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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to investigate the impact of basic education on the lives of adult welfare recipients who were required to return to school as part of their participation in a Family Support Act (FSA) comprehensive welfare reform program and to describe the tensions that developed in a welfare reform program that mandated collaboration between educators and social welfare professionals. The investigator participated for 9 months in the daily activities of an educational center created cooperatively by social service agencies, a local private industry council, and a community college. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with and questionnaires distributed to program participants and staff. Results of the study indicated the following: (1) education, specifically earning a General Educational Development (GED) diploma, was the primary goal for a majority of the new adult learners; (2) most students recognized that obtaining a GED was crucial for future employment; (3) most of the center's adult learners were more immediately concerned with casting off the stigma of being a dropout than with acquiring skills needed to seek employment; (4) although preparing adults for employment was one of the goals of the center, there was tension regarding the best way to accomplish that; and (5) while center staff and most policy makers felt that the center should be concerned initially with serving the developmental and educational needs of participants, some representatives of local branches of the state social welfare agency felt that job placement should be emphasized. Contains 15 notes related to text; some are references. (MAB)

Achieving Self-esteem and the GED -- a Progressive Outcome in a Functionalist World: A Case Study of the Role of Adult Basic Education in Welfare Reform

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Abstract

The purpose of this investigation was twofold: 1) to understand the impact of basic education in the lives of adult welfare recipients who were required to return to school as part of their mandated participation in a Family Support Act comprehensive welfare reform program, and 2) to describe the tensions that developed in a welfare reform program that mandated collaboration between educators and social welfare professionals.

As a principal socializing force, schooling is caught in an ideological conflict by different perceptions of its role in modern society. Many perceive schools as meant to prepare individuals to assume positions in the corporatist workplace, thereby contributing to the maintenance of the existing economic order. According to this functionalist view which has dominated educational policy in recent years, education contributes directly to economic development and workplace productivity. A progressive view, in contrast, has been considered less frequently in policy making. While acknowledging the linkage between schooling and work, a progressive view considers schools to be important agents of individual and social change that can stimulate greater democratization of the workplace, thereby altering an existing economic and social reality.

In the present investigation, the investigator acted as a participant observer for nine months while conducting this case study which was designed to understand the impact of a formal basic education program on new adult learners -- school dropouts who, because they rely on public assistance, have been mandated to return to school. Additionally, the tensions that developed in this collaborative welfare reform program which introduced community college instructors as key participants in a social service dynamic that, in the past, has been

the domain of welfare professionals, were explored and described.

Findings of this investigation indicate students were more immediately concerned with reforming their identity as intelligent and capable learners than with obtaining training and skills needed to search for and acquire entry-level jobs. Earning a General Educational Development (GED) diploma was a key in this reformation of students' identities. Findings also revealed that tensions can develop in a mandated collaborative welfare reform program that brings together different service professionals and different views of the value of adult basic education. While such collaborative programs may appear to bridge traditional service boundaries, the result is not necessarily a client-focused cooperative partnership.

Introduction: Welfare Reform and the FSA

The American dream of achieving prosperity is based, in part, upon the perception of a fluid social and economic structure that enables individuals to rise from a lower to a higher class through hard work and determination. Policy makers in growing numbers, however, are becoming concerned that the potential for solidifying insurmountable class barriers and creating a permanent underclass in this country exists today as never before in our history. A rapidly evolving national economy and the global marketplace are key factors influencing the emergence of a permanent underclass in our nation. Our labor intensive industrial and manufacturing economy which steadily expanded during the past century has been evolving during recent years into an economy relying more on technology than on strong backs. While providing advancements and opportunities in many fields, this economic evolution has been painful for individuals least capable of contributing to the emerging economy because they have achieved only limited education and job skills.

The Family Support Act (FSA), passed by Congress in 1988, was intended to prevent a segment of our society that is most at risk of being relegated to a permanent state of poverty without hope for change -- welfare recipients. The FSA was designed to shift the emphasis of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the nation's primary welfare support program, away from simply providing income support. The Act was meant to strengthen families and help them become self-sufficient. The FSA is based on the belief that parents have a basic obligation to support themselves and their children. If parents are unable to do so, they have an obligation to prepare themselves for and to seek employment. The government, in turn, has an obligation to provide financial support and assistance through

counseling, education, training and employment-related activities so those who need help can fulfill their obligation.

The FSA recognizes that many welfare recipients need more education, training, and work experience if they are to overcome welfare dependency and achieve self-sufficiency in the emerging post-industrial labor force. With passage of the FSA, formal education and the institutions responsible for providing it became important participants in social welfare programs designed to assist welfare recipients in their transition from welfare dependency into jobs that will enable them to support their families.

Community colleges are conspicuous new partners in welfare reform, and they are playing central roles in many states' programs.[1] Directly prior to passage of the FSA, educators seldom dealt with adult welfare recipients or the social welfare agencies that provide relief for individuals and families unable to support themselves.[2] With passage of the FSA and the most recent welfare reform program resulting from that legislation -- the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) training program -- many community colleges have become directly involved in multi-agency collaborative efforts designed to overcome welfare dependency by helping welfare recipients prepare to move into jobs that will provide financial self-sufficiency.[3]

By mandating that appropriate educational services be made available to at least some welfare recipients, the FSA acknowledges that inadequate academic skills can pose serious barriers to self-sufficiency. Because a basic education program is a fundamental element of the FSA, many community colleges have become key partners in welfare reform. Additionally, the FSA's call for cooperative programs means that community college

instructors and policy makers are collaborating with representatives of social service agencies to achieve what seems to be a common goal -- client self-sufficiency.

Function of Education in Welfare Reform

An expanding social welfare system has caused political and social debate for more than fifty years. Public education also has been a source of political and social debate during those years. Like the tensions that underlie the social welfare debate, different perspectives influence the tensions that shape the debate in education. Rather than different views of why individuals are dependent on welfare or the role of welfare programs in our free market economy, the tensions in education are associated with different views of the function of schooling.

A fundamental assumption underlying this study is that the perceived function of education advanced in the FSA cannot be fully comprehended without examining the relationship between two of the most pervasive institutions of our society -- schools and workplaces. The relationship that is perceived to exist between schools and the workplace has long influenced educational policy in this country. Scholars and policy makers have relied on several interpretative perspectives to explain the function of education in modern society and the relationship between schools and the workplace, two of our nation's most important socializing institutions. With passage of the FSA, these perspectives now influence social welfare policy and welfare reform programs as well as educational policy.

Most Americans in recent decades would not question that a relationship exists between education and work. Recognizing the existence of such a link led to the inclusion of the basic education requirement in the FSA. The nature of the linkage between formal

schooling and employment, however, often is an issue of contention. Are schools primarily meant to prepare individuals to enter the corporatist labor force, thereby reproducing the existing economic and social order? Or, is education meant to advance humane and democratic values that individuals will then promote in the workplace, thereby stimulating change in the unequal social and economic status quo? This philosophical debate over the function of education has shaped educational policy and affected Americans for most of this century. The debate now is being played out in the context of welfare reform and it is affecting adults who have not been in a school classroom for many years.

In their analysis of the function of education in modern post-industrial society, Carnoy and Levin (1985) contend that the relationship between education and work is most accurately described as dialectical -- being "comprised of a perpetual tension between two dynamics, the imperatives of capitalism and those of democracy in all its forms" (p. 4). The authors explain that schools are part of a political process and

> Schooling is shaped by class structures and undemocratic capitalist production, but it is also shaped by the social conflict taking place over that injustice and over the political possibilities in a capitalist democracy of expanding democracy itself. Which of these movements dominates is determined by the larger social conflict and the relative political strength of the groups involved. (pp. 25)

The authors maintain that the function of education in this relationship is caught between two broad and opposing perspectives, thereby causing a "severe internal tension" in education. The first, a progressive perspective, stresses that education is independent of the structure and operation of the workplace and that schools create values or ideology independently of the workplace. Progressives maintain that education shapes the minds of individuals who, in turn, act on the social relations outside schools. That is, schools are expected to prepare

individuals to be concerned about equality and democratic principles and to be capable of participating as intelligent and challenging citizens in society. The second broad view asserts that a functional connection exists between schools and the workplace whereby the production needs of the workplace determine the organization and operation of schools. A traditional functionalist view considers schools to be key training institutions that instill necessary cognitive and vocational skills and attitudes, thereby preparing individuals for work roles they will enter after completing school. While progressive perspectives emphasize the differences that exist between schools and the workplace, functionalist views stress the correspondence between schools and the workplace.[4]

The dialectical view of education advanced by Carnoy and Levin is helpful in positioning the function of schools within a broad and often confusing social context. It also is useful for understanding the tension that is inherent in education as schools become sites of social conflict in an increasingly complex modern society. Analyzing the daily activities and behavior of individuals involved in the schooling process, however, requires a perspective that moves beyond the broad structural brush strokes of the dialectical perspective. A second theory is needed to understand the day-to-day activities of individuals involved in a schooling process that is caught up in the dialectical relationship between schools and the workplace.

Like Carnoy and Levin, Weis (1990) acknowledges the shortcomings of the predominant interpretative perspectives that link the function of education to the workplace using a single dimension of correspondence or contradiction. Weis also encourages scholars to "break out of the reproduction framework and begin to explore alternative conceptions of society and the ways in which schools are linked to this society" (p. 11). Weis, however, is

critical of analyses that treat schools as "black boxes" rather than carefully analyzing the behavior and attitudes of individuals at a school site.

In her ethnographic investigation of white working-class youth in the context of an American economy that is evolving from its former industrial base to an emerging service base, Weis (1990) delves into a high school to explore "identity-formation" among the school's students and teachers. Weis defines identity as a "sense of self in relation to others" and explains that identity formation refers to the "processes through which people, either individually or collectively, come to see themselves in relation to others in particular ways" (p. 3). Weis' concept of identity formation, along with Carnoy and Levin's dialectical view explaining the social tensions inherent in education, were used in this investigation to understand the behavior and attitudes of individual learners and educators as they go about the day-to-day activities that constitute the "black box" schooling experience of the Emanual Job Center.

Purpose of Investigation

Enactment of the FSA combined with state policy decisions and the planning efforts of several different agencies resulted in the Emanual Job Center (EJC), Lancaster County's locally organized JOBS Program. The EJC is a collaborative program that brings together social service agencies, the local private industry council (PIC -- a quasi-private sector business development and coordinating agency), and a community college.

Many welfare reform programs have been designed and implemented with varying degrees of success since 1935 when President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law. Assessing the success of a welfare program initiated by the FSA -- as measured by

familiar outcome standards such as number of job placements, wage rates, and welfare savings -- was not the purpose of this investigation. Rather, the purpose of this descriptive case study was to explore the function of formal education and the effect it had on the participants of a comprehensive welfare reform program. More specifically, the primary research objectives of this investigation were twofold: (1) to contribute to a better understanding of the role education can play in the lives of welfare recipients who are required to return to school as part of their mandated participation in a comprehensive welfare reform program; and (2) to describe the tensions that developed in a collaborative program that brought together educators and social welfare professionals, two groups of service professionals whose members had different views of the function and value of education for welfare recipients who had not completed high school.

Methodology

Passage of the FSA and ensuing decisions made by state and local policy makers provided a rare opportunity to study the creation and implementation of an innovative social welfare program at the EJC. The present investigation took advantage of that research opportunity by investigating the impact of a formal basic education program on new adult learners -- school dropouts who, because they relied on welfare, were mandated to return to school. Rather than concentrate the investigation on analyzing external and objective data such as job placement and wage rates that tend to treat schools as "black boxes," the researcher participated in the daily activities of the EJC during the first nine months of operation to understand how the mandated return to school was perceived by students and staff. Additionally, this investigation explored the tensions that developed in a collaborative

program that introduced community college instructors as key participants in a social service dynamic that, in the past, has been the exclusive domain of social welfare professionals.

A case study research design was used to investigate the two fundamental "how" questions shaping this study: (1) How do adult welfare recipients comprehend their return to a formal educational setting that is part of a comprehensive welfare reform program comprised of counseling, education, and job-search training components? (2) How do different perceptions of the function of basic education affect students and staff participating in the EJC?

Questionnaires were developed to obtain perceptions from students and staff regarding goals and objectives of students of the EJC. Three basic objectives formed the basis of using questionnaires. First, student questionnaires were designed to acquire a baseline understanding of the perceptions and expectations of a non-traditional population of adult learners required to participate in a formal educational program. Second, the questionnaires were intended to assess students' views of the role of the ABE component and the value of the GED. Did students express primarily a traditional functionalist view, directly linking their efforts in the ABE unit to desired jobs? Were students concerned with gaining skills needed to become active and contributing members of their community? And third, student and staff questionnaires were intended to determine whether discrepancies in perceptions of the purpose and value of the EJC existed among students, among staff, or between students and staff.

In their assessment of college re-entry programs designed to assist women who were "continuing their education or entering the job market after an extended hiatus," Mezirow and Rose (1978) utilize a technique they label perspective discrepancy assessment. The authors

maintain that this approach to program evaluation is valuable because

> ...an educational process can be understood well only by examining how those involved perceive it and themselves in relationship to it. By coming to see the process through the eyes of those who are interacting to make it happen, it becomes possible to understand not only what is happening, but why. (pp. 3)

Using this technique, a researcher strives to identify discrepancies in expectations that may develop both within and between different groups involved in a program.

A perspective discrepancy assessment technique was used to analyze students' and staff members' perceptions of the purpose of the EJC. This assessment focused on how the EJC was expected to serve students and perceptions of the function of basic education in students' lives. To assess perspective discrepancies, students were asked to identify their principal goals while attending the EJC. Students also were asked what goals they thought the EJC should emphasize to best serve EJC students in general. Similarly, EJC staff members were asked to indicate how important the same goals were and which goals they thought were most important for students to achieve.

Survey responses obtained from students and staff were analyzed using SPSS to determine, in part, whether discrepancies in perceptions occurred among students, among staff, or between students and staff.[5] Discrepancies at any of these points could indicate underlying ideological differences. Discrepencies could signal differences in perceptions of the purpose of the EJC, the role and impact of basic education, and the value of the GED for adults. If they exist, perspective discrepancies could indicate tensions that might jeopardize achievement of student and EJC goals.

In-depth, focused interviews were conducted with EJC students, staff members, and with key representatives of agencies involved in local welfare reform and EJC policy

formation. Key "outside" representatives from the community college, private industry council, and from a local branch of the state's social welfare agency were among the interviewees not working directly with EJC participants. Although they were not directly involved with day-to-day activities associated with counseling and teaching participants, all outside interviewees were actively involved in policy development, program design, and in the on-going effort to reorganize the EJC. All in-depth interviews were intended to elicit detailed information from knowledgeable informants that would lead to a better understanding of: the role of the EJC and the ABE component, the value of the GED, the relationship between education and work, and tensions that were beginning to emerge at the EJC. While interviewing staff and outside representatives, initial questions about these topics led to broader discussions of inter-agency partnerships, funding concerns, organizational culture and ideologies, and the future of welfare reform and the EJC.

While acting as a participant observer in the EJC, the investigator also was able to conduct informal interviews with students and EJC staff. Additionally, as a writing tutor, the investigator was able to assign essay topics to students that probed in greater detail the perceptions, goals, and expectations of students.

The present investigation could be characterized as a qualitative emerging design because early findings influenced later investigative efforts. That is, information obtained from early conversations, student essays, informal interviews, and observations influenced the creation of survey instruments. Similarly, information obtained from formal interviews with students, EJC staff, and outside representatives contributed to the focusing of subsequent in-depth interviews. Finally, because this study did not set out to disprove a null hypothesis,

early findings and understandings were used to explore new questions and insights that emerged as the study unfolded. Compared to a more rigid design that would have required survey instruments and formal interview guides to be fixed before entering the research site, this more flexible approach enhanced efforts to comprehend the convoluted and shifting reality of the EJC.

Summary of Findings, Part I:

New Students in Adult Basic Education

The objective of Part I of this investigation was to understand and describe the effect of returning to school on the welfare recipients who constituted the adult learners of the Emanual Job Center. All the data gathering methods revealed that education, and specifically the GED, were the primary goals for a majority of the new adult learners participating in the EJC. Responses obtained from student surveys demonstrate the extent of this view. For example, when asked to rate the importance of various EJC goals, "Achieving my GED" received the highest mean rating (see Table 1, Appendix A).[6] Additionally, two-thirds of the responding students reported that achieving a GED was their most important goal while attending the EJC (see Table 2, Appendix B).[7]

Most students recognized that obtaining a GED was critical for future employment. As one student explained during an informal interview, "Without a GED, you're pretty much stuck flipping burgers or delivering pizzas." In this sense, students were aware of the functionalist view that linked their schooling efforts in the EJC and their future efforts to achieve financial self-sufficiency.

While students recognized this functionalist link between schooling and work -- they

acknowledged that without a GED they had little hope of obtaining anything but low-wage, dead-end jobs -- most students were more immediately concerned with the transformational function of education than with acquiring skills needed to seek employment. That is, most of the EJC adult learners were immediately intent on casting off the stigma of being a "dropout," a tangible burden they had carried since they left school years earlier. These new adult learners sought to re-identity themselves beyond the limiting frame of being a school dropout, and acquiring a GED was a key to this identity reformation. By succeeding in the ABE unit and achieving their educational goal the new adult learners of the EJC were demonstrating to themselves that they were intelligent human beings who were capable of learning and even excelling in school. This academic accomplishment contributed to their increased self-esteem and was important in helping them form a new sense of self.

Additionally, for many students EJC schooling experiences and achievement played an important and positive role in relationships with their children. Returning to school helped many parents acquire the academic skills and confidence needed to help their children with school work and it demonstrated to their children that schooling was important. A number of EJC students described a change in their children's attitude toward school which these parents attributed in large part to their own return to school. These new adult learners thought that their return to school was helping to convince their children to not "make the same mistake" they, as teens, had made when they dropped out of school. As one parent explained, "I'm walking my talk about school being important."

These findings indicate that, for marginalized adults, relying on a functionalist view alone does not fully enable one to comprehend the value of basic education and the GED.

This understanding has important implications for educators and welfare reform policy makers which will be discussed briefly later in this investigation summary.

Summary of Findings, Part II:

Tensions and Adult Basic Education

The objective of Part II of this investigation was to describe the tensions that developed at the EJC as different views of how best to serve EJC participants clashed. While nearly everyone involved with the EJC -- policy makers from involved agencies, EJC staff, and participants -- acknowledged that employment was a key to overcoming welfare dependence, not everyone agreed about the best way to assist EJC participants in obtaining jobs and achieving financial self-sufficiency. A fundamental tension associated with attaining this goal developed at the EJC. This tension can be attributed to different perceptions of: 1) the mission of the EJC, and 2) the function and value of adult basic education and the GED for the welfare-dependent adult learners participating in the Program.[8]

> The original mission statement (August 1, 1990) explains that the EJC is to
>
> ...positively affect the lives of welfare recipients by increasing individual self-sufficiency and decreasing dependency on the welfare system. We plan to accomplish this by up-grading the participants' basic skills and helping them find employment in the current economic market.

This statement served as a guide for EJC staff who interpreted its phrasing liberally. That is, they understood that the EJC should be concerned initially with serving the developmental and educational needs of participants and that concerns with job placement should follow the accomplishment of these important goals. Staff understood the mission to mean that the program should be "human driven -- a place that could help people improve their lives."

In contrast to EJC staff and most EJC policy makers, some representatives of local branches of the state's social welfare agency[9] who were influential in shaping EJC policy wanted the EJC to emphasize job placement. In doing so, the Program was expected to touch a large number of welfare recipients with a Life Skills training program, some academic remediation that emphasized basic literacy (i.e., achievement of the equivalent of an 8.9 grade level), and a job search program that imparted skills needed to seek employment. These key policy makers interpreted the mission to mean that efforts at the EJC should focus on placing participants in entry level jobs because "getting that first job is a key to getting off welfare."[10] Because of the over-crowding that soon developed at the EJC and because influential local representatives of the state social welfare agency sought to move participants through the EJC as quickly as possible, the social welfare agency was perceived by EJC staff and others as being "numbers-driven."[11] EJC staff members considered the program, as it was being restructured,[12] to be "shallow" and fundamentally different than the "deep" program they envisioned which would provide more services over a longer time for a significantly smaller number of participants.

EJC staff and students considered the GED to be a key objective for students, albeit, for different reasons. Most staff members expressed a functionalist view of education. That is, they thought the GED was necessary if EJC participants were to obtain jobs that might lead to self-sufficiency. Most students, in contrast, were more immediately concerned with reforming their identity (a transformational function of education) and the GED was perceived by them as a critical element in this reformation.

These perceptual differences between students and EJC staff are important and should

be considered when designing programs that serve new adult learners. These different views, however, did not cause appreciable tension within the EJC, primarily because nearly all the staff and students valued the ABE component and the GED.

In contrast to the predominant EJC student and staff member view of the value of the GED and the importance of providing students the opportunity to achieve this goal, influential local representatives of the state social welfare agency perceived the GED as:

1. having only limited value in the local labor market where many individuals seeking entry-level jobs had achieved college degrees and jobs existed that did not require a GED.

2. a goal that, for most adult EJC students, was too:

a) expensive; ABE instructors, because of their affiliation with the community college and its faculty union, had higher salaries and a better benefits package than other EJC staff; consequently, the direct costs of the ABE component were substantially higher than those of other components.

b) time consuming; most adult students required at least several months to achieve their GED at a time when state funds for JOBS programs were threatened and the number of individuals seeking public assistance was rising.

Epilogue

Despite the governor's expressed commitment to JOBS programs, state funding limitations led to a reduction in EJC funding. According to several ABE instructors, though, the ABE unit suffered more than its share of cutbacks. Initial Program restructuring led to the elimination of one and one-half ABE instructor positions in the fall of 1991. The restructured ABE program combined teens and adults in a program format that involved more structured classroom instruction and less individualized instruction, although ABE staff continued to encourage volunteer tutors to participate. Access to the GED for adult students

was reduced and more adult learners were required to exit the ABE unit after achieving the equivalent of an 8.9 grade level. As one of the remaining ABE instructors explained, "There is almost no money now for adults who want a GED."

In the spring of 1992, approximately one year after this formal investigation ended, local EJC policy makers decided to eliminate an additional full-time ABE instructor position. This decision prompted the lead ABE instructor, who had become frustrated with the outcomes of the initial EJC restructuring, to resign from the EJC and take another instructional position with the college. This individual explained,

> I had grown very frustrated with [the state social welfare agency's] philosophy ... [the state social welfare agency] down-played the importance of the GED and ABE in general ... When plans were made to distribute [state] Emergency Board funds to the Program, only a small amount was targeted for ABE under even the best scenario. To me that said it all. They [local representatives of the state social welfare agency] didn't want to put money into ABE ... they didn't think it was that important.

When I asked about the partnership between social welfare agencies and the community college which was supposed to have developed at the EJC, this former instructor replied,

> The EJC wasn't a partnership. [Local representatives of the state social welfare agency] ran the show as they wanted ... They insisted on offering a shallow program that reached a lot of folks. And what still upsets me is they expected many of those folks to return to welfare after leaving the Program.

The departure of this instructor left the ABE unit with two full-time and one half-time instructor positions and two part-time instructional aide positions (when the EJC first began serving participants in October 1990, the ABE unit was comprised of four full-time and two half-time instructor positions). In the fall of 1993, the ABE unit was comprised of one full-time instructor and two half-time instructors. This 60% reduction in ABE instructional FTE occurred during a period when other EJC units (Life Skills and Job Readiness/Job Search)

suffered substantially fewer if any reductions in staff.

Implications of Findings

Findings of the present study demonstrate that adult basic education should not be perceived as a simple production process intended to pour basic academic competencies into students' brains. Many of the welfare recipients involved in this investigation were plagued by the stigma of being school dropouts. Policy makers and ABE instructors who will be mandated to serve these new adult learners because of FSA requirements should recognize that the identity reformation many marginalized adults experience while achieving the GED is an important developmental process. Overcoming the dropout stigma and developing the perception of themselves as intelligent and capable individuals is an important step away from a marginalized position in society, a step that must be taken if welfare recipients are to eventually achieve self-dependence.

The transformational function of education should not be overlooked or discounted in the classroom or in policy making. Using only a functionalist lens that focuses on the acquisition of productive skills can result in such an oversight. Policy makers dealing in the hybrid realm that combines educational policy with social welfare policy in the context of welfare reform should recognize the empowering transformation that occurs through achieving the GED. By earning the equivalent of a high school diploma the subjects of this investigation were realizing much more than the acquisition of academic skills needed to eventually obtain employment. Earning their GED contributed to EJC students forming a vision of a life free of the hassles and shame associated with welfare dependence.

Achieving a GED should be perceived as a key developmental step that many of the

new adult learners participating in comprehensive welfare reform programs must take if they are to eventually become self-dependent. These individuals must come to see themselves as capable of learning and applying the basic academic skills most of them failed to master as youths. Abilities most accomplished adults take for granted such as being able to solve basic algebraic problems and writing an organized essay, are perceived by marginalized adult learners as important indicators of one's intelligence and ability to achieve.

The transformation from self-doubting academic failures to confident and empowered achievers is not inconsequential for individuals who have been labeled "school dropouts" and who have been "taken care of" by a social welfare system. Additionally, this transformation is necessary if welfare recipients are to compete for jobs in the private sector labor market. From his investigation of welfare recipients' work orientations, Goodwin (1972) concludes that after experiencing repeated failure in the work world, welfare recipients "tend to become more accepting of welfare and less inclined to try again [to obtain employment]" (p. 113). Similar to Goodwin's subjects who gave in to welfare dependence, I expect that few of the EJC participants with limited education or work experience will have enough confidence to persevere in the daunting and protracted ordeal of striving to achieve economic self-sufficiency through employment until they are able to realize self-validating learning experiences gained from achieving a GED diploma.

Findings gained from the present investigation indicate that initially, the EJC may have begun to contribute to the lengthy and complex process of altering the personal, economic, and social reality of individuals who are dependent on AFDC benefits. As one EJC Life Skills instructor reflected,

> For the first time these folks [welfare recipients] are getting together and they're talking. They're sharing their frustrations and fears ... They're seeing that they're not alone, that there are others with the same kinds of hardships and fears ... and they're starting to believe their lives can be different.

Enabling welfare recipients with limited formal education to achieve their GED is an important step in altering a status quo many welfare recipients perceived as both depressing and holding little hope for change. Besides reforming their identity as intelligent and capable individuals, working toward and achieving their GED enabled students to gain access to some of the "technological and cultural resources necessary to be informed, make decisions, and exercise control over the material and ideological forces that govern [their] lives."[13] By improving their reading, writing, and speaking skills, students were becoming more capable interpreters of the information and propaganda that continually flows through their lives. Students were exercising these developing abilities by consuming information more critically and also by using a collective voice to direct information to others.[14]

Despite evidence of personal transformations that could be perceived as the first steps toward broader structural change, local policy changes and program restructuring at the EJC suggest that welfare reform, as implemented at the EJC, will not be the "non-reformist" reform some had initially hoped it would be.[15] By limiting adults' access to the GED and cutting back funds to the ABE component, I expect that the EJC will have little effect in altering the welfare dependent status quo of adult participants who lack a high school diploma. That is, the EJC essentially will have little impact on the employment futures of participants' with limited educational attainment. Nearly everyone involved with the EJC -- participants, staff, and most outside representatives -- believed that without a GED, participants would only be able to obtain low-wage, dead-end jobs that would provide no real

opportunity to escape welfare dependency. In fact, most students and EJC representatives believed that a GED was only the first step to be taken in acquiring the education and training needed to obtain family-wage jobs. These individuals also thought the EJC should enable students to achieve the GED.

What was notable in the present investigation was the perception expressed by several key local representatives of the state social welfare agency who were influential EJC policy makers. These individuals viewed the GED as unnecessary for many adult students because EJC completers could obtain jobs that did not require high school completion. This view was based on the understanding that participants could accept entry-level jobs even if such jobs offered low wages and little or no opportunity for advancement. After gaining work experience in their initial entry-level jobs, individuals were expected to advance in a step-wise manner to better paying jobs that would eventually lead former welfare recipients into self-sufficiency.

In contrast, the EJC staff and other outside representatives strongly favored a "deep" program designed to prepare participants to compete for family-wage jobs immediately after completing the EJC program. Proponents of a deep program argued that such a program would provide the only real opportunity for participants to achieve self-dependence. Deep program proponents perceived the GED as an important factor in achieving self-dependence. Interestingly, most of these proponents expressed only a functionalist perspective of the role of education and the GED. That is, by achieving the GED, students were expected to acquire knowledge and skills that would enhance their chances of obtaining jobs and would enable them to be productive employees. While most of the staff agreed that the EJC should enable

participants to gain self-esteem, only a few staff members expressed an understanding that achieving the GED would contribute to this process. Unlike a majority of the students, only a small number of EJC staff members expressed awareness of the transformational effect that earning a GED was having on students.

There are no quick fixes for problems as convoluted as those that EJC staff face every day. Poverty, welfare dependence, single parenthood, limited educational attainment and work experience blend in a multifarious web that often seems to defy comprehension. To expect that individuals can be "fixed" in a few months by a program such as that provided by the EJC demonstrates a mechanistic production-model perspective of human development. Such a view may be appropriate for correcting an inefficient product assembly process that is stamping out consumer durables, but it is unrealistic in the realm of human development.

Policies at all levels of welfare reform are influenced by individuals' perceptions of the reasons welfare recipients are dependent on public assistance and of ideas about the most effective means for overcoming that dependence. It may be unrealistic to expect welfare professionals and educators to share the same perceptions of the social reality of welfare recipients, but it would benefit all if such perceptions were critically examined. Similarly, it is important that the function of education in such programs be critically discussed. It is essential that social policies and welfare reform programs provide marginalized adults with opportunities to regain self-confidence and self-esteem which are necessary if these individuals are ever to achieve financial self-dependence. These traits also are essential in developing a critical voice and a desire to participate in the social process and to strive to make that process more democratic and moral.

Notes

[1] Jaschik (1989) reports that although most state governments "have a long way to go" in delivering what could be considered an optimal collection of services in their Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programs, many of the community college officials involved with these programs maintain that the programs represent a long-overdue shift in thinking about people on welfare. Rather than the "quick fix" programs of the past that operated for only short periods, JOBS programs have received funding and permission from state and local officials to operate for an initial five-year period, a relatively long time when compared to, for example, the original Work Incentive Program (WIN), an earlier rehabilitory welfare reform program.

[2] Community colleges have offered adult basic education programs for many years. These programs, however, usually are designed to serve students who voluntarily turn to the college. Community colleges also have offered special programs intended to aid adults trying to re-enter the work force. These programs often are designed to serve displaced workers or homemakers. The Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) has provided funding for such programs which often are part of a system of services coordinated through local private industry councils (PICs). Welfare recipients in Oregon have not participated in these sorts of programs in significant numbers nor have they comprised an identifiable population that community colleges or any other educational institution has specifically targeted.

[3] The nature of community college involvement varies across the U.S. and even within states. For example, in Oregon some community colleges are serving as the prime contractor for the FSA mandated program in a service area. In other programs, the colleges are serving as a sub-contractor, providing a particular program component. This component is typically adult basic education. This was the situation in the program investigated in this study.

[4] Carnoy and Levin maintain that the predominant progressive and functionalist interpretative perspectives are limited in their ability to explain the paradox that characterizes schooling (i.e., education is intended to perpetuate the economic status quo while instilling democratic values and ideas that will cause individuals to challenge that status quo). The authors explain that interpretative perspectives that emphasize the correspondence between education and work while disregarding the contradictions (functionalist views), or perspectives that stress the contradictions between schooling and work while discounting the correspondence (progressive views), do not adequately explain the function of education in a modern capitalist society.

[5] Surveys were distributed to a sample of 84 of the 203 students who had participated in the ABE unit during the first eight months of operation. Fifty-four of those students completed and returned their survey, yielding a 64% response rate. Staff surveys were distributed to all 19 EJC staff members and 10 completed staff surveys were returned, yielding a 53% response rate. Because of the relatively small number of completed student

and staff questionnaires, basic frequency distribution analysis techniques in SPSS were used to report simple frequencies, percents, and mean ratings.

[6] This information was drawn from Question 1 of the Student Survey: *How important has each of the following goals been to you while attending the EJC?* (Appendix A contains the list of goals reviewed by respondents.) On the questionnaire response scale, 5 represented "Very Important," and 1 represented "Not At All Important." Calculated mean ratings were derived by summing all responses to a question and dividing the sum by the number of valid responses for that question.

[7] This information was drawn from question 2 of the Student Survey: *Of the goals listed in question 1, which three [in order] were most important for you while you attended the EJC?*

[8] Tensions that developed at the EJC because of different perceptions were exacerbated by expected funding reductions resulting from a voter-approved statewide ballot measure that reduced property taxes, an important source of state funds directed to JOBS programs.

[9] This state agency also was responsible for directing the allocation of funds from state and federal governments for the EJC and other JOBS programs.

[10] This view was described during a formal interview with a key representative of a local branch of the state social welfare agency. This individual supported the view by explaining that EJC clients should pursue a step-wise work plan whereby they initially accepted an entry-level job, worked hard, and gained valuable experience and skills that would enable them to move on to better paying jobs.

[11] The state social welfare agency was judged to be responsible for over-crowding at the EJC because local representatives of that agency set the number of clients that would participate in the EJC. In the following excerpt, a key local representative of the state social welfare agency explained why the tension that could be attributed to different views of the EJC mission developed:

> The FSA and JOBS mandate that [the state social welfare agency] put people into jobs. Therefore, the primary goal of the EJC has to be to move clients into jobs...The ABE goal may be counter to the [state social welfare agency] goal because educators see their goal as getting these people to pass the GED. They have less concern with connecting these folks with the workplace or the primary objective of getting jobs than with reaching an educational goal.

The perception that the EJC should move participants quickly into entry-level jobs also was influenced by fiscal constraints and the state social welfare agency's principal responsibility of providing welfare support for individuals at a time when the number of new welfare claims in the county was rising substantially.

[12] A comprehensive EJC review and restructuring effort was begun only a few months after the Program opened its doors. This restructuring was undertaken because of expected funding reductions following voter approval of a state-wide ballot measure limiting property taxes, a principal source of EJC funding.

[13] Henry A. Giroux, "Educational Leadership and the Crisis of Democratic Government," Educational Researcher 21, 4 (May 1992): 10. Giroux argues that all citizens must recognize that democracy is much more than the formality of voting. The author believes educators can play a vital role in helping individuals understand the many external systems that influence their lives and in helping individuals develop attitudes needed to become active and critical participants in democracy. Giroux contends that this process of raising critical awareness is necessary if we are to create a "democratic public culture" that transfers "power from elites and executive authorities who control the economic and cultural apparatuses of a society to those producers who wield power at the local level" (p. 10).

[14] Several notable examples of EJC students using a collective voice to educate and influence others include: 1) publication of a newsletter for EJC students and staff (not an insignificant accomplishment for students who may have felt incapable of writing an intelligible paragraph before entering the ABE unit); 2) formation of a committee comprised of students who addressed a legislative fact-finding group investigating local JOBS programs (members of this group also began to inform and lobby state legislators with a letter-writing campaign); 3) formation of a media-response group that responded to an inaccurate local newspaper article by writing letters to the editor and inviting reporters from the newspaper to meet with them to discuss the EJC and its activities; letters and an ensuing article appeared in the local newspaper.

[15] Michael W. Apple, Education and Power, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 129. Apple uses the term "non-reformist reforms" to denote reforms that both alter and better present conditions and that can lead to serious structural changes in society. For Apple, non-reformist reforms are progressive in the long term and enable people to reassert control of their economic and cultural institutions. Apple goes on to argue that the issue in state educational reforms, for example, is not to merely consider proposed reforms in organizational arrangements. He asserts that what is taught and what is not taught also should be considered. He maintains that with current conditions "whole segments of the American population remain relatively unanalyzed, in part, because the ideological perspectives they are offered ... defuse both the political and economic history and the conceptual apparatus required for a thorough appraisal of their position" (p. 129).

Appendix A

TABLE 1. Students' Ratings of Goal Importance: Calculated Mean Rating, Standard Deviation, Valid N, and Goal Rank

EJC Goal	Mean	SD	N	Rank
Achieve GED	4.66	1.33	53	1
Acquire stronger sense of self-esteem/self-confidence	4.63	0.68	54	2
Gain academic skills	4.58	0.82	52	3
Learn more about schooling opportunities beyond EJC	4.52	0.77	54	4
Improve communication skills and ability to work with others	4.42	0.82	52	5,6
Prepare for more education beyond the EJC and GED	4.42	0.89	53	5,6
Escape isolation	4.35	1.08	54	7
Learn how to get a job	4.15	1.09	54	8
Learn job skills	4.11	1.09	53	9
Make contacts/gain support for finding a job	4.08	1.19	53	10
Learn parenting skills	3.72	1.27	54	11

Appendix B

TABLE 2. Students' Ratings of Goal Importance: Distribution of Responses

EJC Goal	Percent Reporting as 1st Most Important Goal	Percent Reporting as 2nd Most Important Goal	Percent Reporting as 3rd Most Important Goal
Achieve GED	66.7%	5.6%	1.9%
Acquire a stronger sense of self-esteem/self-confidence	14.8	22.2	18.5
Prepare for more education	7.4	13.0	11.1
Learn job skills	5.6	11.1	11.1
Gain academic skills	3.7	3.7	5.6
Make contacts/gain support for finding a job	1.9	3.7	3.7
Improve communication skills and ability to work with others	0.0	11.1	13.0
Learn how to get a job	0.0	9.3	7.4
Escape isolation	0.0	5.6	9.3
Other	0.0	5.6	9.3
Learn parenting skills	0.0	5.6	3.7
Learn more about schooling opportunities beyond EJC	0.0	3.7	1.9
Missing	0.0	0.0	3.7
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

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