s advocacy (2G.1). They described how feminist beliefs play a central role in their approach to their relationships with the students and in the social analysis that they provide in the classroom:

I enter my working relationship whether I am a teacher or a counselor the same way. It is a feminist approach. I have information to impart and I have a certain amount of expertise but I see myself as an equal with the women that I am working with. I am a cog in the wheel of her recovery or growth. I will do the best I can, the best of my ability to impart whatever wisdom or information people have given to me. I want to draw out the woman and encourage her and have her feel good about herself and empowered. ...I speak with a lot of hope when I am with my students and their potential is what I am shooting for (1G.7).

[A feminist approach] means understanding ...that women haven’t had equality, and that assertiveness and outspokenness have not been valued in women, and that all women receive double messages, like don’t be whiney and don’t be dependent but don’t go out and earn more money than the man does, or OK go out and work but your kids can’t suffer and your husband can’t suffer and the house can’t suffer. ...We can help women get away from blaming themselves for being inadequate and realize that society is set up so that women aren’t equal and if they try to be equal they face real opposition... And also understanding things like sexual harassment, that it is real, and ...the glass ceiling, understanding that there are also structural disadvantages for women, and how the poor tend to stay poor. ...It’s not just a feminist analysis, it is a socialist analysis, too (1C.12).

The instructors were, however, aware that their responsibilities to the objectives of the program and to the women themselves also require that they sometimes act in a manner that is not particularly consonant with feminist values:

...Now mind you, some of the things that we do to get the students ready for work aren’t feminist. It’s a hierarchical system out there and it’s not always great for women and we
are teaching students that if they want jobs that is the system they will have to work with... We act as authority figures, we give assignments, expect people to be here on time, we expect them to be responsible and it's not as free as we would like it to be. Sometimes it goes against the grain of what we feel a feminist world should be but we are aware of it and they are aware of it, hopefully (1N.13).

As well as instructing, Germaine, Nel, and Gloria counsel the program participants. Though they are all qualified counselors, Nel explains,

We don't try to do therapy, but we are... capable of dealing with things that come up. ...We would talk to her and encourage her to go back and talk to her counselor that she sees on a regular basis, and we would make sure that she has some kind of counseling in place before she comes in here so that she can access that during the program (1N.10).

Instead their counseling is mainly oriented toward problem-solving related to program assignments, goal setting, and future planning:

Everyone has different aspects of the program that they struggle with, like somebody may not be able to do the interviews, somebody else may not be able to get their work done on time, somebody else is always late, somebody else has an authority problem. We deal with each individual person on what their problems are and try to work through it. So we talk about how to get [class] projects done; is it a time management problem, is it insecurity, what is it that stopping you from getting your projects done? (2G.2).

Administrative and Organizational Features

Program Two has been operating for sixteen years “running on contracts from year to year” (1N.1). Originally, the program was funded through a non-profit sponsoring agency on contract with the federal government. Eleven years ago, the program elected to switch to another non-profit sponsoring agency because the group of women working in the program wanted to organize themselves as a collective. By organizing as a collective the women now operate with equal responsibility in decision-making, equal status, and equal pay... we make a lot of our decisions as a group, even some of our most trivial decisions are made as a collective. Usually we meet at the end of each day and we have a list of things that we want to go over and decisions that need to get made and we talk it over and come to a decision on it together (1N.2).

The instructors commented very positively about the collective and non-profit arrangement and its processes, not only in terms of their personal satisfaction with being able to “be in charge of my [work] life” (1G.8), but also because they feel this administrative factor strengthens their ability to maintain the orientation of the program to their professional satisfaction. For example,
We are very client focused, and as the funding gets re-evaluated we are really clear about what money the province is offering and the needs of our clientele. We keep saying, we can’t change our clientele to fit the funding, you need to fit the funding to the clientele. And I think that we act as real advocates [to the government] for the clientele. This is what we need, ...we need programs for older women. Women who are in abusive relationships, when they get older, they often get the wherewithal to leave abusive relationships and that is when they need support (2G.2).

Or if funders respond to proposals by requesting a change in the program that the instructors feel may jeopardize what they want to accomplish,

...We invite them here and show them what we are doing, show them how we conduct our classrooms and how we get the women involved, we may have to ...show them what research has been done to document women’s experience in the workplace or women’s way of learning, to sort of back us up and prove that we are on track. There’s four or five of us here so by the time we combine our ideas, we have to work things out but we are a united front in the end, so we are powerful in that right. ...When they want us ...to get rid of [a feature], [they say] it’s not employment related, we just bombard them with all the information that we have and document things and write up letters explaining why we do this and why it is beneficial and how it has been proven that it has made a positive impact on the program... So generally we get them to see it our way ...or we may have to make a few modifications, so that the element is still there but doesn’t have the same focus as it did before (1G.1-2).

In late 1995, the funding source shifted again, and as a consequence, the program was required to cut one staff member and add two more students in 1996. The funding shift was due to the changes in availability and allocation of funds now that the federal government transfers a block of money to the provinces which is then redistributed into health, education, and training programs. As Germaine noted, the loss of a staff member and the increase in students has had and will have some influence on teaching/learning environment:

...We can still do an effective job but it will mean more stress on us and we will have a little less counseling time. Up to this point we have had four participants per instructor and now we will have six. It means you can’t give as much time to people but it can be done. Writing a funding proposal every year is a pain. It is a lot of stress, but we still do a good job in the classroom. And this fall doing a proposal for a new funder was really hard. We did a lot of overtime... There was a lot of information required for the proposal and we were trying to run a program, do counseling, write the proposal, keep the program together. It was just a lot of work (1C.6).

Program Two is twelve weeks long; three programs are offered per year. Classroom hours are 9 to 3, Monday to Friday. The 1995 funding proposal stated that the goal of the program is “to graduate 75% of participants and successfully place 75% of those in full-time employment for a minimum period of ten weeks within six months of graduating or in employment related
training or education.” However, the instructors volunteered that their goals extend beyond the
desire to assist the women in the development of employment-oriented knowledge and skills;
they also include a commitment to addressing “the inner woman, the stuff going on inside you
that makes you successful, makes you happy, makes you strong and resilient” (1G.6).

The general topic areas the program addresses include employment counseling, personal
development and self-discovery, labour market information and exploration, job search skills,
workplace issues, and basic computer training. The program also includes three - one-week long
work placements. For the first placement the instructors choose and set up a location appropriate
for each student; for the second placement students choose for themselves and the teachers set it
up. The third one the students find and set up for themselves. Placements provide an opportunity
to

get a foot in the door, just to feel like what it is like to be in a work situation after they
have been gone for so long, or maybe they were in one but they were using the whole
time, work feels scary now that they don’t have their coping mechanism in place and they
are learning new strategies of how to cope [at work during the work placements] (1N.14).

After completing the 12 week program, the women can participate in a once-a-week,
morning Job Club, if they wish, for the next six months. The educators are also available to
counsel to students by phone or appointment for six months, and after if necessary. Gloria
explains,

[Job club] is about providing students with a little bit of structure and refocusing to help
keep them on track. And it is also a lot of support because they have been in this class for
12 weeks and they have had 15 or 16 other women around them everyday and us and
everyone has been paying a lot of attention to them getting a job and what they are
feeling. Then all of a sudden they are cut loose and they are on their own and we don’t
really want them to just drift off into the stratosphere, we want them remain in contact
and not to isolate, to have the support that they need, to have the resources, and to be part
of a community space (1G.2).

The criteria for participants to successfully complete the program are participation in and
completion of class assignments, and attendance and punctuality. Women who are unwilling or
unable to fulfill these criteria may ultimately be asked to leave the class. As well as reflecting
employment appropriate behaviors these requirements exist because, as Gloria explains,

If you come in late it is disrespectful to the woman that is speaking. So [rules] are
presented such that we have to live here cooperatively and these are the ground rules on
how we think things can be done around here cooperatively. If you have problem with
that bring it up with us and we will discuss it and see if that rule needs to be changed
(2G.1).
Classroom assignments include employment research and presentations, writing introductory and cover letters and resumes, self-esteem exercises, various employment focus and goal setting exercises, and a small group project. The small group project provides an opportunity to work cooperatively to bring together all the skills necessary to research, find, and acquire a job for an imaginary woman.

In this program, formal and informal evaluations are an integral factor in the process of refining and enhancing the teaching/learning environment. Evaluative information comes primarily from student-generated feedback and is implemented through consensus-based decision-making among collective members. An informal student progress appraisal and feedback session occurs in the middle of the program between each instructor/counselor and her assigned students. Formal program evaluation occurs at the end of each program, at a three-month class reunion, and at six months, by telephone. The purpose of the evaluations and feedback is basically to "look for what worked and what didn't... sometimes they will pick out a particular staff and say I didn't understand what she was talking about... and they talk about areas on the program that they have found of benefit" (1C.2). Nel describes how the gathered evaluative material is utilized,

...we have a period of time between programs where we sit and go over those evaluation forms and make any changes to the program that we would like... Also we do our own internal evaluation as the program goes along, when we see something we would like to change or discuss the possibility of changing, we write that down in the evaluation section of our staff meeting book, ...and if [students] give us feedback during the program we usually put it down, ...then during the evaluation period we might have anything from fifty to one hundred issues to go through, it usually takes a couple of days with the whole group and we go through and evaluate all those items that we put down. (1N.6)

Another example of how the evaluative information is utilized occurred in 1991, the teachers had noticed that Aboriginal women were having a harder time meeting the criteria for entry into the program and, once they were in, completing the program. As a result, the women "were very interested in finding out what was going on, what was causing that, what we could do about it" (1N.5). They hired an Aboriginal woman to do a evaluation, and

...she found that we were taking aboriginal women into the program more easily than we would take other women, so in fact we were bending the program for aboriginal women in an attempt to get them into the program and that was maybe the reason that they weren't doing as well once they got here was because they didn't have the same stability... she thought that we should tighten up some of our criteria and she gave us a lot
of recommendations of things that we could try to do once we got the women into the program to try to support them (1N.5).

The other purpose of the formal evaluations is to provide statistics for the funding proposal. "We have to produce statistics on the last year’s performance, how the students did and the graduation rates, and the placement rates during the program... we collect those statistics and put them every year in our proposal, and present them to the funders, and ask for more money for the next year" (1N.1). Taken together, the instructors feel these evaluative processes lead to

...a program that is constantly changing, it is very dynamic, it is constantly in flux, it does change whether it is outside forces or the students telling us that isn’t right, or we recognize ourselves that something is not working. It is constantly evolving to give the women the best chance that they have of succeeding (1G.2)

Although these instructors did mention financial constraints as an influence on the program, saying things such as “we are nickeled and dimed to death around here” (1N.7), and “I always feel like I am living on a social services budget” (1G.10), they remarked that they are still able to accomplish their educational objectives. Additional money would be utilized to enhance the classroom environment with more comfortable chairs and tables, to procure more written materials for teaching resources and for lending to students, and to bring in more guest lecturers and speakers.

The Participants

The program is open to 16 women who are self-referred. The participants must be able to speak an intermediate-level of English. The new 1996 funding arrangement resulted in two mandatory shifts in student eligibility. In previous years students could have been receiving either social assistance or unemployment insurance (UI) or paid their own way. However, now they can only be on social assistance. But as Nel observed, “eventually ...UI runs out and they go on social assistance and come here anyway.” She also noted that in years past the federal government had been pushing the program to take only UI applicants, and “that was even worse. Because there are people on social assistance who really need the program and could never get in so... we would just like to take everybody that needs it regardless of where they come from” (1N.3). Second, the program has been working with women who are recovering from alcohol or drug addictions, eating disorders, mental illnesses, corrections backgrounds, and survivors of abuse - sexual or physical. But in 1996, the criteria for selection will be based on being a survivor of
abuse - sexual, physical, emotional. However, Nel noted that “most of our women [currently] fall into that category” anyway because many of those other life experiences are associated with having experienced abuse (1N.2).

Prospective participants may hear about the program from sources such as friends, counseling agencies, drug and alcohol programs, treatment facilities, private counselors, doctors, psychiatrists, mental health workers, or hospitals. There is an initial intake interview at which time each woman’s “emotional supports” and recovery stability are assessed. Having emotional supports means that participants are involved in another therapeutic counseling relationship and/or group. The primary factor that affects entry into the program for those women who have had addictions is recovery time. Nel explains,

we don’t see someone [actively] dealing with major issues like that as somebody who is ready for employment... We ask for about six months recovery time but we judge each woman on a case-by-case basis by looking at her whole situation, like maybe she has had a year recovery before and had a slip but her supports are really good and she isn’t likely to do it again (1N.2).

Participants are eligible to receive some financial assistance during the program, which is determined primarily by their relationship with the social services system:

... if they are on social assistance they stay on social assistance and we give them a $100 [a month training allowance] and people that are on UI, if they make more than what we pay - they stay on UI, if they make less than that, we pay them instead so that they are making the same as everyone else, and those people who have other sources of income, we pay them the training allowance (1N.2).

Women with children in their care can also receive a childcare subsidy through Ministry of Social Services or Ministry of Skills, Training, and Labour if they meet their financial criteria.

Program Three

Physical Setting

Program Three is part of a small college which offers diverse educational and training programs for both men and women. The college takes up the better part of two floors in a multi-story building on a major transportation route in an urban center. The classroom dedicated to the women's program is down the hall from the main reception area. No street noise can be heard

---

4 The relationship between the participants' life experiences and their consequences in the teaching/learning environment are discussed in-depth in the chapter on The Instructors' Perspectives on Teaching.
and there is very little disruption from other classes coming and going. The classroom itself is a rectangle, approximately 8m x 10m, with three blackboards that go most of the way across the front of the room. Rectangular tables are arranged in a U shape so that students can see each other or, when necessary, move to face the blackboards. A computer classroom is available to students in another part of the college. There is also a smaller classroom that participants can use for study or working independently.

The instructors are very satisfied with their premises and think that because the program is part of a small college, it can offer the students a positive and personal academic experience which could then act as a bridge into returning to other higher education institutions.

The Instructors

This program has three instructors: Ruth, the program director teaches in the area of personal and professional development; Alice, teaches the GED (General Educational Development) academic upgrading preparation; and Doris teaches career focus and readiness. Ruth and Doris also counsel the students. Ruth explains the nature of the counseling:

...We do an enormous amount of referrals, we simply are not set up to handle some of the in-depth counseling that is required for some students to move forward. So we utilize outside support agencies wherever possible. I make that work for students by saying to them, you may be away from school an hour and a half a week but I will keep you in [the program] if you do this, when you are gone you are just sort of off site, to encourage them. But between [Doris and I] we do the inevitable crisis counseling, life management counseling, bridging and referral counseling, plus the employment readiness type, you know, this is what I see, this is what I feel about what is happening in the classroom. I can sort of extrapolate when I see [a student's] behavior and say what do you think about this behavior in an employment situation or in any group situation (1R.3).

Doris is responsible for teaching and doing relevant research associated with the career focus portion of the program but she described ongoing curriculum development as a “joint project” with Ruth and other colleagues at the college who teach career focus. She volunteered that she has found working at the college so pleasant that she stayed when it became necessary to move to a part-time position due to loss of funding for other programs at the college in which she taught:

[Ruth] and I work really closely together. I really, really like the people and the atmosphere of everybody helps everybody else, ...there is no nastiness, there are absolutely no politics, and if somebody finds something good that works, they share it with everybody else... People here really give each other a lot of support. (1D.)
Alice also volunteered that she “really loved” teaching the women in this program and that as a group the instructors are really good about getting together and I think I am being quite honest when I say that we have the students’ best interests in mind... we are prepared to talk about how things should be done and how we are going to modify things if they aren’t working, ...I think I am really lucky with the people I work with (1A.7).

In addition to the three educators, the program has a volunteer, retired social worker who comes in once or twice week to advise women who would like assistance on issues related to the social services system. Further, other women from different professions come to class to speak with the participants, including previous participants, now employed, who may or may not have passed all five of the GED components. Four women from other training colleges also come to speak about their respective programs.

Administrative and Organizational Features

Program Three has been offered for eleven years. The program is funded on an annual basis (two programs) and the program director is responsible for writing the proposal. According to her, the current funding proposal states that the goal of the program is to have 75% of those who graduate become involved in further education, training, or employment within six months (1R.1). Currently, Program Three is funded through the Ministry of Education, Skills, and Training, although, at times in the past it has been funded by Ministry of Women’s Equality or Canada Employment. Throughout the changes in funding sources the program has been maintained with the same general curricular areas.

The stated purpose of the program is to help “women receiving social assistance, who have been out of the workforce for an extended period, to obtain their GED and prepare for further training and employment” (college brochure). Moreover, “underlying that, of course, is [the goal of] building self-confidence, problem solving, and coping with life skills” (1A.1). Some participants, however, already have passed some or all of the five subjects in the GED test, because not having the GED is not a funding requirement for eligibility. Ruth explains, Our view is that anybody can be supported in upgrading reading and writing, and numeric skills for the workplace, and when we get someone who is academically very high, they often get to offer peer support, ...which is also a good employment skill - the skill of working with others and supporting others to obtain their goals (1R.3).
Two programs are offered per year; each is 20 weeks long. The summer months have no classes because most of the clientele have children. Classroom hours are 9 to 4, Monday through Friday.

The topic areas covered during the program include assertiveness, critical thinking, and problem solving skills; academic upgrading and high school equivalency preparation; labour market research; career/ training exploration; professional and personal development; job search skills; and introduction to MS Word and WordPerfect. The educators think computer literacy is very important so students spend one full day a week in the computer lab. The career focus part of the program also takes place one day a week. The GED preparation instruction is offered in the mornings, 16 hours a week, and the personal and professional development is offered 9 to 12 hours a week.

After the eighth week of class, participants are expected to volunteer one day a week at the employment site of their choice. The women are encouraged to find and set up their volunteer placements after having been exposed to numerous community resources such as Volunteer Canada, and relevant information and support from staff, however, the instructors will assist them with placements if necessary. Volunteer placements offer an important opportunity to “get some job and interview skills ...and it is a way of exploring, often we find that the volunteer work focuses them to pursue a particular line of employment” (ID.3).

Attendance and punctuality are considered very important aspects of the participant’s “willingness to make the necessary changes to pursue suitable employment and/ or further training” (college brochure). Women who are unwilling or unable to fulfill these program requirements may ultimately be asked to leave the class. The other criteria to successfully complete the program are participation in the personal development and career focus part of the program, and completion of computer class assignments.

After completing the 20-week program, participants, if they wish, can call and make an appointment with Ruth or Doris for counseling assistance offered one day a week. They can also return to update resumes and cover letters. This aspect of the program is carried out voluntarily by the instructors, it is not funded as part of the program. As Ruth explains,

It is very much the focus of this college, not just the program itself that you can’t get 20 people ready the same day, it is going to take some people a longer amount of time; career counseling or life management counseling doesn’t have a finite end, it has more of a gradual end. They are ready when they are ready and they leave when they are ready. We can’t just say we have been together every day for five months but it is over now, good-bye. Even the process of letting go can’t happen over night, you can’t build a team on day 1 and then disband it day 100. We recognize that participants are moving forward
as they can move. As an example, I have a student who has returned from a class a year and a half ago, she has overcome some stuff, completed her GED and got fabulous results and is now actively looking for work. Now if we look at the 75% objective then she was a failure. If we apply a rule of learning, then she’s a success and that is how we look at it (1R.1).

Neither Doris nor Alice mentioned carrying out a formal program evaluation with the students, however, participants are encouraged to give the instructors feedback “at any time” and one afternoon a week instructor and participants have a discussion about “what we liked best about the class, about the week, what did we learn that was most valuable to us... even if it was something at home that had happened” (fg3.7). As the program progresses, the women take small tests that mimic the GED test. This is also a way for the instructors to assist them in making decisions about the upcoming exams. Alice explains,

[After the mini-test,] the three of us will sit down and say Mary isn’t doing too well, so maybe when she comes to write the GED she would be better doing three of them, and then we sit down and talk to the student, sometimes they choose to take all five, even though we tell them failure is a possibility and you really don’t have to do that, they might choose to do that, and that’s fine (1A.7).

Alice mentioned that one factor which influences some participant’s preparedness for taking the GED test is the length of program. While there is no established or recommended length of time for preparing for the tests, the twenty-week period “for some of the students it definitely isn’t long enough, ...particularly in mathematics because there are so many skills that they need and you need to have a basis before you can build on it...” (1D.3). Therefore, the instructors emphasize reducing test stress and anxiety by encouraging students to concentrate on the test areas that they feel they can pass. Participants have the option to take all five exams, a few, or none at the end of the program and they have three years after that date to go back and take exams that they failed or didn’t sit the first time. Attending the classes, participating, and doing the course work in the program is considered to be far more important by the educators than passing all the GED tests. As both teachers observed, not passing all five GED tests “doesn’t mean they can’t get some kind of training and become very good and have a rich life” (1D.3).

The time of year that program graduation occurs may have some influence on a woman’s initial opportunities to begin further education or training programs. Those who complete the program in January can often begin new programs at the summer or fall term. But those who
graduate in June, may have to wait until January to begin because fall term classes are filled (1D.4). Further, according to Doris, opportunities for receiving more money for further education or training after this program are “quite slim.” However, she noted that “there are other ways, ...they can go for Canada student loans, [scholarships, or grants] and very often they can stay on social assistance while they are going to school but they have to pay for their schooling” (1D.4). However, as one young woman pointed out, “the thing that gets me is they [the government] say they can’t afford to put us in training, ...well, if they can’t afford it, how are we supposed to afford it, that’s what I don’t understand” (fg3.12).

The Participants

Program Three is open to 22 women. Recruitment comes via referrals from social service agencies, through word of mouth, and from information sessions which are held for all the college’s programs once a week. Several factors currently affect the women’s entrance into the program. First, they must be 19 years or older in order to sit the GED exams and, second, they must be on social assistance and have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse and/or drug abuse or addictions. They do not have to have children although the majority do. During the program participants continue to receive income assistance as well as, when applicable, a childcare subsidy and transportation allowance.

Another factor which may affect a woman’s entry into the program is the two-week screening period where academic testing and attendance issues are considered. Successful entrants are those who indicate a desire to commit to taking the program, have a good attendance record for that period, and are assessed as having a basic academic level which will allow them to participate in the GED preparation. The reasoning behind the screening is described by Alice:

... well, we might say to Sally, we have done this academic upgrading assessment and we think it might be to your benefit to go and get some more intensive academic upgrading and then we would like to have you back for the next program... when we do the screening we are not shutting anyone out. We are just trying to guarantee that when they do come into the program they are going to be successful. And for some, what [the program director] may have to say is look, obviously, you need to be clean, maybe you are in an abusive relationship, maybe you need to get some counseling because if you are in this kind of a situation, we don’t want you to fail; we want to ensure that you are successful so you need this assistance before coming into the program. (1A.1)

Interestingly, the students in this program brought up their relationship with the social services system during the focus group discussion whereas women in the other two programs did
not even though many of them were also on social assistance. For example, one woman commented that she thinks some students enter the program because of pressure from social assistance workers, but this was countered by another who explained, “we are here because we want to be” (fg3.11). Others spoke about the difficulties they feel they encounter in accessing relevant information on education and training opportunities from the social service system. For example,

I mean I didn’t know there was such a thing as a training consultation in the first place, I didn’t find that out until August of last year... so unless you bang the doors down, you are not going to get any answers from those people. Even now that social services has done their cutback and they are pushing people out into the workforce, they still don’t tell you what is available out there... (fg3.11).

And finally, personal finances also came up as a significant factor which influences decision-making not only to begin this program but other education and training programs as well:

... my biggest fear was the financial end of it, how could I pay for school, pay for daycare, pay for transportation, pay for everything under the sun and still keep food in the fridge to feed my kids with... (fg3.11).

And actually when welfare told me to quit my job, because daycare was too high and they weren’t going to give me any more money, I made a vow that when [my child] started school that I would start school. ...That I wasn’t going to have to go get a student loan or anything else, it really made it a whole lot easier for me to make the decision to actually come back and do [this program] (fg3.11).

Summary of the Programs

As previously described, frame factors represent the physical and conceptual conditions under which instructors have to do their jobs (Dahllöf, 1977). This summary of the three career exploration programs addresses some of the physical frames which are “anything that limits the teaching process and is determined outside of the control of the teacher” (Lundgren, 1981, p.36). I will address the conceptual frames of attitudes, values and beliefs in-depth in the following chapter on the perspectives of the instructors.

Between these three programs there are significant differences in the physical frames. In particular, the differences in administrative factors varied most significantly between Program One and the other two programs. Program One is located within a college system and is therefore
not dependent upon procuring government funding or meeting funding requirements or objectives. Consequently, this program serves any adult woman from the general community. The only limiting factors for student eligibility are that they must be able to arrange tuition payment through various means or services and have an intermediate level of English proficiency.

Programs Two and Three, on the other hand, even though one is sponsored by a non-profit agency and another is located in a college, compete for limited government funds which subsequently determines a variety of administrative features such as staffing levels; numbers of students and their eligibility; targets for student graduation, and training and employment placement; and to a small extent, the curriculum. Those factors are, as Ruth explains, “a function of politics, politicians make all these great plans, and then bureaucrats have to see that they are carried out. A program like [Program Two or Three] has to be flexible because we have to responsive to the focus of the funders” (1R.1).

Currently, Program Two serves women on UI, social assistance, or those who have their own funds, and have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse and/or addictions. Program Three serves women who are on social assistance and have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse and/or addictions. In both programs, participants must also have intermediate English proficiency. The major curricular distinction between them is that Program Three involves academic upgrading and is significantly longer in duration.

Certainly, the pragmatic and important goal of all three programs is the same: to assist women in accessing skills and information relevant to pursuing immediate employment or making plans for education and training which will lead to employment that offers women both personal satisfaction and adequate economic resources. However, Program One resides within the culture, or in other words, the frame of a higher education institution. Program Two resides completely in the frame of a government-funded ‘employment-oriented program,’ although it is certainly an educational program as well. And Program Three bridges, in a sense, between the frames of ‘higher education institution’ and the frame of ‘employment program’ because it is located in a college and has a academic component, yet it is also a government-funded employment-oriented program. However, in essence, Programs Two and Three exist if and because they fulfill a governmental expectation of assisting women to move (most of whom are on social assistance) into or toward the work force. Nel explains,
There's a lot of bean counting that goes on, I mean it costs so much money to put women through this program and [the government] wants to see the results, and their results are who is employed or who is close to getting employed because they are in school or getting some training towards employment (IN.5).

The funding source also affects job security of the instructors. In Program One, the single instructor is a regularized employee of the college which means that she has relatively high job security. Though the four instructors in Program Two have organized as equal members within a collective which is different than the two instructors in Program Three who are hired on a term by term basis, job security is minimal in both programs because they are funded year-to-year. Nevertheless, these instructors had been with their respective programs from two and a half to seven years and, at the time of our conversations, all were planning to remain. Overall, all the instructors expressed a high level of personal satisfaction with and commitment to their work as educators in career exploration programs for women, the institutions where they work, and their co-workers.
CHAPTER 5: INSTRUCTORS’ PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHING

In this chapter, I provide a synthesis of the seven instructors’ perspectives on teaching in career exploration programs. The synthesis was produced by examining the transcripts from individual instructors with an eye toward illuminating commonalities and honoring the distinctions which exist between the instructors’ aims, the value they attach to student/teacher relations, the personal values and beliefs they follow in teaching, and the instructional strategies they employ. Though the distinction between intentions and beliefs is somewhat arbitrary, I begin with the expressed aims of teaching, followed by the values and beliefs about teaching in this context. I then discuss the teaching strategies used in the programs. Finally, I provide a summary of the conceptual factors which arose from considering these perspectives.

Aims of Teaching

Even though the educators in these career exploration programs work with women from a wide variety of backgrounds and each program has many distinct features, all of them spoke of the transfer of curriculum content and skill development as inseparable from the goal of encouraging critical self-reflection on the part of the students. Nel explains,

    The work that we do here requires a lot of looking at yourself personally, ...every single class item on the agenda in the class requires looking at yourself in some way, assessing how you manage stress, manage your time, you’re constantly looking at yourself... and setting some kind of goals (1N.11).

Moreover, the educational process is not considered complete unless participants develop what Maria calls an “orientation to task” which includes taking concrete steps to apply what is learned:

    I think one of the most important things for me is to run the program in such a way that women are truly experiencing a chance to see small changes taking place within the program. That they are not thinking and feeling their way through the program and not taking any action. So I’ve tried to design the program in such a way that in order to get through it, to complete the assignments and tasks and so on, that it involves actually taking steps, seeing successes, completing tasks that involve action. I think that’s really what makes a difference for women in terms of their level of confidence, ...that they have accomplished this task, and they can go out and do it and then the next task (1M.1).

One of ways that you learn to develop self-esteem is by recognizing your competence in an area, and the women have to do so much of [the work] here by themselves.. it’s not like we don’t do anything and we just give them the work, we are working constantly, but
we are working to get them to do it for themselves. And that creates independence and is a recognition of competence, and I think that is really critical to self-esteem (1G.12).

Imparting information relevant to gaining knowledge and access to a wide variety of employment options, fostering the ability to make informed decisions about further education, training, or employment, and developing an orientation to task were viewed as crucial to enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence in individual women. Conversely, enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence was viewed as an important aspect of fostering the capacity to successfully implement that knowledge:

What I want to accomplish here is to provide the women with the necessary information that they need to empower themselves personally and to achieve employment. So they need information first of all, to [know how to] get a job, and they also need to acquire enough self-confidence or enhance their self-esteem to be able to implement the information (1G.1).

A lot of women that come to these programs... seem to think that if they could just get a little more confidence in themselves then they would be able to do this or that. ...and some of the women really lack information and how to access it, ...but it is really amazing what they can do once they have it, how much more informed their choices for themselves can be, once they know how to get it, where to get it, and what to do with it (1M.3).

Consequently, these educators place great emphasis on making classroom experiences and information relevant to the lives of the women, not just for immediate use but for

...making a difference in how they are in their lives... Sometimes I think are we really making any difference? But some will say I learned so much. I had to go into counseling or I didn’t get a job right away but I learned so much about myself and I was able to use it later on... So that helps me see that even if someone hasn’t fit the criteria for success statistically, we are making a difference in how they are in their lives, ...they know that they have a place in the world, they have place in the world of work and they deserve it (1C.2).

As Doris explains, “I want them to come away with an awareness of their abilities and an awareness of possibilities, what I like to do is plant seeds that maybe won’t grow for a year but they will grow or be there as ideas when they need them” (1D.3).

To these educators, developing an awareness of possibilities also means including discussions on the relative positions of power in society, generally based on examining and “understanding issues of discrimination in the workplace and basic human rights” (1M.7). Maria explains, “What I would look at is what women’s traditional roles have been, what men’s traditional roles have been, what the difficulties are for women, and what the difficulties are for
men" (2M.1). For the instructors in Program Two, this social analysis is rooted in a feminist epistemology:

[Feminism] is about women having equal status, both in their value, and their power in society. ...part of what we like to do here is to encourage women to claim their adult status, to demand their adult status and that recognition (1G.9).

...We might watch a film about women in the workplace and we talk about what are the issues around sex, what are the issues around race and also when they do the histories of what the women in their family did we look for patterns, and say what are the patterns based on sex, what are the patterns based around race or culture and class, ...like a family whose mother was an immigrant might say well because my mother was an immigrant she had to do cleaning work because those were the jobs that were available [to her]...

(1N.11).

When we do our class on workplace values... we have a scale where white males are at the top and black females are at the bottom of the economic pyramid... so non-white women are right on the bottom... and we talk about economics, who has the power and who has the money ...we have [the participants] look at roles of women in the world, and women’s place in the economy and how the economy has been controlled by men in this patriarchal society (1C.12).

But with or without an explicit feminist analysis, instructors in all three programs mentioned that the opportunity to specifically discuss the effects of gender on employment and position in society is enhanced in a women’s-only classroom environment:

Women’s reality and women’s history in the world of work is different [than men’s]. And discussing some of the issues around ...need to find your own voice [as a woman] would be very different if the group was mixed... when the two sexes can be separated you can really focus on reality from a woman’s perspective. What comes out loud and strong is how different those lives are (1M.5).

...what is important about having a program for women run by women is that we acknowledge that experience. ...It is valuable to raise their consciousness around why they chose the kind of work that they did, how they may respond on the work site to authority figures, or to male and female co-workers, and how that is affected by their attitudes about themselves. Also, it might be important just to talk about how they feel about [paid] work in general, do I want to work or do I want to stay home and look after my kids (1G.5).

I try to tell them that it doesn’t matter if you are a man or a woman, you can succeed [at whatever you want], and don’t think because you look in a mirror and see a woman looking back at you that you can’t be as successful as a man. What we try to impart is that just because you are a woman, it doesn’t mean you are a second class citizen ...and if you want to be a mechanic or a plumber, you can be, ...they get that everyday, all day, over and over, so equality I really emphasize (1D.9).
Thus, it appears that the aims of teaching are to support each woman’s capability to be independent and self-determining by enhancing self-awareness and self-confidence, by acquiring employment-related information and skills, by fostering an orientation to task, and by providing a gendered analysis of society.

**Values and Beliefs about Teaching**

These educators expressed a firm belief that their programs should be exclusively for women. This belief appears to be founded on the notion that a women’s-only environment offers the participants a sense of safety. However, the instructors clearly recognized that perpetrating abuse is not the exclusive domain of men, and that women can act as oppressors of other women both in the family constellation or in society, perhaps as a response to differences in race, class, or sexual orientation. However, many of the women particularly in Programs Two and Three have suffered abuse at the hands of men, so a classroom without men gives the women “a chance to get some of their self-worth and strength back without feeling that the men represent their husbands,” [parents, or partners] (1C.7). Teachers also described a ‘safe’ environment as one which gives women the opportunity to speak out because they do not feel intimidated by the presence of men who, as several noted, “may be used to being dominant and speaking more” (1C.7). Doris explains, “[The women] will say that they feel safe here, if there are men in the room they don’t feel safe. Here they can talk out their problems and what things have happened to them” (1D.5).

The sense of safety in the learning environment also develops from reducing some women’s feelings of physical isolation from spending most of their time in their homes, or mental isolation as a consequence of previous life experiences, through the (re)discovery or heightened awareness of common life experiences as women. Developing this awareness plays a particularly important role in Program Two where “much of what we do in the program is helping them to get more comfortable with other people and be less isolated” (1C.6). These instructors incorporate a life history approach to develop “sensitivity and awareness” of other women’s lives, “so they can empathize with each other and get their own experiences reflected back. Another woman may have been abused and if I can look at that other woman and I can see that she has nothing to be ashamed of then I am more likely to look at my own shame and think I
have nothing to be ashamed of either” (1C.7). They have found that requiring the students to share their life stories with one another causes them to look at what their barriers [to employment] were before they came here, things that they went through, ...it really helps them and us pick out things, not just superficial things but what the really big things were around difficulties they had with employment in the past, and also it really helps in terms of bonding and commitment to the program. A lot of women who come here are very isolated because they have shame, shame about their past, but when they hear that other people had the similar things happen the shame starts to go... and they know each other really well and they are very committed to each other and they are very committed to the program (1N.7).

All of the educators described an important part of teacher/student relationship as being founded on supporting the women on their respective journeys toward increasing self-esteem and confidence “in who they are.” Several noted that a lack of confidence and esteem could be related to being under-employed or unemployed and that that situation can have far-reaching effects in the lives of women:

I saw women going back into abusive situations partly for their own reasons and being afraid of the unknown and also for economic reasons, thinking they couldn’t look after themselves... so I just see women being able to earn a living and having confidence in those areas as so important for their independence and keeping them out of bad relationships and bad situations... not only from the economic sense but for their self-esteem. To be able to know you can make it on your own, to have a good level of self-esteem and self-confidence... you can gain that partly through feeling like you are able to work and pay the bills and be valued in society (1C.1).

Therefore, the instructors placed a significant emphasis on using this educational opportunity to simply encourage the personal advancement of their students. Their concern for the personal advancement of each participant also appears to be relative to each woman. For example, in Programs Two and Three the statistical measure of ‘success’ is based on having 75% of students involved in further education or employment within six months of graduation, clearly an important and desirable outcome. However, the instructors spoke of success primarily in terms of fostering each participant’s movement toward gaining a sense of personal accomplishment.

We want the women to feel good about themselves... we have difficult exercises and we want them to struggle with them but we want them to succeed in the end. If they have a failed experience, [for example,] they see themselves interviewing on the videotape, and it goes really lousy, we want them to walk away [from the program] feeling they have grown between the first interview and the second... that they have achieved something and they are approaching where they want to be at the end of the day. (1G.1)
This notion of success was also described by Alice whose academic upgrading component is the most content driven area of all the programs. She notes that for some of the women in her program learning is difficult to start with [due to learning disabilities], or they have been overlooked, or put down, or they never have met with [educational] success... so we try really, really hard to build in success for them. And sometimes that is all they need, just a belief in themselves that they can do it. If students are faced with a problem, what we want to do is give them some skills so that they can look at alternative ways of finding an answer (1A.4).

The educators generally described their role as one of ‘facilitator’ who acts “to encourage, support, and draw out the best that [each woman] can be” (1G.7). Doris feels that “a lot of it is [generating] motivation, and saying [to the students] you might not be able to do it now, but with this and this and education you can” (1D.1) Encouraging and supporting each woman to take responsibility for her own learning is viewed as critical because as Maria said, “it’s their life that they are trying to get their head around so I like to engage them as much as possible over all in the classroom” (1M.6). However, as several teachers noted, participants also have to be at a place in their lives where they are able to utilize and incorporate the offered information and skills:

All we can do is provide them with a good experience, but we can’t redo their history and they have to also make the decision to take advantage of the situation that is offered here. Sometimes it is going to work for them and sometimes ...they are not ready, they are going to go out and use again and I can only do so much (1C.10).

We can address academic upgrading [and other employment issues] to a degree, but if we are dealing with an outstanding alcohol or drug issue nothing that happens during the program will help until that major issue has been dealt with, or if we are dealing with an active abusive relationship, nothing we do in any of these programs will help until those major issues are dealt with (1R.1).

The instructor’s responsibility is to create the environment where the individual voices and experiences of the students can be heard. Gloria stated, “by setting limits and all the rest of it I am being supportive and caring, I’m saying we have to protect each other, we can’t have people criticizing and knocking each other and these kind of things. Or if you come in late it is disrespectful to the woman that is speaking” (2G.1). For Nel teaching responsibly means having ... a way of working with the students that feels comfortable for us as a group and also lends comfort and safety for the students, and part of that is just keeping control of the class and not letting everybody talk while we are talking or while other people are talking. ...If a student is talking she can feel that the rest of the group is respecting what she is saying... they are listening (1N.11).
Overall, the educators stressed that women share commonalties in life experiences, and they strongly encouraged and nurtured the development of what Gloria called “a women’s culture” in the classrooms, based on how much women are alike ...even though we have a lot of differences - you’re older, you’re disabled, you’re native, you’re Chinese-Canadian, even though we have all these differences we are still women that have to support each other to get recognized for our capabilities in the workforce. So there is a common bond, [as women] we have been under employed, we have been underestimated, we get put down, we get sexually harassed... these kind of things (1G.6).

However, they also recognize that these women are unique individuals who “are very different based on what their history is” (1M.4). Furthermore, the educators recognized that students have different learning styles and spoke of the necessity of accommodating these differences among the students both in terms of teaching techniques and teacher/ student interactions:

I try to give them some knowledge about how they best learn, is it through the printed word, or is it better if they listen to a tape... I try to put information on the board even as we are talking about it because, you know, we have visual and auditory learners. And I think how can I help them, how can I go about changing what I am teaching, what strategies can I use... We want to encourage them to identify how best they learn and what they need to do to learn (1A.3).

You really have to change when you are talking to native people. For example, you and I will talk and we will interject or ask a question and it is real impolite... and when we counsel native women we might sit here for 4-5 minutes while they are putting their thoughts together. And what is our normal thing, wait for five seconds and then jump in and say something, but you have to realize that you have give them time and wait and they will talk, but you have to give them time. ...And when you ask a question in class, you have to wait the extra time, don’t wait 15 seconds and if they don’t answer go on to someone else (1D.6).

In addition, the instructors in Program Two and Three noted that though the issue of employment “is the issue that we are here rallying around,” the life experiences of the participants plays a significant role in influencing classroom dynamics and discussions:

I mean work is really important... it gives us purpose, direction, and meaning, our work is extremely important to our identity development so it is not surprising that there is so much emotion around it. It is the northern star in our lives in many cases, but I don’t think that that is why it’s difficult here. I think it is difficult because our client group are women that are recovering from alcohol or drugs, physical or sexual abuse... they are coming from a bruised place and this is part of their healing process. So together it is kind of cataclysmic, employment is a big issue, their lives have been difficult, and they are trying to get their lives back on track so it is an emotional place (1G.9).
I'm not a male-basher but I think the major problem with them getting on with their lives is men, they don't seem to be able to balance who they are with the men, the men seem to take over, and I think that is also a matter of self-esteem, ...and that comes from, I guess, a lot of them have been abused, a lot of them come from alcoholic families or where there was drugs, alcohol and whatever, dysfunctional families of some sort... they have never been encouraged to learn (ID.2).

Indeed, in these programs the life experiences of the participants underlay and pervade how the instructors present and reply to the women’s responses to being in the program and the curriculum. Ruth explains, “the women in our program have experienced abuse. Abusing themselves, through alcohol or drugs, or from others, through physical or sexual abuse. So the curriculum has to also address itself to those issues” (1R.2). And Nel stated,

For one thing, given the target group that we are working with, we are looking at very sensitive issues, ...You can teach a simple class like resume writing and a woman that has been a prostitute for ten years is going to have some issues come up for her around that. ...How does she deal with that? So if she wants to talk about that while she is in class, or if she wants some counseling around it, we try to create an atmosphere where she can share those things (1N.10).

Further, the instructors in Programs Two and Three also explained that their style of teaching and the relationships that they consciously form with students were influenced by the life experiences of the women. Gloria stated, “you cannot spend your life listening to the stories of women ...and not be affected by it. That teaches you how it is for women, I have had to learn how life is for lots of women. Through their stories the women have taught me how to be a good teacher, they’ve taught me” (1G.7).

We try to be pretty serious when we are teaching... we watch what sort of humor we use, we try not to use sexist humor, and we are really aware of not putting anyone down, not even playfully, because they have so much of that in their life. I exercise a lot of patience which I might not normally in [other relationships in] my life. ...I just want them to have a positive experience... If they make a contribution in class I want them to know that it is valuable, so I am always trying to reinforce that what they say is valuable and also if they make a mistake, it is not that they are stupid... I try to get them to see that everyone makes mistakes and that is one little thing that they have done (1C.8).

I am very low-keyed, and I think it is really important to remind them that no question is ever a dumb question ...and that it is OK to make a mistake... you have be very conscious that you are never judgmental... you just can’t ever have any kind of an attitude while working with them, that is very important with these students (1A.5).
But, in addition, it seems that for all the instructors, underlying the adoption of a respectful teaching style is the fundamental belief that even though the “[participants] are not running the program, we are,” (2G.1) “everyone is entitled to respect and human dignity, ...we are all equal in that way and that is what motivates me” (1M.10). Maria explains further,

What I try and do in the classroom is share my own experiences as much as I can to let them know that there are lots of similarities, I just happen to be the instructor, ...so what I try to do is tell them where my information comes from, and this is a bit about my journey and how I got where I wanted to go. I try to make us all as human as possible for them to realize that we all struggle in different ways at different times. I also have them participate in the classroom, where they are giving the presentations and I am a part of the audience so that they start to see what it is like to be in every part of the classroom (2M.2).

Instructional Strategies

All the educators referred to their classroom teaching style as “participatory” and/or “interactive.” A huge emphasis was placed on engaging the students “as much as possible overall in the classroom” (1M.6). This approach included not only encouraging students to interact with the material being presented on an individual basis but also to interact and learn from each others’ perspectives and experiences.

I encourage my students that if they have a way of learning something and someone else is struggling with it, just share with them and tell them how you do it... I have no qualms about them jumping in and helping out, and sometimes they are really good about coming up with ways that I haven’t thought about (1A.5).

“I think that the students have a lot to contribute to the class and a lot to learn from each other, we certainly try and have that happen as much as possible” (1N.12). Teaching, therefore, was not just a matter of “me teaching and them learning,” (1N.12) it includes providing opportunities where “the students can learn from each other” (1D.3). The following passage could have been spoken by any of the teachers about classroom processes:

Often we start out teaching with a large group and then we break the students into smaller groups to do small group work, or sometimes the class just gets together as large group and we have discussions, we may be going through some materials and students have a chance to comment or ask questions, we encourage not only us to give answers but other students in the group to share because that’s a really important way of learning. (1N.8)

Focused group discussions allow the students to consider and contribute their personal knowledge to the collective class knowledge in order to produce an “exchange of information so
that they are constantly teaching each other and they are involved" (1G.4). Furthermore, as Nel explains,

The small group work really helps in terms of just learning to get along with other people... we actually have some small group assignments that they do during the program so that they can learn to work with a group because a lot of employers ...are looking for good team players, that’s the big thing now, how do you work with other people. (1N.8).

Overall, the development of supportive relationships between students is encouraged both in and outside of class. Programs One and Two have occasions for students to give each other feedback in supervised exercises. These feedback sessions seem to be, in part, peer appraisal, but are primarily opportunities for affirmation. As Maria says, “I think it is really useful to get feedback from other people who have seen you and worked with you and been a classmate with you for a period of time” (1M.8). Program Two incorporates an exercise which allows students to talk about what kind of barriers they saw each other come in with, and which ones they feel they have worked on, and then they look at what their strengths are around employment... about getting a job and keeping one, and they pick goals that they want for themselves based on that feedback (1N.7).

All the instructors mentioned they not only encouraged participants to speak in the small groups and class discussions but they often had exercises where they required each woman to contribute something. For example, Program One has a morning “opening round” and Program Two has a Friday afternoon closing-the-week discussion. All the instructors also incorporated numerous opportunities for each woman to speak to the group by giving individual presentations on their job research or other class work. “Practice speaking out loud and ... projecting their voices” (1N.8) was considered to be an opportunity for many of the women to “find their own voice” (1M.5) and to “learn to express themselves and lose some of that shyness or feeling that they are saying things wrong” (1C.3). It can also “be a real boost to their self-esteem, it is an opportunity for them to discover, Oh, I didn’t know that I could help someone with that” (1D.3).

Another teaching strategy employed by most of the educators is role play. The instructors find role playing particularly important for developing assertiveness and skills for job interviewing. Gloria describes role play as an important teaching strategy because “the women get to practice and they also get to help each other out. ...Role play is an opportunity to give each other feedback, support, and just exchange information” (1G.4).
All three programs bring other women into the classroom to provide community resource information, give short courses on specialized topics, and to discuss specific training and education programs. Not only do they share their expertise but they are also considered to act as role models. Nel explains,

We bring in role models, women who are working in different jobs come in and talk about their jobs, then the students can ask them questions, ...what they like about it, what they don't like about it. It's really valuable for career exploration, there's only so much that you can get out of the books, getting it from a person is very different, they can say what is it really like, for example, working with men in a non-traditional job, the books don't tell you that (1N.8).

The educators also view themselves as role models. Several described how they share with students their own educational and workplace experiences. For example, “[students] say, ‘What me go back to night school!’, and I say ‘Yeah, I got a university degree through night school’” (1D.5). And Germaine explains,

I like to able to tell them all of the ways you can prepare for job interviews and I love using personal examples, like often I tell about how I got this job, what I did well and the mistakes I made ...and I talk about people that we have interviewed here and the mistakes they have made... (1C.4).

Further, instructors are aware that they act as role models in their interactions with students through “how we teach the women and interact with each other, how we interact with the women, how we solve problems and how we take care of things around here” (1G.8). And Maria explains,

As an instructor I have always felt that I don’t hold a hammer and chisel in my hands as my tools, my tool is me and in order to use that tool effectively, I feel I have to practice what I preach and I have to confront the things that bother me and drive me crazy and where I’m stubborn and procrastinate or slack off... all of the things that happen in the classroom, and if I can practice what I preach then I feel like I have a better understanding of how difficult times can be for other women who are in a transitional phase or who are in any phase of their lives (1M.10).

Several educators spoke their hope of instilling students with the desire for “lifelong learning” in both their personal lives and regarding education and training. Germaine, for example, tries to “tell them it is a lifetime thing for all of us to work on ourselves” (1C.10). Doris encourages her students to take practical educational steps, “say you want to get over there, but you can start here [with some basic training] and it is not going to cost you a lot to get to this point, then you can work and save your money until the next lot of training and keep on going”
(1D.4). But they acknowledged that for many of their students considering further education and training or making plans for employment and careers was difficult.

Some women, the educators felt, "haven't been encouraged to have that career mentality" (1G.5) perhaps due to being raised believing that they should be (or will be able to become) economically dependent on men or from a lack of career-oriented role models among their families and friends. Consequently, all three programs emphasize "opening the doors more so that they are getting the whole of what is possible" in terms of exploring a wide range of employment and educational options (1M.6). Further, all the programs utilize interest and abilities testing and self-assessment tests in order to encourage students to examine their values, talents, and abilities and how those may be suitable to various areas of employment that they may not have considered before:

We nag them all the time about having a wide exposure. ...to encourage them that maybe the reason they weren't happy in their job before is because they weren't in the right job and that in order to find the job that makes them happy they have to look at a wide variety of jobs and pay attention to how they feel about that job. ...We want them to [think about] the whole gamut and not to rule something out because nobody in their family was a labourer or a professional, or those kinds of messages of women don't need to work - like why do you want to be a doctor, you are just going to have a bunch of kids, how would you like to be a nurse (1G.11).

Another difficulty mentioned by several instructors is that "a lot of our students haven't had structure [in their lives] or have rebelled against structure" (1N.13). They mentioned that lack of structure in student's lives was reflected in such things as poor study habits or lack of time management skills as well as by exhibiting insufficient commitment to the responsibilities of employment (i.e., adhering to time schedules and attendance, completing assignments, and working well with others, etc.). Therefore, most particularly for the instructors in Programs Two and Three, employment appropriate behaviors play an important role in determining the structure and requirements for successful program completion.

In Program Three, for example, students who are chronically unable to fulfill program obligations are placed "on contract." "[Going on contract] means that we specify what it is they are not doing and what it is we expect of them, that they have to be in class or whatever, and they sign it. It is a contract, they get a copy, I get a copy, it goes in their file" (1D.8). If participants do not live up to the conditions specified in the contract, they will probably be asked to leave the program. Doris and Ruth explain,
part of the problem with students in this program is that they have no self-discipline and that combined with low self-esteem is totally self-defeating. Self-discipline is taught, it is not something that you are born with, and it is easier not to be self-disciplined, ...so that is one of the things we try and teach them. One of the really hard things to get through to our students is if you are not going to be here, you have to phone, you have to have a reason. Right from the very beginning we are really hard on them about attendance issues... that is partly because we are teaching that sense of responsibility that many of them don’t have (1D.7).

We try to treat this program like work in a way, it is a job, it’s practice. OK, we are going to do some things that are fun and some interesting things but here attendance is required and these are your co-workers. And so how are we going to build a team around that and how are we going to learn to resolve the conflicts that inevitably occur when you put a bunch of people with different ideas together. Because that is a skill that you can transfer to work, the skill of working with others. So there is much they don’t know about what employment skills really are, they think about stuff like I don’t know how to file or how to type, not team skills, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, the skill of cooperating with others, so when we are looking at life management or in-class issues, we try to relate it to something meaningful in their life (1R.2).

In Program Two, Gloria and Nel explain,

...this place is supposed to be a step, an introductory step which tries to imitate the workplace to a certain extent, like we have timetables, and requirements, and they have to be here everyday at nine, we have coffee break and lunch break, if they can’t handle the structure here, they can’t handle the workplace (1G.13).

We have a set of requirements for the program which we give the students before they come in ...and that’s part of teaching some of the behaviors that would be important to the workplace. We do a lot of that while we are here. If a student is late, they are docked [unemployment] pay and it breaks our hearts to do it, but we do it because it is very effective ...if they aren’t doing it [adhering to program requirements] then we are not teaching them what they need to know (1N.13).

Consequently, although the instructors clearly place a high value on fostering more egalitarian forms of relationships with participants, because of their roles as instructor and, in Programs Two and Three, “employer,” and perhaps because of distinctions in education, social position, age or other differences, there are undeniably moments where there are unequal positions of power and authority. As Maria said, “just the simple fact that they are students and I am not, sets me apart” (2M.2).

The final significant strategy employed by all three programs is volunteer work or study placements. Placements are “a way of exploring options, and also I think a good way for them to get some self-confidence” (1D.1). Maria feels placements “are a great way for students to
evaluate whether [the job or study program] is really something they love or hate, so it really helps them to make a decision as to whether they want to go ahead with it or not” (1M.6). But as several teachers recognized, for some women, placements can be a difficult part of the program:

I get a lot of resistance to the volunteer work. They are afraid to go out, they don’t want to go, ...I don’t think it is a matter of doing something for nothing, it is a matter of having to go out and deal with people, it is not safe, like they come from home to here so it is from one safe place to another, so what we are doing is opening the door and booting them into what to them is an unsafe area (1D.9).

Consequently, part of the instructor’s work became

having to talk them through things like, yes, yes, you can go back into the workforce, you are not too old, and then... they start to say well, maybe you’re right, maybe I’m not too old to get a job, maybe it doesn’t matter that I have been out of the workforce, maybe I don’t have anything to be ashamed of (1C.4).

The educators consider the placements to be “really important for some students in terms of getting a foot in the door, just to feel what’s it like to be in a work situation...” (1N.14). Germaine further explains that following through on work placements “would be an indication that she has gone past some of her problems with self-esteem” (1C.4). Successful work or study placements also provide concrete experience with utilizing the skills and information necessary for employment.

**Summary of Instructors’ Perspectives**

Several significant themes emerged from considering all of the instructors’ perspectives on teaching in these career exploration programs. First, instructors declared a commitment to learner-centered teaching approaches in which expertise and knowledge are considered to reside in and be produced by both the participants and themselves. Rather than utilizing a directional flow of information and knowledge from teacher to student, the focus is on creating an interconnected and supportive learning climate wherein each individual’s knowledge and personal growth becomes part of a collaborative construction of knowledge. Further, the focus on collaborative work helps to shift the delivery and creation of knowledge from the instructors back to the small groups and individual women. Hence, the participants’ own life stories and life experiences, and their experiences with the information gathered during the programs are utilized as sources of knowledge and insight.
Second, the educators utilize a variety of teaching approaches which act to engage each learner and to honor the differences in learning styles and the range of abilities in individual women. By establishing a climate in which trust can develop, thus allowing for self-disclosure and mutual respect, the instructors encouraged each student to find her own voice by requiring her active participation in the processing of ideas by engaging in reflective conversation with personal experiences as well as with each others’ experiences, and though students’ reporting of interactions with classroom materials and processes. Further, the learners undertook independent projects and reported the knowledge they discovered back to the class. These approaches gave students the opportunity to be more responsible for their own learning by maximizing opportunities for student-to-student and student-teacher interactions and discussion.

Third, most of the instructors professed an awareness of the tensions inherent in creating and managing more egalitarian relationships between themselves and the participants while at the same time acting as instructors and “employers” with information to impart and expectations to be met. Here, I must make an observation that relates to the physical factors which act to frame each program’s unique teaching/learning environment. Maria in Program One did not present her program as being “like work in a way” (1R.2). As I speculated in Chapter 4, this may be because Program One resides within a different realm of influence than Programs Two and Three in the sense that Program One seems to be, fundamentally, a college education program which is about employment. On the other hand, both program Two and Three seem to be, fundamentally, employment programs residing in different types of institutions which incorporate (extensive) educational activities.

However, in all cases, underlying the instructors’ relationships with the participants, one senses a deep ethic of caring about the lives of the women. All the instructors spoke of the crucial role they play in creating the learning environment by modeling respectful and sensitive classroom interactions, appropriate employment behaviors, and by providing encouragement and recognition of these kinds of desired behaviors. While all the instructors had clear expectations of participant accountability and each program’s educational aims, they also spoke strongly about the necessity of connecting each woman’s education to her personal experiences. Thus, overall, instructors sought to empower the women in their programs both by encouraging critical self-reflection though the processes of self-assessment of personal knowledge and by providing relevant information and curricula.
Finally, these instructors emphasize the necessity of providing a ‘safe’ teaching/learning environment in which discussions of women’s concerns, interests, and experiences in society are the focus. They sought to provide participants with learning conditions, regardless of the institutional location of the programs, which could assist them in becoming more informed about themselves, the experiences of their lives and one another’s lives, and to recognize their personal strengths and abilities as individuals and as women. Further, instructors provided the participants with information about a wide range of possibilities in the world of work, and women’s varying positions and roles in society. The overall goal, it seems, of all three programs is to actively engage each participant in the production of knowledge to thus encourage the achievement of self-determination.
CHAPTER 6: THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING

This chapter presents the perspectives of the women who participated as students in the career exploration programs. My goal was to provide as complete a description as possible of the wide variety of student perspectives in order to portray how they say they felt about their experiences in the programs. I also try to bring forth distinctions in the participants’ experience between the programs. I begin by reporting the students’ perspectives on the teaching/learning environment. This is followed by a discussion of student/teacher and student/student relationships. Next, I discuss how the women talked about the process of self-discovery and the role that information and skills played in leading them toward changing perspectives about themselves and their future opportunities. Finally, I provide a summary of the themes which arose from considering these perspectives.

The Teaching/ Learning Environment

Overwhelmingly, women in all three courses mentioned that the reason they wanted to take part in a program solely for women was for the sense of comfort and safety that being in a group of women engendered.

The fact we are all women, we all share a lot of the same trials and tribulations of coming into the workforce but we are so different at the same time, we get a lot of different insights... and ideas from different women... Whereas if it was with men I think it would be intimidating, [Yeah, said several other women] even the teachers, I was really happy that they were all women (fg2.2).  

- It’s very important that we all have felt comfortable and I don’t think you get that so much if it was a mixed group.
- We have been really personal... that would never happen with men, or with a male instructor (fg1.1).  

For some women, feeling comfortable and safe in these classes seemed to be founded more on being without men rather than being with women:

...I’m not afraid not like I was when I first started, I was even afraid of these women, ‘cause I didn’t know who they were and we were all strangers. Now I’m very, very comfortable around them and I feel really good, like they are my friends

---

5 (fg2.2) This comment came from Program Two’s focus group, (fg3) would be from Program Three, and so on. The second number notes the page number of the transcript.

6 Each dash (-) represents the voice of a different woman.
and they are going to be my friends for life. [Yeah, Yeah, You’re right... said other women], So I think it was safer with women as opposed to being here with men. ...I wouldn’t take a course like this including men, like because I was so low on the ladder I probably wouldn’t have got as far as I did with only women... (fg2.12).

The desire to experience learning in an environment without men was particularly stressed by the women studying for their high school equivalency exams. They said that had men been in the class they “would feel left out” and they probably would not speak out “because we would be too scared.” (fg3.1) Being with only women meant

...there’s nobody here to intimidate you, I find that men tend to do that, because they are more technical than we are. If we screw up in math who cares, right... [laughter] we all laugh about it and help each other but if there was a bunch of guys sitting in this program, there is no way we could have done that (fg3.1).

Some women spoke of sharing similar life experiences because they are women which seemed to nourish a fundamental camaraderie. “Men have a different way of learning and doing things.” “Yeah, men don’t get pregnant, they don’t have babies, and they don’t have to worry about childcare” and “they don’t have to worry about self-defense” (fg1.2). For others, becoming part of a classroom community of women who were struggling with many of the same employment and personal issues provided new sources of strength and inspiration. “I never realized that I could bond with other women and how much it could mean to me” (fg1.4). “Just being with other women has been really good, that’s what I have learned” (fg3.7). “Yeah, like everybody in here has different backgrounds and yet we still came together, and it felt good” (fg3.7).

I think that is really the strength of [this class], going through it with everyone else, you come in and Wow, there are fourteen other women who are all going through the same thing as me, and you go through it together and that just makes it so much stronger....and you have a certain commitment too, to come in here and do your assignments, and you’re just driven because everyone is doing it, so doing it as a group is a very strong experience (fg1.2).

A number of women spoke of coming to the programs with feelings of isolation, wrapped in veils of low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence. “I know for me, I minimized myself so much, like anything that I could do it was like - Oh well, anybody could do that. I wasn’t assertive, I wasn’t confident, my self-esteem was pretty much dragging” (fg2.1). “If I didn’t come here I don’t know where I would be, really, like the other ones were saying I might be still in my black hole and wondering how I am ever going to peek out of there” (fg2.2). For these women,
the programs provided an opportunity to establish connections with other women in an empathetic learning environment.

- I got more confidence, too, just relating to the other mothers here, like I’m not a bad mother like I think I am. Hearing about others’ kids who are driving them nuts, you just want to pack them up and send them off to their Dads, run away and how can I get rid of them...then I feel so guilty! You know, just being able to relate, hearing other women’s frustrations...
- Makes you not feel as alone...
- Yeah, not as alone, because I am alone, usually a lot, I’m not a social person, this has gotten me out a bit, I usually just work and go home... that’s my life.
- Umhmm, umhmm [from other women] (fg1.4).

I remember when Sally walked into the classroom and it was like she didn’t want to talk to nobody, she didn’t want to associate with nobody, [Nope, Sally says] she just said I’m going to do my work and get the hell out...but she couldn’t, she had to make friends. [Sally adds,] before I came here I wasn’t sure which direction my life was going in... I didn’t have any self-confidence either so I thought there was no way I was going to make it out there if I didn’t do something, and working it out with all these women has been great (fg3.1).

Though many of the women in the focus groups talked about the “friends for life” they felt they had developed during the programs, and there was much talk of future “get togethers” including slumber parties and reunions, only Program Two was able to offer a venue in which the women could meet with each other or the educators on a regular basis if they so desired after the program was over. As one woman described, the opportunity for an extended period of support and assistance offered her much comfort:

...we can come back every Tuesday [for at least six months] which is really nice because you know that if you get stuck you can come and ...meet once a week to recharge our batteries. They aren’t just throwing us back out into this mad world without a paddle, ...

Inter-Relationships

In the focus group sessions the women frequently spoke about the nature of the relationships that existed between themselves and the educators and with the other students. In all three programs, the women were effusive in their praise of the “really good instructors” (fg3.2). One woman observed that “what is great about them is that they role model that they love what they do. So they’re living proof that you can find a job and do something that you
absolutely love and they are completely committed...” (fg2.9). Others made comments such as “she sincerely seems to want to help everyone of us as individuals” and “she made us feel like we all had a story” (fg1.1). Several mentioned that the concern shown by the educators for each individual helped them “start to see a lot more value in ourselves” (fg1.1). A student in Program Two described how those educators facilitated opportunities for affirming the value and worth of each individual:

[The teachers] ...acknowledged that we all walk around with all these negative tapes going on in our mind... I can’t do it, I’m just a failure, whatever, everyone seems to have an overload of these tapes. And so within the structure [of the program] you would check in the morning and then end the day with a positive statement about yourself regardless of how you felt ...and that was a really important aspect because of all those tapes, because we minimize who we are and all the things that women do that don’t get paid or acknowledged or all the rest of it, because we, many women, come from a place of struggle and we have often given in to all that negative stuff, and we are all in place where we choose not to do that anymore (fg2.7).

The students also placed a high value on the consideration that the educators (and other students) displayed to ensure that the women understood the information that was being presented so that it could be useful to them.

Yeah, everything we have done, I think, we all understand, we don’t walk away wondering, we can ask and she will keep going on and explaining it, and it gets explained until we all understand,...there’s nothing in here [she pats her notebook] that I don’t understand which is great, I don’t think I had that in school, you know, I walk away or I don’t bother asking. (fg1.7).

- ...if you don’t understand something [the teacher] will work with you one to one, it’s not like let’s get it over and done with, she waits till you understand before she goes onto something else.
- And none of us here put anybody down either because we have all had those kind of problems, ...some of us have difficulties with ...aspects of personal development, other people are having problems in math... but we all work together... [Umhmm, Yeah] to help everybody (fg3.2-3).

The women particularly seemed to appreciate the adult atmosphere in the programs wherein the educators responded seriously to questions or concerns that they might have regarding class content or processes. For instance, “they never had any cappers on anything like [questions or feedback], they would sit you down and explain to you the reasons why this was incorporated into the program ...and then you could go OK, I see that now, so they made everything really crystal clear” (fg2.10). However, women in Programs Two and Three also noted that educators had clear expectations of each woman’s responsibilities:
...rules were there, and they were enforced, too. They really were very serious about that we would like you to consider this as a work environment and when it wasn't appropriate behavior we were told so. We were told it wouldn’t be appropriate in a work environment so why should it be appropriate here (fg2.10).

Many women remarked that the educators “encouraged us to learn from other people’s experiences” (fg3.2). One woman said, “I think [the teacher] helped us to motivate each other, to work together as a group. And I think we have helped each other out... it is set up to be supportive” (fg1.2). This led to a learning environment that the women in Program Three described as “really open and ...really close” (fg3.4). As another student expressed, however, the educators’ role in establishing an environment in which personal disclosure could safely occur cannot be underestimated:

[They set] such an impressive example for us. I mean we all consider each other as equals, [Yeah, Yeah, said other women] regardless of who has more education or whatever. ...They set a tone of realness, from day one. Like we had to start the program with telling our life stories which was really hard to do and really emotionally draining but ...we were able to start the program relating to people on a real level, it wasn’t this phony superficial thing and because we had that, for me anyway, as I could see people working on stuff throughout the course ...if they did something that I knew was one of their bigger struggles, I could truly appreciate that they overcame that struggle or that they faced it and they might not have finished something but they sure fought with everything they had to address it, and so it was constantly inspiring in that way... and it was a lot easier to be present and have more compassion and empathy (fg2.5).

This “tone of realness” appears to foster a learning environment wherein knowledge and insights were freely exchanged among the women and not just delivered by the educators. As one student aptly described,

...it offered an environment where if you were in a good place or not necessarily in a good place but you really related to a particular issue... then it offers two venues. It offers a venue to say I’m really having a lousy time and this is why. And it leaves an openness for asking for help which is defined as a very big issue around women, that we don’t ask for help. Two, it allowed a place to go and offer help, like on break, maybe someone said something that I went Oh boy, been there... so you can say I have really been there, do you want an ear, or may I offer a suggestion. It offered a type of exchange (fg2.6).

Accordingly, many women in all three programs volunteered that they placed high value on receiving feedback from other women in the programs, both on an informal basis and during formal exercises organized by the educators. Numerous women made comments such as “it has really helped me to be here with the other women, I get a lot of good feedback and good
support...” (fg3.1). Based on having developed supportive relationships, the feedback provided the women with opportunities to “help each other with understanding” such diverse concerns as previous life experiences, employment related skills and information from the classroom, or prospective plans (fg3.3).

The honest feedback has been really good for me that everyone gives each other on what our decisions are. It’s not like we are doing it without thinking, but I think we know each other in a different way than we know a lot of people. I mean, we know what each other are like and we are starting to see patterns in each other and we can start to get an idea about what we can see each other doing. That’s really important because it is easy to get lost in this program in yourself... and it’s nice to hear what other people are feeling and have to say because it makes you feel like that’s just not a crazy idea, and I could never do that when someone actually says, “Well, yeah, I thought that you could do that” (fg1.6).

And the positive feedback, being able to give and receive compliments or feedback in a positive way was overwhelming for me. [At first,] it was almost like, Oh yeah, right... what do they want, but to receive it and know it is honest, that it comes from a really good place, not from a vindictive place or a wanting place, it was a wonderful thing to feel (fg2.7).

- [The teachers] made everyone wear a piece of paper on their back and run around and write something that we really appreciate about the person and then we had to read them out loud to the rest of the group.
- Like I actually couldn’t see when they first described it ...what this was going to do for me but I got that piece of paper on my bedroom wall and I see it first thing when I wake up in the morning and last thing when I go to bed and these are fifteen other women, you know, same as me, who wrote this about me, so it is a real eye-opener (fg2.7-8).

**Knowing One’s Self**

The women described numerous ways in which they were encouraged throughout all three programs to reflect upon their personal values, their lives, and their motives regarding employment. As one women observed, “just understanding what you are capable of and what exactly you want in your future, that is what the program is about... and finding out about yourself, and who you are” (fg3.5). Another commented,

One of the things that helped me was there is structure but there is also unstructured time. And we have to report back about how [the research time] went so it’s not like we can just goof off, but we can be creative and do it ourselves. So it’s not like four months of just doing it someone else’s way, it’s four months of doing it somebody else’s way and four months of creating our own style (fg1.5).
Many women, in fact, commented that the “personal work” they engaged in during the programs was one of the biggest benefits they have enjoyed from the experience.

I think the personal work that was involved was the greatest eye opener for me, the working on yourself, the self-esteem building, ...all those things really helped me come out of my shell... And in these classes, that’s where I really sat up and said, I’m a women, but I am also a parent, like all of these things, but I am a real person and I’m a valuable person at that... I’ve got something to offer... (fg2.3).

- For me, [the discussion about personal values] was just nonsense at first... I thought I am going to school so I can get an excellent job and make lots of money so I can buy whatever the hell I want... But we have been taught that values are important, if you go into a career for the money but nothing else, you’re not going to be happy...
- Exactly, you try to build your job around something that is important to you...
- Well, when you are not happy at work, it tends to want to flow into your personal life and your kids end up suffering for something that you should be changing to begin with...
- If you are not happy, your family is not happy, I have noticed that big time (fg3.5).

“Personal work” was carried out in the programs through such broad ranging activities as the telling of life stories, self-assessment tests, self-esteem and assertiveness exercises, and through creative means such as collages and other presentations:

The collages were good because they started our public speaking, and we didn’t know each other then... After that everyone was like - people would go up and you couldn’t get them to leave there, OK, your time is up! [laughter] In the beginning people would be running away even before they finished their sentences, all shy and paranoid. Now, they are up there doing this show and everything and you can’t get them to get away from there (fg1.8).

We’ve done enough assessments tests that it’s really interesting to put them all together and start to see a correlation between them. It really helps you to understand yourself more and get to know yourself better which is really valuable because it is really hard to pin down when you are just thinking about it on your own (fg1.7).

Several women talked about the importance they attached to process of “learning to stand up for ourselves, ...talk about yourself” (fg2.6). As one woman described,

it has given me the tools to get out there and voice where I feel I fit in society, and use the assertiveness training, and the boundaries, and the whole nine yards. Now I know how to go out there and do it and apply it to my life so that I know where I fit (fg2.3).

On the other hand, several women commented that learning about yourself can be a difficult and exhausting process. “Yeah, some of the discoveries that I have made about
myself are really amazing and others are quite frightening, [she laughs] do I really want this, do I want this to be part of me...” (fg3.5). And another women said,

You have to really want to do [the program] because it’s a lot of work, it’s very exhausting... because it’s very self-oriented. I mean, you are just constantly thinking about yourself and where you want to go and what direction you want to move in and you can’t really close the door on that kind of thing. I found it is really a 24 hour thing, I’m really tired now at the end of the course... you have to want to do something, ...[the program] is not something you just go to and it’s going to help you figure it out, I mean we have done all the work ourselves (fg1.1).

The women in Program Three, in particular, talked about how returning to school and work proved to be a difficult and emotional adjustment for themselves and for their children, yet conversely, how it positively affected family dynamics:

- We’re learning that just having a Mom that is going out and doing something to make things better in a lot of cases has helped our children’s self-esteem. At first it wasn’t like that though... they did everything they could to sabotage us...
- [Oh, they did... Big time, said other women]
- You don’t love us anymore, who is going to look out for us, who is going to make us lunch, you’re never home anymore... [lots of laughs] ...my younger one, what a nightmare, I didn’t think I was going to make it through the first month with that kid.
- It took about a month and a half for my kid to stop crying when I dropped him off at daycare.
- And then the guilt, right...
- Yes, the guilt is... [a woman trails off...]
- A lot of guilt [comments another] (fg3.1-2).

Further, while many friends and family members play an active role in supporting the women, they also acted as a testing ground for new-found knowledge and awareness and this was, at times, an uncomfortable and disorienting experience.

- It’s hard to relate to my friends now, they don’t understand, ‘cause they are all in the same place as they were before, in their jobs that they have worked at for a long time, their mentality is the same, they don’t understand how I get offended by a lot of things as far as being a woman [in this society], a lot of them are still in bad relationships, they’re scared to leave their job and they’re scared to go back to school. It’s very hard being around them, ...they can’t get a grip on what I’m trying to say, how I’m thinking...
- Well, you’re taking risks now and changing...
- Exactly, I’m changing and they can’t deal with it because they are used to seeing me in a certain way... now it’s like I have just realized so many things, I’m aware of so many things that I wasn’t aware of before, and it’s hard to try and explain, I’m not trying to inflict my views on anybody but just in general conversation, they just don’t see how they got caught up in it (fg1.4).
And another young woman described how her determination to participate in the career exploration program and to pursue employment has affected her family relationships and how they responded to her making decisions for herself:

...It’s made such a difference with my family, a total difference, because my family said I would never do it... I have always been in alcohol and drugs, and they always told me to go into a alcohol and drug counseling thing, but coming here... I don’t need that. So now my family is a little bit upset with me but my Mom is happy, because she said she knew I could do it... but the rest of my family is like no she couldn’t, but now I have proved them wrong and I am happy because I proved it to myself, to my Mom and to my kid (fg3.8).

Accessing Information and Skills

The processes of self-reflection and self-discovery in a supportive and inter-connected learning environment were clearly important and meaningful to these women but they also stressed the importance of accessing information and skills directly related to facilitating decision-making in pursuing further education and employment goals. Particularly, many women enjoyed the opportunity to explore a wide variety of careers not previously considered:

[It] is helpful because then you can start to make better decisions about what kind of fields you might go in because we were exposed to a lot of things like trades and technologies and stuff whereas before we were exposed to things like, well, do you want to be a secretary or a airline stewardess, you know, those kinds of things and it seems like toward the end people were choosing cool careers, things that maybe you might not have chose before (fg1.3).

Additionally, they enjoyed the opportunity to determine how their skills and potential might best be applied. As one woman said, “the thing I liked about this program is that it helped me to identify my strengths and weaknesses in terms of work” (fg3.7).

Numerous women talked about how empowered they felt by being “really well informed” on such things as writing covering letters and resumes, interviewing, learning how to use employment resources such as the National Occupational Classifications, how to determine pay scales, how to use library references, learning about employee rights and dealing with sexual harassment (fg2.9). Some further examples of important learning events involved interactions with other women:

- Just bringing in other women from other fields was inspirational and telling their story of how they got there. There were a few who were on welfare too or UI or just nothing
starting out and they have made it... it gives me the idea that we can do what is in the back of our minds and we think about (fg1.3).
- That’s why knowing the choices and options that you’ve got is really important so you don’t think that you can’t do those things, that you can try different things, and don’t have to get stuck (fg1.5).

I learned by watching other people do their practice interviews. I learned by watching them make mistakes and doing it better the next time, how to answer... and I learned by how I come across in the video, ...I learned by watching other people going through their stuff as well as me going through my stuff (fg2.6).

And another woman insightfully commented,

We were encouraged to work in groups a lot and in different groups ...and I think that will be extremely helpful once we get out in the workplace, just associating with different people with different temperaments and personalities and so many different opinions and insights into things, and that is the biggest issue in the work world. This is a great place to practice because you get lots of support here and you won’t necessarily have it in the workplace (fg2.11).

The women in Program Three, in particular, described a broad range of enriching information and skills that they had enjoyed:

- We learned how to organize our time better.
- We’ve learned how to organize our kids better.
- How to make a decision and stick to it.
- It’s been learning about how to be positive ...and have confidence for the future.
- Money management.
- That we can do math..
- [We went] to the new library three different times and we toured that and learned how to use it and we went to Museums and the Museum of Anthropology and other places I had never been to before... (fg3.9).

Volunteer work or employment placements were part of all three programs. The students described placements as a valuable part of the program experience in several ways. For many women, placements helped them to clarify their goals, for others, they helped to eliminate educational programs or areas of employment prior to significant expenditures of time and money. And for some women, placements set them on the paths that they plan to pursue after completion of the programs.

I found the job placements really, really helpful because it was just such a safety net to checking out dreams ...and it made me feel like I was already out in the work world, and that clicks you into a whole different competence level, you’re not at home wondering how am I going to get work, it’s two different worlds altogether. And it was really good because in the back of my mind I was constantly assessing because I knew I had to for the course, I knew I would have to come back and assess to my counselor why I didn’t like it
and why I did, so it was always re-focusing what are my values, what are my skills, what do I want out of a job, what do I not want out of a job. It really helped me to have clarity, clarity, clarity (fg2.4).

...a lot of us have done some eliminating as well, there’s been more of that. A couple of us really know what we are doing but the majority of us are still looking and... I don't think you can come out knowing what you want to do but it’s certainly given people more options... and I think the eliminating part is just as good, too, that’s just part of it (fg1.5).

Myself, I know exactly what I am going to be doing now. So I guess the course did what it was supposed to do, ...the funny thing about it is when I came into the course I heard that they were really going to try and push women into the male dominated trades, and right away fear came out in me on that one, like Oh, yeah, I can really do that, right... now it is exactly what I am doing, going into a male-dominated trade (fg2.1).

Overall, women in all three programs enthusiastically commented that one of the most crucial aspects of the personal knowledge, information and skills they gained from the programs was that it will be useful for their lifetime.

All the stuff and handouts and booklets are relevant to life in general, so even if you can’t use them now, maybe in a year or two years from now... we have all this valuable information (fg1.7).

Like that is how I feel, it is such a life-long skill we have learned by being here (fg2.12)

All of the information that we have been taught in here will help us in the future...[Oh, Yes, from many voices] (fg3.5).

**Changing Perspectives**

The learning events and processes that the women experienced in these programs seem to culminate in altering many women’s perspectives of themselves, their opportunities for the future, and their role as women in our society. They spoke about how the classroom community offered them recognition of their many varied skills and accomplishments across the spectrum of their lives by reducing the separation between domestic and public spheres which often minimizes accomplishments of the home.

When we first came into the class we had to write down on a sheet of paper all our skills and about ourselves, and everybody was sorta like... nothing. I don't really have any skills or I was a waitress. And then we went through everything with [the teacher] and we found that everybody had so many skills, especially women that are mothers. They are doing all these things - cooking, sewing, maybe not all mothers but they do all these things in organizing the schedule with the kids, and even if you don’t have children you find that
you have all these skills that you weren’t even aware of... So it is neat that way, that you find out what you really can do and that you aren’t this worthless person that is going through life with no real ideas or skills... that’s what I found most amazing... (fg1.8)

As for me, what this course has done is show me that I have transferable skills from my home, to go out there and I can get paid for it. Like it is so awesome because I have done this for so many years in my home, working there, non-paid and just slaving away, and I always thought it was just nothing and then I found out that those skills are really great when I went to a job placement and that has given me insight that I can transfer those skills out there to get a job and get paid for it. And I am so good at it, that is the one thing I do know (fg2.2).

Many students also commented that one of the most important outcomes of the program was to have enriched their perspectives on prospective opportunities for themselves. For others, this experience appears to have given them some impetus to continue the process of decision-making around employment and education with newly acquired knowledge and skills.

Motivation, it has just provided me with a lot of motivation and also with a framework to start with, from coming out of the vague situation that I was in, I feel like I have entered some sort of a structure and being in that structure has given me a lot of the kind of contact that I needed and the kind of motivation that I need to go on from here (fg1.1).

-It’s just given me lots of incentive to get out there and get myself working and it just feels good getting up and doing something every day.
- Yeah, it feels good to know that you can, you can get up in the morning and get those kids off to daycare and we can do it...
- We can go do something...
- We can make it... (fg3.1).

And finally, numerous women talked of their new realizations about themselves as women, their position as women in our society, and their revised expectations of their employment opportunities as women:

Well, when I was sitting at home I knew women were getting into this and that but I thought, until I came into this course, that they were exceptions, but then you realize no, I can do that, if I want... realizing that we don’t have to do these things but if you choose to, you can and there are always ways to do that. I think that was a big thing for me (fg1.3).
I'm proud to be a woman today [Yeah, Yeah, *from other women*] and I know that I can do anything fully as well as a man out there. My eyes were really opened to equality in this course, feminism I guess, which is equality... something that I never really had much exposure to as I was always willing to settle for second best, you know, put the man first and that stuff... (fg2.2).

...Well, we are equal to men as opposed to before the course started, I didn’t feel that way, I was always second best and I was O.K. with that but since taking this course I have discovered that, Hey, we are equal no matter what. They might think we’re not, but we are, I know it and I am going to live by that. And this course has actually pointed me in that direction, actually brought me to that conclusion, that I’m not better than them but I’m not under them anymore either. It’s just like we are equal. And these classes with the ladies, it is really, really safe and I would recommend it to any woman in the same boat I was in, to be able to rise and stand up tall and say this is me, right. I like that (fg2.3).

**Summary of Students’ Perspectives**

When considering the voices of the students, several themes stand out. First, in essence, the career exploration programs acted as a place for the women to consider who they are and what they want; a place of self-disclosure, self-discovery, healing, and gathering power. Power has been defined as the capacity to produce change, including changing one’s own thoughts or emotions as well as creating change in the economic or social arenas of life (Miller, 1991). Therefore, gathering power describes the enlivening of students’ ability to speak for themselves and to bring their own questions and perspectives to the material presented in the classroom. Further, it describes the heightened sense of self-awareness, greater self-confidence, and competence many women spoke of as a consequence of working to resolve issues that are relevant to their daily lives. In general, the women sought to fashion their own voice by creating knowledge on their own terms as well as in concert with others. As one woman said, “We learned about ourselves and who we are” (fg3.2).

Second, many women seem to want their lives to be different and their return to an educational venue despite, for some women, current obstacles, prior damaging life experiences, or perhaps, previous unhappy educational experiences signals a serious and courageous effort to change their lives. As one woman in Program Three said,

We want to be happy, we don’t want to have to do this all over again, none of us want to do this again. [Nope, No way, *said other women*]. Only because it is a struggle, it really
is... it has been a struggle right from September on... but we are all seeing a light, at least I am, we are all seeing a light at the end of the tunnel (fg3.2).

This also suggests that many of them had begun to see that employment could and, in the majority of instances, would have to play a central role in their lives. Overall, the women’s aim for employment appears to stem from a desire to find work that is meaningful, economically viable, and consistent with their values. They seek both the non-economic and economic rewards of work in order to provide self-sufficiency for themselves and their families. Participating in the career exploration programs gave them the chance to demonstrate their willingness and readiness to adhere to the demands of employment in this society because the programs involved displaying employment-appropriate behaviors. Moreover, the women were able to gain a greater sense of confidence by developing the skills to research and pursue various employment and educational options and by experiencing formal educational or employment situations through study and job placements.

Third, the foundational milieu in which each individual’s learning took place was the community of the classroom, an environment which students described as being fostered by the patience, sensitivity, and commitment of the educators. Establishing a ‘safe’ environment through sharing experiences and developing relations of trust set the stage for discovering and developing connections among the students, for relating learning to one’s own life, and for reaffirming the value and worth of each individual. It also promoted collaborative learning and problem-solving interactions among each woman’s own experiences and ideas, and those of other women. Furthermore, it seems to foster an increased awareness of how “the various realms of their lives were interwoven, interdependent and mutually reinforcing” (Statham et al., 1988, p.31). In other words, many found that when they gained knowledge and insight into one part of their life, it led to changes in perspective in other aspects of their lives. The result, for some students, appears to be a fundamental shift in perspective about self and employment; where perception of self and subsequent employment options were once considered to be a “black hole of ‘Oh, I can’t do anything’,” many students now have “insight into myself, my abilities, my skills, and what I am capable of” culminating in a greater sense of confidence in their “ability to find work and do something I want to do” (fg2.1).
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored the perspectives of instructors and participants in three career exploration programs. It also examined the contextual factors and pedagogical approaches which act to create, influence, and constrain these sites of practice. In the previous three chapters, detailed descriptions were provided of the three career exploration programs and the perspectives of the instructors and the women who took part as participants. In this chapter, I begin by summarizing the administrative and organizational factors related to these programs. Next, I discuss the relationship between the literature on liberatory pedagogy and the aims, beliefs, and strategies of the instructors along with the participants' perspectives on learning. This is followed by a discussion of the social and political factors which influence and constrain these sites of practice. Finally, I discuss the implications of this study for adult education practice and further research.

Administrative and Organizational Factors

The three career exploration programs share many common elements in orientation and curricula that are consonant with elements usually found in most bridging or pre-employment programs. Similarities in topic areas among the programs included skill development related to employment interviewing, job search, and employment and education research; work/study volunteer placements; professional development in the form of communication, problem-solving, computer, and team-building skills; and personal development in such areas as assertiveness, self-confidence and self-esteem building. Distinctions in curricular elements included incorporating an in-depth study of employment opportunities in trades, technology, science, and self-employment in Program One; writing and discussing each participant's life history in Program Two; and academic upgrading in Program Three.

There were also differences among the participant population's and criteria for eligibility from program to program. For example, though some of the women in Program One may have experienced violence, abuse, addictions, or mental illness, having had those kinds of life experiences is not a criterion for student eligibility as they are in the other two programs. Secondly, in Programs One and Two, the women could have been receiving unemployment insurance, on social assistance, or paying their own tuition through various means. In Program
Three, participants are eligible only if they receive social assistance and, in general, these participants have the lowest levels of formal education.

Another factor that may potentially influence student eligibility in Programs Two and Three actually began with the funding-related goal of graduating 75% of participants and having 75% of those be involved in further training, education or employment within six months of program completion. Program One, on the other hand, had no target percentage for women to complete the program nor time goals to be in further education or employment. Additionally, Programs Two and Three carry out a screening of applicants prior to enrollment, whereas Program One does not. However, it is difficult to assess whether the 75% goal in Programs Two and Three actually had an influence on the screening and selection of applicants or subsequent graduation rates.

As several of the instructors in Programs Two and Three noted, the focal aim of their career exploration programs is to address issues and provide information related to pursuing employment and/or making future employment plans; they are not intended or oriented to be a therapeutic program. Women who are actively engaged in addictions, other forms of abusive situations, or a mental illness are rarely in a particularly good position to pursue employment or make future educational plans. Furthermore, the instructors spoke of their responsibility to provide a safe, supportive, and focused environment to those women who are committed to addressing employment related issues and who are recovering and in relatively stable life situations. Therefore, participant eligibility and screening, such as the six months of addictions recovery in Program Two, suggest more of a concern for individual participants and class well-being than a process carried out in order to fulfill the objectives of the funding goals.

In general, all the instructors had great flexibility and power to determine classroom management factors such as arrangement of tables and chairs, the groupings of participants during classroom exercises, the nature and frequency of teacher-student interactions, the selection of pedagogical processes, the selection and use of instructional materials and tools, the time dedicated to specific topic areas, and student and program evaluation standards and procedures. However, some of the organizational differences among the programs seem to reflect the unique relationships with the institutions where the programs reside and the institution’s funding source.

In particular, the instructors in government-funded Programs Two and Three expressed concern over the future of their programs due to the changes in availability and allocation of
government funds for health, education, and training which occurred in 1995. Further, they could not be sure whether or how changes in funding requirements would affect their client eligibility or curricular orientation in the future. Program One, on the other hand, though it may change to remain current with ongoing shifts in the labour market, seems relatively secure due to its location within a college.

Secondly, perhaps because of its location in a higher education institution, Program One displayed the greatest flexibility in terms of assessing attendance, determining satisfactory completion of course assignments, and overall student assessment procedures. However, participants could be asked to leave Program One if there was a significant lapse in attendance, inappropriate public behavior (such as drug abuse or violence), or an overall unwillingness to complete course assignments. The other two programs placed more emphasis on the participants adhering to each program’s set of rules which are intended to produce behaviors appropriate to the workplace.

Regardless of the funding and institutional structures within which the programs are located and which clearly influence the program clientele, how the programs are administrated, and significant aspects of the pedagogical orientation, as individuals and as a group, the instructors appeared to embrace pedagogical approaches which are consistent with the values, and social and political objectives of the women’s movement and with liberatory pedagogy. The objectives of the women’s movement are, in general, to work toward advancing women’s interests in society and to empower individual women. In the following section, I discuss the pedagogical approaches expressed by the instructors in relation to the literature on feminist and critical pedagogy. In the final section on social and political factors, I discuss the contradictions inherent in applying feminist and critical approaches in order to advance women’s interests and empower individual women in the context of these career exploration programs.

**Pedagogical Approaches**

As the chapters on the perspectives of the instructors and participants showed, the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the instructors as well as the teaching strategies they utilize, are important conceptual factors framing these programs. The literature reviewed for this study suggests that adult instructors concerned with liberatory aspects of educational events advocate for and engage in teaching approaches which reflect their rejection of traditional models of instruction. In the
traditional model, the social function of education is to prepare individuals to find their place within a society that is assumed to basically offer fair access to opportunity. Thus, because achievement will be different for different people, and it is differentially valued by different people, social inequality is seen as inevitable and as necessary and beneficial to the structuring of society as a whole (Rubenson, 1989).

On the other hand, a critical feminist pedagogical model, would include the following approaches, it would: proceed in part from the questions and everyday experiences of participants without giving up instructor responsibility and expertise; encourage reflection on course content as it relates to participants' life experiences; encourage a socially-constructed view of knowledge; challenge and inform participants as to the nature of existing power relations based on expressions of difference; and link classroom topics with issues in the larger community (Gore, 1991; Maher, 1987; Tisdell, 1993). The educational process is not considered complete unless learners take concrete steps to apply what is learned toward change (Hayes, 1989). These elements are oriented to encourage “practices of teaching/learning intended to interrupt particular historical, situated systems of oppression” which are reflected in the structure of opportunity and lack of social mobility that exists in society (Lather, 1991, p.121). The aim of critical feminist pedagogy is to assist women (and men) to develop their own voice in relation to the material presented and develop attitudes, abilities, and knowledge to work individually and collectively for change and improvements in their lives, communities, and workplaces (MacKeracher, 1993).

In the context of career exploration programs explored in this study, the instructors and participants described practices in which both traditional and liberatory approaches to teaching and learning were evident. Some of these contradictions and the influences which acted to create this blend of approaches to adult education practice will be explicated below.

Fundamentally, the instructors in the three programs encouraged the personal advancement of each woman by viewing her as a unique individual with unique experiences, abilities, interests, and aspirations. However, they also created and encouraged a learning environment wherein the sharing of personal experience and participation in small group work was central to developing relations of trust among the participants and between themselves and the participants. At the heart of these programs lies the strong agreement among the instructors
and participants that the woman-centered aspect of the programs contributed significantly to the ways that participants, and participants and instructors were able to relate to one another. In fact, the voices of all the women reflect that the woman-centered aspect permeated both how the teaching/learning environment was constructed and experienced and how classroom analysis was carried out. In Program Two particularly, both participants and instructors noted that the educational environment was strongly influenced by the sharing of the women’s life stories. The voices of the instructors and participants alike suggest that the value placed on knowing, respecting, and enhancing growth among women was encouraged and facilitated through the creation and nourishment of these mutually-empathic relationships (Jordan, 1991).

By encouraging mutually-empathic relationships, the individual mastery of skills and information became part of a collaborative construction of knowledge through the pooling of personal experiences and through group discussions about curricular information. Rather than exercising a didactic delivery of curricular knowledge, the instructors shepherded their classrooms, guiding exercises in which participants were encouraged not only to take given information and “make it live for you,” but to discover and create knowledge originating from and relevant to their daily lives (1G.4). The focus on fostering collaborative learning was evident even in the physical set-up of the classrooms. Although there were flipcharts or blackboards which acted as a focal point for instruction, participants’ tables and chairs were arranged in such a way that all could see and hear one another or the space could be arranged for small group work.

Furthermore, it appears that by incorporating participants’ own life experiences and questions as sources of knowledge and insight and by providing a gender-based (and in Program Two, a class- and race-based) analysis of society, new insights between personal experiences and broader theoretical frameworks were formed. These insights are illustrated by some of the participants’ realizations about the positioning of women in this society and how their personal struggles are reflected in that positioning. In essence, personal growth and mutual empowerment emerged through the active facilitation of interactions which encouraged greater self-awareness and supported the development of self-confidence and self-esteem (Jordan, 1991). In addition, individual self-worth was validated through the recognition by other women of each individuals’ accomplishments and actions.

Each participants’ self-confidence, esteem, and worth was also validated through taking concrete actions. For example, the process of determining, arranging, and participating in
volunteer work or study placements required utilizing many of the skills and attitudes developed during the earlier portion of the programs. Actually, for many of the women just participating in the programs displayed a significant commitment to affect change in their lives. And in Program Three, studying for and sitting the General Educational Development exams was an important step in the active struggle to improve each woman's life.

In all three programs, the instructors spoke of attempting to minimize traditional hierarchical power relations between themselves and the participants, however, neither participants nor instructors denied that differences did exist in their knowledge and authority. Fundamentally, all the instructors professed a belief that as human beings and as women, they were equals with the participants. But the instructors also referred to occasions where there were struggles over such issues as regular attendance, timeliness, assignment completion, or remaining clean and sober. Some participants also resisted taking part in the work and study placements. In these instances, instructors had the responsibility and power to, first, seek to engage the woman in solving these issues or, ultimately, ask her to leave the program. So although instructors worked to minimize hierarchical power relations, the structure of classroom expectations, differing levels of education and social position, and their roles as instructor, counselor, and "employer" acted to maintain some unequal power relations. Overall, however, the voices of the instructors and participants alike demonstrate that the emphasis in these career exploration programs was on creating and maintaining a different kind of power relation based on more egalitarian relationships than traditional forms of student-teacher relations.

The instructors provided opportunities for participants to question and interpret their own needs and identity by considering their lives and the role that they wanted employment to play though the questioning of personal values, and they encouraged the participants to think about pursuing careers which were consonant with their values rather than seeking short-term employment or work where they might not be satisfied personally just to have a job. The voices of the participants' also reflected the desire to have both the money and the non-economic rewards that employment could give them. Generally, both the instructors and participants professed great optimism about the participants' future opportunities to find and participate in meaningful employment that would also bring about economic self-sufficiency. However, several instructors qualified that much of this optimism is due to the rapid economic growth that is occurring in the lower mainland at this time. This brings me to the examination of the social and political factors which act to influence and constrain these sites of adult education practice.
Social and Political Factors

The over-arching social frame which shapes the teaching/learning experience and objectives of these career exploration programs is the normative societal expectation of ‘employability.’ The B.C. Labour Force Development Board (1995) recently produced an "Employability Skills Profile" which outlines foundational skills necessary for employability. Generally, they are described as the combination of academic, personal management, and teamwork "skills, attitudes, and behaviors required to get, keep, and progress on a job and to achieve the best results" (p.20). The objective of employability skills is to assist people “in reaching their full labour market potential” (p.21).

These notions of employability represent the dominant ideology of the traditionally-based model for education in the industrialized world. This model essentially demands that people be held up to certain standards of accomplishment, primarily based on expectations of individual self-sufficiency, wherein persons are expected to be able to ‘find’ their place in which to contribute to and not take from society by being financially dependent. However, this notion of ‘self-sufficiency’ obscures the hardships of workers whose jobs pay low wages, provide no benefits, and offer few possibilities for advancement (Nettles, 1991; Harlan & Steinberg, 1989). Furthermore, employability criteria are based on the expectation that women (and men) have to adjust themselves to the existing structure of employment; a structure which has not been significantly altered to reflect the reality of women’s increased participation in the workforce in the last 40 years.

Although women are now in the labour force on a massive scale, and there is a significant increase in the numbers of single parent families, primarily women-headed households, the institutions of employment are generally organized around the same traditional capitalistic model of work and family life. This model generally assumes that one person in the family is at work for at least 40 hours (plus commuting and overtime) and a partner (or someone) is available to manage childcare, care-giving, and domestic tasks (Butterwick, 1992). However, feminist theorists argue that the capitalist model is not gender-neutral, instead; the assumption is that the primary breadwinner is male, and that a woman’s social role is deemed to be more flexible, and, thus, her participation in the labour force is marginalized (Pateman, 1989; Sassoon, 1987).
Employability criteria along with the attendant ideology of individualism basically perpetuate the notion that self-reliant individuals have the personal power to change themselves and their circumstances in order to strive to "realize their full labour market potential;" if a person does not make it to the 'higher rungs' of the labour market, the implicit assumption is that they have not tried hard enough. However, as Maher & Tetreault (1994) explain, this construct minimizes the social context both within and outside classrooms that positions people differently with regard to their gender, race, class, age, ablebodiedness, sexual orientation, and other expressions of difference:

The capacity of many people to tolerate the severe inequalities of capitalism depends on their acceptance of the fundamental ideal of the marketplace, where everyone competes on equal terms for places on a fixed ladder. People are set up to compete as atomized individuals in the marketplace, have political rights as individuals, and are assumed to occupy different positions in society primarily on the basis of individual merit. Yet these conceptualizations of basic individual equalities of opportunity and rights mask deep structural inequalities of power, position, and possibility in the lives of many people (emphasis in the original, p.217).

Moreover, beyond overt expressions of difference, enormously difficult and emotionally damaging life experiences are also known to many women and men. Women, for example, often report that they live with deep feelings of depression, shame, anxiety, powerlessness, rage, inadequacy, or ambivalence as an effect of abuse and/or addictions. Dealing with these feelings and the events that precipitated them may obviously effect some women's ability to be fully "employable," at least until they gain some measure of knowing and understanding about the circumstances of those experiences and knowledge about how to cope with them.

However, since the overall aim of these career exploration programs is to assist women in gaining access to existing structures of education, training, and employment, and given the dominant discourse on employability which currently prevails in capitalist societies, it is not surprising that the instructors, most particularly in Programs Two and Three, frame the structure of their programs to be similar to the workplace. But, the orientation to produce behavior and actions on the part of the participants which reflect 'employability' is displayed in all three programs. It is displayed in the 'expectations' determined between instructor and participant in Program One, and the 'rules' set in Program Two and Three; all of which concern the participants' responsibility to adhere to time schedules and attendance requirements, participate in classroom discussions, complete assignments and other tasks, and work well and/or work to resolve conflicts with others.
After all, women who participate in career exploration programs will be seeking education or employment in a social system which absolutely demands that they understand and adhere to current notions of employment appropriate behaviors and actions. In view of that reality, women need to understand how to function in, take advantage of, and, in theory, prosper within existing social parameters. This reality essentially necessitates that the instructors perpetuate our society’s notions of employability. Indeed, for women who have been disenfranchised and marginalized by lives of poverty, violence, addictions, and abuse, entering into or returning to paid work despite its obstacles and imperfections may result in an increased sense of personal worth and value, a sense of purpose and achievement, and ability to gain independence from the control of others. These features have been identified as crucial to women’s sense of well-being and liberation (Chester & Grossman, 1988; Jordan et al., 1991).

Thus, the instructors do perpetuate notions of employability and individualism which aim to construct women as self-disciplined and, essentially, compliant workers who can function in some form of a ‘self-sufficient’ relationship with the existing structure of the labour market. However, they also teach from a political position rooted in anti-sexist struggle which incorporates an exploration of the existing social and structural inequalities that burden women so that they may resist these inequalities. This paradox arose for me as the most thought-provoking pedagogical aspect of these programs.

The literature suggests that the ultimate ideal of a liberatory pedagogue is “to empower participants both as individuals and as potential agents of social change,” (McLaren, 1989, from Gore, 1990, p.57). However, instructors and students are social actors negotiating actions within particular complex social contexts. Therefore, if one refutes the notion that any instructor can give power to (empower) a student, and instead views the attempt to ‘empower’ as the exercise of one’s power in an attempt (that might not be successful) to help others to exercise power, any notion of ‘empowerment’ must be considered in light of its social context and actual practice (Gore, 1990). Hence, although the conditions through which a person becomes empowered must reside within each individual, instructors can act as agents to facilitate empowerment (they, of course, can also act as agents who, knowingly or unknowingly, silence and oppress).

In the context of this study, the overarching frame of the dominant social and political discourse and reality of employability and individualism acts to greatly influence these sites of practice. But the instructors in these career exploration programs did exercise their power in an attempt to help each participant exercise her own power in several important ways. First, they
exercised their power through their professional and personal commitment to caring about the lives of the women whom they taught; second, they sought to enhance each participant's knowledge of self and self-in-relation to a gendered analysis of society; third, they provided skills and information relevant to women's lives which may assist them in succeeding by society's standards, and; fourth, they sought to foster an "orientation to the task" of employment which could facilitate decision-making for self-determination (2M.1). Thus, empowerment in this context means encouraging and assisting women to explore and analyze the forces acting upon their lives, and involved teaching women to think and act in ways that may increase their power in the labour market.

Moreover, the instructors resisted the ideology of individualism by creating a learning environment which nurtured inter-relationships and collaborative learning. In addition, instructors encouraged participants to envision and work towards the development of a career which could offer them both personal satisfaction and real economic self-sufficiency as opposed to just getting a job. They sought to teach the participants that they should strive to be capable of adequately supporting themselves and their families. In doing so, the instructors contest prevailing social norms about women's appropriate roles, which are "fraught with uncertainly about whether we believe women should work as men do, earn as men do, and head families as men do" (Marano, 1987, from Harlan & Steinberg, 1989, p.42).

Further, the instructors also resist dominant social norms which perpetuate sexism in occupational choice by exposing and encouraging the participants to consider a broad spectrum of careers, including arenas traditionally dominated by men. However, by succeeding in these programs and gaining employability skills in order to "make it out there" (fg3.1), the participants assert their value and abilities as women, but must inevitably comply with the logic of employment under capitalism (Weiler, 1988). Consequently, though the cumulative effect of social and political frame factors, in effect, acts to reproduce the social structural status quo, the instructors in these career exploration programs did offer, at the same time, a form of adult education practice that is supportive of creating a kind of resistance to the status quo. It is resistance to the status quo because these women are attempting to teach other women ways to assert themselves and to resist the ideological and material forces which have been and are imposed upon them. And this is a form of adult education which can lead to social change.

When I spoke with Gloria, during our second conversation, about some of the contradictions in pedagogical orientation that I was seeing in the three programs, she presented
this analogy to explain her perspective on teaching within the contradictions inherent in career exploration programs for women:

[The contradictions] remind me of a book called something like Going out of our Minds, it is about how ‘society’ is supposed to be sane, but rather it is what is really crazy, and in order for us to be sane, we essentially have to be out of our minds [to comply]. But, you know, that is just life, that is just the way things are. [What we’re doing] is just like what a parent has to do for their children, they say, the world is really difficult and contradictory and often screwed up, but I want you to do well in that world, and that means that you have to be even more sane than what you think you have to be. And that’s what we are trying to get these people to do, is be as sane as they can in an insane situation, and know how to find some peace in that. Get some objectivity, like know that you don’t want to be part of all that necessarily, but you want to do well in that environment. ...[We hope] at least now maybe they understand that more so they are better armed (2G.3).

In a similar vein, Ng (1995), writing about critical anti-racist educational approaches, argues that the code and rules of society are established by the dominant group and is part of a “culture of power.” Since women (and minorities) are outside of the “culture of power,” by explicitly stating the rules of that culture and linking the theoretical understandings derived from the classroom to the real-life struggles of people occurring outside the classroom, instructors may make acquiring social power easier for students. Thus, she argues that it is important for the liberatory educator to “assume her authority explicitly and teach minority students the skills necessary for surviving and competing effectively in the culture of power” (p. 149).

In the final analysis, critical feminist pedagogy is not only for students who are deemed to be the recipients of educators’ theories and wisdom, nor it is a set of abstract principles or a model that can be applied regardless of the context (Ng, 1995). Rather, it is meant to be a reflective process and practice which is dependent on the ‘Others’ whose presence one is responding to and acting with in any given situation (Ellsworth, 1989). From this perspective, liberatory pedagogy is a process by which we all can begin to confront our own contradictory learning and societal structures which have been created and mediated by sexism, racism, classism, and other forms of oppression. It is teaching and learning which attends to the particular social and political context of schooling, and works to contribute towards more equitable, just, and humane conditions in schooling and in society.
Implications for Adult Education Practice

Throughout this study I have sought to explore women's perspectives on teaching and learning and the factors which act to create and influence particular career exploration programs for women. I also focused on explicating the instructors' pedagogical approaches in view of my interest in contextualizing how the theoretical ideology of feminist and critical pedagogy is manifested in actual practice. I believe that the qualities of encouraging and assisting women to explore and analyze the forces acting upon their lives, and providing information and instruction which may assist women in thinking and acting in ways that may increase their power in the labour market, are consistent with the aims of a critical feminist pedagogy. But while I consider the efforts of these instructors to provide examples of adult education practices which reside within feminist and critical pedagogical traditions, others might simply call them examples of "good teaching."

In either case, the work of these particular adult educators is important because within a context in which social-structural frames significantly influence learning objectives, they also fostered learning opportunities which may lead to the kind of transformative learning that good teaching and liberatory pedagogy hope to accomplish. This study also illustrated how adult educators concerned with the liberatory possibilities of adult education must invariably operationalize liberatory ideas in complex, constrained, and often contradictory social sites which act to shape the possibilities of instruction. But, as Weiler (1988, p.153) states, "by recognizing the limits of what is possible, teachers (and all of us) should recognize the value and importance of doing what is possible." Because, if adult education practices in bridging and employment programs can help women better understand the positional dynamics and social structures which affect their lives, then perhaps women will be able to challenge them and create change in their own lives and in their communities.

This study also explored the participants' perspectives on learning in these career exploration programs. Merriam & Clark (1993) suggest that for a learning experience to be considered significant it must personally affect and be subjectively valued by the learner. By personally affecting the learner they mean that the experience results in an expansion of skills and abilities, a sense of self or life perspective, or it precipitates a transformation that involves the whole person. By subjectively valued they mean that the learner names its importance in her life. Based on these criteria, the responses of the participants suggest that the learning
experienced during these career exploration programs was significant. However, what we as educators cannot know is how or if these learning experiences will be drawn from or acted upon after participants leave the programs nor, even if they are, what kind of experiences the women will meet with in the world and whether this learning will assist them in their capacity to respond to those experiences.

Nonetheless, that having been said, as the voices of the participants in this study reflect that a woman’s decision to participate in career exploration programs implies many changes in life. These changes are often accompanied by many concerns about such issues as the ability to compete (reflected by a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence), appearance, finances, time management in conjunction with the balancing of multiple roles, appraisal of the past, and modification of life structures (Lewis, 1988). Furthermore, these changes and struggles are manifested differently for individual women because of the possibility of experiencing simultaneous and contradictory forms of oppression and dominance.

As this study showed, recognizing the shifting subject positions that people live, the effects of socialization, the impact of abuse and addictions, and fostering the enhancement or (re)building a positive sense of self necessitates a holistic approach by instructors in bridging and employment programs. Particularly, offering career exploration programs for women only in which the development of mutually-empathic relationships are encouraged, and a combination of individual, small group, and whole class work is provided to create a collaborative learning environment, may help to foster the creation of knowledge which is relevant to participants’ daily lives.

Additionally, addressing participants’ personal concerns (through occupational and personal counseling support, childcare, and/or financial assistance) and providing an analysis of the shifting subject positions women and men inhabit in community and society must be considered as an integral part of the educational process. Indeed, following Cunningham (1988), I maintain that adult educators have an ethical responsibility to create learning environments wherein participants can explore the nature of structured power relations and how the realities of their personal lives were created. Therefore, it is not sufficient for adult educators who design and instruct in bridging and employment programs to offer such programs for women without; first, acknowledging and understanding the social structural issues and life experiences that may trouble women and; second, having additional support services available and accessible in order
to minimize the issues which affect women’s lives during the continual process of individual development.

The women who participated in these career exploration programs have taken a step on the path which will hopefully lead toward meaningful and gainful employment. Certainly, the personal and competency-oriented benefits the participants say they experienced from participation in these career exploration programs suggests a coherent argument for maintaining bridging toward employment programs for women. However, for those women with little formal education or training, research has shown that people with more education have lower unemployment rates and earn more than people with less education (Allen, 1996). Consequently, from a social policy perspective, it is pointless to provide career exploration programs for women without providing additional educational supports, such as financial assistance, child care, transportation allowances, and flexible schedules, so that women can gain greater access to two-year colleges and universities. These are the kinds of supports that would enable women to participate in education and training opportunities that will increase their chance of gaining employment which provides longer-term stability and a higher earning capacity.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Conducting social research starting with women’s everyday experiences and exploring how these phenomena are organized within broader social relations by considering external factors which act to frame the research site, proved to be an effective means of contributing to a deeper understanding of specific adult education practices (Smith, 1987). This approach directs attention to both the social actors and the social and political processes and practices that create and organize specific adult education activities. It is, therefore, useful to further understanding about the liberatory possibilities of educational activities and the constraints and contradictions inherent in them. Further similarly oriented research could explore other sites of adult education practice and, thus, enrich the discussions on the linkages between classroom practices and wider social-structural relations and the liberatory possibilities that exist within the contradictions of ‘schooling’ wherein power relations are always mediated, resisted, and reproduced by human agents (Giroux, 1983). This information is vital so that “teachers recognize not only structural constraints under which they work, but also the potential inherent in teaching for transformative and critical work” (Weiler, 1988, p.52).
Secondly, this study did not observe the day-to-day activities taking place in career exploration programs. Further in-depth research is therefore needed that seeks a greater understanding of the meaning women as instructors and participants make of their experiences in career exploration programs. Along with observational research, engaging the participants in more extended discussions and returning to them to discuss emerging information analysis would be an important contribution toward furthering and enriching the arena of analysis begun in this study.

Finally, this study suggests that adult education practice in career exploration programs for women is an important arena for helping women to overcome some obstacles toward obtaining meaningful and economically-viable employment. Moreover, it can also provide opportunities to empower women by assisting them in becoming critical and self-determining agents. However, further feminist research should be undertaken to explore the effects of subsequent application of learning and to determine how the labour market supports goals and aspirations of the participants in actuality. In other words, How or do the skills and information gained in career exploration programs and becoming personally empowered actually assist women in acting in and changing unequal social power relations? And, How or do women’s experiences in career exploration programs contribute to the feminist movement’s social goal of attaining equality for all women?

---

7 This of course assumes that women are willing and able to meet and adhere to the employment demands of work, such as start and finish times, clothing and/or tool requirements, physical strength, and educational or training requirements. It also assumes that they will not face ageism, sexism, heterosexism, racism, fatism, ablebodiedism, down sizing or restructuring when seeking work or acting on the job.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX C

Instructor Discussion Topics

- Tell me about your program: How did the program come about? What are the goals and objectives of the program? Is that different that what is presented in your funding proposal? What sort of relationship exists among instructors and director. Who are the students, and How does the program recruit students?
- How did you end up doing this kind of work? (general background)
- How do you determine the duration and materials needed for your part in the program or does the program give you an outline.
- What areas of information are covered in this program?
- How is the (your) program evaluated? Do you receive any feedback? What do you like to find out about during evaluations?
- Could you please tell me about the kinds of teaching activities you like to use and why you like to use them. Is there anything which makes it difficult to accomplish this in the program? (physical, administrative or financial considerations). What areas of the program do you teach? What would you like students to come away with from your portion of the program?
- When do you feel that you have been successful with that? Do you try to build in opportunities for feedback? How do you encourage student involvement, ...is it difficult to get the students involved?
- Why do you think that some women do not complete the program?
- Do you feel that programs specifically for women are important or necessary? Why? What role, if any, do you think the life experiences of the women play in determining the way in which or the content of what you teach? What is different about this program than a course run for a mixed sex group?
- Do you think that there is anything unique about teaching (and teaching women) in the context education which is concerned with employment than in other educational situations?
- What are the important qualities that an instructor in job training programs should possess?
- There’s lots of discussion about issues related to gender, race and class in education and how they effect the relationships between students and instructors, do you think this is an issue in work related education?
- Are there personal experiences which have guided you in the way that you teach? How are beliefs or philosophy about education reflected in the teaching strategies you use in the program?
- Have you changed as a teacher since you began teaching? What has been influential in bringing about that change?
- What do you think it means to be a feminist, What do you think is feminist in your teaching and what makes it possible, what hinders your work as a feminist educator?
APPENDIX D

Questions For Student Focus Group

- If you were to describe the program to other students, what would you say about it?
- Was the fact that this is a course solely for women important to you?
- Do you think that because all of you were women and the instructors were women that it was a different learning experience?
- What aspects or moments in the program were most meaningful to you?
- What do the instructors do that was particularly helpful for you to learn the material?
- Do you feel the other students helped you in this learning experience?
- Were there opportunities for your input or feedback regarding content or instruction during the course?
- If someone had difficulties with moments in the program or the material, how was that resolved?
- Were there course materials or areas of information that you found particularly good, or some that were not useful?
- How do feel this course prepares you for making decisions about the work world? What did you get out of this course that is important for work?
- What kind of things were important to you in this educational situation: certain kinds of teaching styles, the classroom arrangement, the content...