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The far reaching impact of transformative learning: A critical ethnographic case study

Aline E. Harrison
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The Far Reaching Impact of Transformative Learning:

A Critical Ethnographic Case Study

by

Aline E. Harrison

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Dedication

This dissertation is first dedicated to God Almighty for the strength and wisdom during my entire studies. Second, to my daughter Jude and the entire family: you were my inspiration. And finally, to the women who participated in this study as they continue to metamorphose and flutter voicing their voice.
Acknowledgements

This life-changing event has not come to fruition without the support of many people. I want to thank Dr. Bob Sullins and Dr. Young for the opportunity to be a part of ACHE department. I am grateful to my committee who has helped shape this dissertation and fostered my transformation. I express my thanks to Dr. Rosemary Closson, Dr. Bill Young, Dr. Linda Evans, and Dr. Derek Mulenga for their guidance and support throughout my doctoral studies. Thank you for your time, commitment, and encouragement.

I am grateful to all my friends and colleagues, both here in the USA and in Belize, who encouraged me along the way. Thank you for your concern. Thanks Debbie, Eve, Phillip, Consy, Lily, Maria, Lisa, Deb, Joel and Sister Angela. Dr. Connie Hines and Dr. Phil Smith thank you for your support.

I would like to thank the women in this study who willingly participated in this study. They told their stories with such openness and honesty from their hearts.

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Finally, I want to thank my daughter Jude, for her enduring patience, support and prayers during this challenging process. Thank you to my mom, dad, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, sisters-in-laws, aunts, uncles and cousins for their continued prayers and support.
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The Far Reaching Impact of Transformative Learning:
A Critical Ethnographic Case Study
Aline E. Harrison

ABSTRACT

This multiple case study focused on the lives and experiences of four women who participated in an adult literacy program. This case study approach used critical ethnography as an analytic tool employing grounded theory leading to the development of a substantive theory. In-depth, semi-structured interviews and researcher’s reflective journal were employed to collect data for this study that critically examined the impact of the transformative process of its participants and its influence on their socio-cultural context. Results revealed that participants did not necessarily experience a disorienting dilemma as contended by Mezirow (1978, 1991, and 2000). Rather participants experienced a series of integrating circumstances that led to the transformative experience. Moreover, the study indicated that unlike Mezirow’s assumption that individuals need to have a high cognitive or educational level to experience a transformation these participants with little or no education experienced a transformation.

Overall, the purpose of this study was to generate grounded theory on the impact of the transformative experience on the participants and their socio-cultural context. From the findings of the study, a substantive theory emerged
revealing profound changes: a metamorphosis. Thus, the substantive theory is:

Metamorphosis: Given the opportunity to shift frames of reference, one has the innate capacity to alter one’s life and impact one’s socio-cultural context creating possibilities for self and others.

In light of this, all participants related experiences that reflect the core elements of transformative learning as first posited by Mezirow. These elements included exploration of new roles or actions, self-confidence in new roles, development of a plan of action and reintegration into life based on their new frames of reference.

Major themes that emerged from the data are self-esteem and assertiveness, discovery of self, great personal sacrifice, development of sense of possibility for self and family, beliefs and values, increased spirituality, self-sufficiency, role model, opportunity for social action. As the women became empowered, the changes affected their socio-cultural context resulting in changes with their children, family and community.

Finally, this study has far-reaching implications for policy-makers and practitioners in particular for strategic improvement of life for low-income families and family relationships. These findings can serve as the impetus to improve the disintegration of family values triggering a positive impact on entire communities.
Chapter One: Introduction

The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn. Alvin Toffler (1990).

Context

Belize, a former British colony and independent since 1981, is a small country in Central America with an area of 8,867 square miles and approximately 265,000 inhabitants. It is historically part of the Caribbean and geographically part of Central America. According to a United Nations report in 2004, “about half the population is female and about half lives in rural areas. 33.5% live in poverty, with 10.8% living in abject poverty, of which children are the most vulnerable [sic] (Children and Adolescents in Belize, 2004).”

Despite its small size and population, Belize is comprised of a number of distinct major ethnic cultural groups, each of which continues to use its native language to varying extents. The official language of the country is English and it is used for official publications, proceedings and as the medium of instruction at all levels. In informal everyday speech, however, Belizeans speak Belize Creole (English based lexicon) and Spanish to a lesser extent.
Figure 1.1. Map of Belize

Of significance to this study are two areas in Belize: Belize and Toledo District as these areas are the home of the participants in this study (see Figure 1.1). Toledo in Southern Belize has the highest percentage of illiteracy and poverty and is often referred to as the...
“Maya Heartland”. Toledo District is home to the majority of Maya Indians (Kekchi and Mopan) who still practice their traditions. In postcolonial Belize, Toledo District has earned the name “the forgotten district” given its distance and the high poverty rate of 79% (Belize Central Statistical Office, 2002).

In 1991, The National Literacy Task Force (NLTTF) was created and it functioned as a governmental agency to address issues of literacy. NLTTF had representation from non-governmental agencies, government agencies and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). According to an NLTTF 1996 report, the Task Force had a mandate to address issues as it related to literacy. For example, the Task Force set aside a National Literacy Day. To my knowledge, this was the last National Literacy Day the government sponsored. In addition, a highlight of the National Literacy Day was a literacy fair that involved displays of books, puppet shows, poetry and story reading (Literacy Day, 1991). To date the Task Force is non-existent and I had difficulty obtaining information on its accomplishments.

The results of national exams are in a certain way related to literacy. In 2007, Primary School Exam (PSE) results indicated a national mean score of 52%. This standardized exam is taken after having attended primary school for eight years. This is significant since
the definition for being literate is equaled to attendance of seven years of school at the primary level. This criterion was established by The National Literacy Task Force when it existed in 1996. This definition was patterned from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) definition in 1996 (NLTF Report, 1996). If the results are so low and the literacy rate is equaled to years of school attendance, the results do not appear to be positive.

From these exam results and the 75% literacy rate (Belize Statistical Report, 2002), there is no doubt whether literacy is an issue that needs addressing. But rather the focus should be on how best to address it. Belize for many years boasted an adult literacy rate of 96%. However, more recent research in particular a study conducted by Duke (1995) dispelled the myth and explained it as a political ploy. The adjustment in 1997 to 75% according to Duke was more acceptable as indicated by the 1996 Literacy survey results.

Additionally, literacy is an issue that has elicited much interest from politicians, educators and the community in Belize. There is little argument about its important role in the economic development of a country in an age of global economic competitiveness in particular for developing countries. The severity of the literacy crisis has prompted increased attention from Belize’s two main political parties for the past three decades as documented in their manifestos (People’s United

The PUP, upon winning in 2003, pledged to the Belizean people to address with the persistent issue of illiteracy. Prime Minister (to present date) and then Minister of Education (2003-2004), Said Musa had the following to say in regards to this dilemma on Channel 5 News (April, 2003) on behalf of his political party and government:

We need to get back to basics, and one of the things I am emphasizing as the new Minister of Education, not just as Prime Minister, is basic reading skills. There is a direct correlation between illiteracy and unemployment and poverty. And if we are going to fight poverty, which is a main plank of our manifesto, if we are going to eradicate poverty, we have to deal with illiteracy, and we have to take it on board and not be ashamed to say, well it's too low, whether it's seventy-five percent or whatever the percentage is, we need to get to the nineties percent once again [sic]. Belize was there before, but of course, you realize what has happened to us. There are two major things to have happened in our society, one was the massive the influx of poor, peasant people from Central America, the other was the outward migration of many
Belizean mothers and fathers; the grannies had to take care of the kids, and this created in itself a major dysfunction in Belize and we have to address that [sic].

However, in my opinion, none of the political parties has taken any noteworthy action when in power. The creation of the National Literacy Task Force was one initiative that had the potential to address the issue. The life of the Task Force lasted for three years, when a change of government ended its existence. Records of its activities were difficult to locate with only one report lodged in the Belize Archives Department.

Apathy by the government has been documented and its source identified as partly the result of colonialism in a study conducted by Duke (1995). While Duke linked the source to colonialism and the inheritance of a colonial system of education, no clear language or literacy policy exists for the Belizean context to address this issue. According to Jules (1988):

The existence of mass illiteracy is the historical product of structural deficiencies and inequalities in the formal educational system. The absence of adequate primary school places, the negative impact of socio-economic difficulties at the level of the family, are two of the most notable features of this inequality. (p. 370)
This line of thinking is further reiterated in a 1996 report from the National Literacy Task Force (1996) and a 2004 report from UNESCO, which questions whether the primary/middle schools are performing up to standards. According to the Literacy Task Force Report of 1996, “the overall literacy rate for the country stands at 75.1% (p.36).” It must be noted that this percentage consists of absolute literates and semi-literates. According to Miller (2000), Human Development Reports for the 1990’s issued by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), persons with no primary schooling are considered absolutely illiterate; those that had less than seven years of schooling as functional illiterate; those that completed eight years of primary schooling as functionally literate and those that completed secondary schooling as having a literary standard. The literacy definition criterion employed to determine the literacy rate level is years of schooling. Belize provides eight years of primary schooling often termed as free education but which is not necessarily the case as parents are often levied high fees to some extent.

Consequently, a person was considered as literate if he or she had completed seven years of primary schooling according to this criterion. On the other hand, the 1996 national literacy survey using means of performance on literacy classified the literacy rate as 42.5%. This is considerably different using years of school criterion for the
same year, which yielded 75.1% (National Literacy Task Force 1996; Miller 2000).

**Statement of the Problem**

One of the aims of adult education is to prepare individuals to cope with the changes of new knowledge acquired. With this in mind, it is indispensable that adult educators have greater insight of this process. Adult educators therefore, have a vested interest to promote and understand the process and conditions that generate transformative learning. Transformative learning suggests that learning gives way to a new or revised interpretation of the learning experience. This revised interpretation is precisely what this study has explored, using the following operating meaning based on my understanding of transformative learning:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and action. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alerts our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body-awareness, our visions of alternative approaches...
to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (O’Sullivan, Morrel & O’Connor (2002, p. xvii)

Like many developing countries, Belize has no empirical evidence of the consequences of literacy program participation or of how it shapes the individual and their socio-cultural context. Scant evidence which exists is from United Nations reports often not addressing the situation adequately. Therefore, it is imperative for research to be conducted in this area. Lind (1997) asserts that:

The systematic evaluation and documentation of some new programs is impressive. Very interesting publications and research have been produced. Adult literacy is still under-researched, but it is much better documented than it was in 1985. Some recurrent themes of new publications have been the impact of literacy programs, the uses of literacy in different contexts, women and literacy, and post-literacy. (p. 33)

Therefore, this study investigated the extent to which participation in a literacy program affects the lives of its participants and how the change was manifested. In addition, it assessed the affective impact as felt in families, relationships, work and the community according to the participants.
Using a critical ethnographic case study approach, this study sought an understanding of the experiences of its participants as they moved toward self-sufficiency. The overall focus was to gain an understanding of the transformations in the participants’ own lives and their experience of personal change. This is important, as their experiences, knowledge and perspectives are the most valuable and valid in gaining insight on how participation in a literacy program affects them. More specifically, this study described:

1. Critical incidents that enhanced transformation.
2. The extent that participants describe transformations in their own lives.
3. The extent that participants describe experiences of personal empowerment.
4. How the transformations and changes influence their relationships at home, school/work and in the community.

Research Questions

This case study is nestled in an emancipatory approach to research as it uses critical ethnography and transformative learning as underpinning theories. This design was chosen because it is complementary to the guiding questions of the research and the participants and offers the opportunities for a broader understanding.
of the conditions and circumstances that foster transformative learning.

A case study couched within a critical ethnography is a way for me to highlight the lived experiences of the conditions and circumstances that foster transformative learning process for adult learners in one setting. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What conditions and circumstances foster the transformative learning process?
2. What critical incidents have enhanced transformation?
3. How does participation in a program transform the participants to create change in their lives? How is this change manifested?
4. How have the transformations influenced participants’ relationships at home, school/work and within the larger community?

**Significance of the Study**

This study added to the expanding research on transformative learning by investigating the change created by participation in a literacy program. In addition, it examined the impact of the change on the participant’s socio-cultural context. Thus it expanded Mezirow’s (1991, 2000a) transformative learning theory beyond the rational and
cognitive process he postulates by including the impact on the socio-cultural context of the participants. Such an understanding contributes by offering insight into the “integrating circumstances” (Clark, 1991, p. 45) that fostered the transformative experience. Additionally, it tested Mezirow’s assertion that transformation requires a certain level of education and cognitive development consequently meaning a certain educational level (Mezirow, 2004; Merriam, 2004) in order to engage in transformative learning. The participants in this study had either very low levels of formal education and/or low literacy levels and were all capable of transformational learning as indicated by their critical reflection. According to Brookfield (2000), “an act of learning can be called transformative only if it involves a fundamental questioning and reordering of how one thinks or acts (p. 139).” This is clearly evidenced with all four participants as their frames of reference were transformed as they acted on their reflective decisions.

Unquestionably, this research study has the potential to contribute to Belize, in many ways, particularly to those engaged in the work of educating adults. Additionally, it can inform the work of adult education on both a theoretical and practical level. For example, there are several literacy programs operating within Belize, generally sponsored by non-profit organizations. But, no studies exist in Belize that addresses the impact of the literacy program on the community,
family and workplace by individuals who have engaged in a literacy program. The findings of this study offers insight into the influences emanating from the transformative experiences of women.

The overall goal was to gain insight that offers critical information to policymakers, program designers and administrators of adult education programs by providing knowledge that can be incorporated in the Belizean context. Furthermore, the results add reliable published data in an effort to improve practice and contribute to the field of adult education in Belize. Finally, this study gives voice to participants who would otherwise never be heard. Giving voice according to Giroux, (1992a) means, “giving voice to those who have been normally excluded and silenced (p. 209).”

Assumptions

The following are the major assumptions that underlie this research study:

1. Facilitating critical consciousness through education leads to transformation of individuals and their environment.

2. Even though the findings in this study are context-specific, the findings will be relevant and useful for adult educators in developing nations.

3. This research study is empowering and enlightening for both researcher and participants.
4. Transformative learning exists and can be studied to gain an understanding of the process.

5. The objectivity of this research lies in the honesty, integrity, and objectivity of the researcher rather than in the particular method used.

6. The very act of being interviewed using reflexivity is transformational and new meaning is created.

Overview of Participants

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<tr>
<td>Gida: 46 yrs. of Belizean Creole &amp; Garifuna descent, single mother of 2 sons &amp; grandmother of 4; returned to formal education after 37 yrs. Recently completed an associate degree and has been accepted at the university. A community activist in particular against gun violence. Considered “spokesperson” for neighborhood. had no idea of “a future” before returning to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey: 27 years of Belizean Creole descent, single and teaching at an inner-city school; goal-oriented, role model for family and others; and aims to attain the highest educational possible. Pursuing a B.A., presently. Uses her experience to motivate other young people and her students to value education. Sees education and recognizes its value as a way out of poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imara: 37 yrs. of Ketchi-Mayan descent, wife and mother of 8; wife, community leader &amp; advocate she has broken the barriers of women from her culture, claims to have found her voice. Is now in training to become a literacy trainer in a basic literacy program. Travels to remote areas conducting sewing training something she claims would not have happened before participating in the literacy program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayna: 44 yrs of Belizean Creole descent, mother of 3, wife and real estate owner. Eldest of 14 children, being the eldest prevented her from attending school. Very fascinated with reading of billboards/signs. being literate &quot;opened up a whole new world&quot; for her. Claims that she could not recognize her written name before attending literacy program. Thinks before she acts attributed to literacy program participation.</td>
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Figure 1.2. Snapshots of Participants

I interviewed four women as participants for this study. Table 1.2 provides a snapshot of each participant. In depth descriptions of each
participant is provided in chapter four. All participants were women who had engaged in a literacy program within the last five to eight years. Prior to engaging in a literacy program, they had very little or no formal education. All claimed to have experienced a transformation in their lives and primarily attributed that change to attending a literacy program. Two of the participants attended the same program at different times while the other two attended different programs. Three of the participants live in the city located in the central part of the country. The fourth one lives in the southern part of Belize (see Figure 1.1).

All participants were very willing and accommodating with the interview. One of the participants considered it a therapy as she delved into her memories and remembered instances that were painful in the transformation process.

Definition of Terms

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and action. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alerts our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body-awareness,
our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (O’Sullivan, Morrel & O’Connor (2002, p. xvii)

Socio-cultural context refers to social, cultural, historical, geographical and political space as it relates to class, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status.

Inner-city refers in this study to the poorer areas of the city often less developed and crime ridden with a high unemployment rate.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Once you have glimpsed the world as it might be, it is impossible to live anymore complacent in the world as it is. Anonymous

This chapter will first present the theoretical framework for this proposed study. It will then present literature to gain an understanding of transformative learning as theory and practice. It will furthermore situate transformative learning theory within the socio-cultural factors that make its meaning unique for this study. It will finally present the information on the educational system in Belize and its intersection with the literacy dilemma.

Theoretical Framework

Merriam (1998) notes that qualitative research is based on the view “that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds (p. 4).” Qualitative research allows the understanding of particular contexts based on in depth analysis (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Carspecken 1996). This reality can have multiple realities if a critical research perspective is taken. This study was framed using a critical ethnographic case study approach as issues such as power of literacy, empowerment and transformation will be studied.
The principal frame for this study is underpinned by Transformative Learning Theory, a theory that addresses change. Mezirow (1991, 2000a, 2000b) explained that adults construct meaning from new information and experiences. Transformative Learning Theory is particularly applicable as the main frame of this proposed study as participants reflect on experiences of change and empowerment. Transformative Learning Theory points to adult learning and development; it is a process that enables adults to critically reflect and give meaning to their experiences (Mezirow, 1991). Transformative Learning Theory provides a lens for adult learners in this study to self-examine critical incidents that led to transformation. It furthermore, explored their new roles and how their transformations extended beyond themselves.

King (2005) aptly notes that transformative learning extends far beyond the individuals learning environment. Figure 2.1 is adapted from King (2005) using O’Sullivan, Morrel & O’Connor’s (2002, p. xvii) definition stated in the definition of terms. King adds that its far reaching impact is felt in families, relationships, work, and the community (see Figure 2.1). Furthermore, O’Sullivan, Morrel & O’Connor expands the impact to include political forces, social action and spirituality.
Baumgartner (2003) suggests that, “The transformative learning process is intuitive and involves students’ minds, bodies, spirits, and social environments (p. 18).” Correspondingly, King (2005) claims that transformative learning deepens the learning experience and its impact extends far beyond the classroom experience affecting multiple arenas within the adults’ lives. King’s idea of the diffused pattern of transformative learning in relation to the affective aspect of the
participants’ transformative experience was explored in this study along with O’Sullivan, Morrel & O’Connor (2002) definition that includes political forces and social action. Figure 2.1 illustrates the potential far-reaching impact of transformative learning emulating both King and O’Sullivan et al definition of transformative learning.

More specifically, Mezirow’s more cognitive approach to transformative learning was expanded to include affective, spiritual, social action and political dimensions as the theoretical framework for this study as indicated in Figure 2.1. This study in a way parallels Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory but goes beyond as affective factors, context and social/political environment were considered in the final analysis. This was based on the premise that, “human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbolic systems, and can best be understood when investigated in their historical development (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191).”

Transformative Learning Theory as the principal underpinning theory for this study facilitated the analysis of participants’ experiences, thinking and circumstances that fostered their transformative learning. A more extensive discussion of transformative learning will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.
**Socio-cultural Theory**

Socio-cultural theory, drawn from Vygotskian theory of learning and development, added to the theoretical framework by explaining the impact of the external social world of the individual within his or her larger society. This theory assumes that learning takes place in social interactions and thus must be examined from that perspective. It further posits that the individual cannot be understood without first understanding his or her socio-cultural context (Wertsch, 1991).

Socio-cultural approaches to learning are based on “the concept that human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbolic systems, and can be best understood when investigated in their historical development (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996, p. 191).” Socio-cultural theory validates the numerous social and cultural contexts from which learners’ experiences emanate and how these lived experiences influence learning. Because learning and change take place in meaningful social and cultural contexts, they ought to be studied and understood within the same contexts.

**Critical Ethnography**

This study was also informed by the theory of critical ethnography. According to Thomas (1993), critical ethnography applies “a subversive worldview to the conventional logic of cultural
inquiry (p. 111).” In other words, it takes a critical look at the relationship among knowledge, society and political action. Thomas further adds that critical ethnography is a style of analysis and discourse embedded within conventional ethnography. It combines the focus of the investigation with a commitment to use the findings for change (Thomas 1993, Brown & Dobrin 2004). This type of analysis unleashes ethical obligations and influences a move toward change.

According to Patton (2002) “what gives critical theory [ethnography] its name is that it seeks not just to study and understand society but rather to critique and change society (p. 131).” Patton further adds that, “It (critical ethnography) approaches fieldwork and analysis with an explicit agenda of elucidating power, economic and social inequalities (p. 548).” “Through analysis or actions in the field, critical ethnographers hope to free the oppressed or at least to contribute in some ways to their emancipation (Gunzenhauser 2004, p. 77).”

Critical ethnography embodies reflection that analyzes culture, knowledge and action. It offers a profound view in understanding and to a certain extent, feel social inequality. It “open (s) to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centers and assumptions that inhibit, repress and constrain (Thomas 1993, p. 2).” Moreover, critical
ethnography “speaks on behalf of their subjects as a means of empowering them (Thomas 1993 p. 4).”

This framework, while acknowledging the role of the educational system, sees the system not only as agents of cultural reproduction (Dei et al 1997) but seeks to unpack “the development of the underdevelopment (Collins and Blot, p. 28, 2003).” This study highlights the participants’ “consequences of literacy (Collins and Blot 2003, back cover),” as a colonial legacy. It has an explicit agenda invoking social consciousness, reflection and societal change (Dei et al., 1997; Gunzenhauser, 2004; Thomas 1993). This then makes it imperative for educators to analyze and take action and “approach learning not merely as the acquisition of knowledge but as the production of cultural practices that offer students a sense of identity, place, and hope (Giroux 1992a, p. 205).”

Understanding Transformative Learning as Theory and Practice

Transformative learning theory is a description of a learning process whereby individuals move from an unexamined way of thinking to a mode where thinking gears towards criticality and reflection (Mezirow, 1999). Transformative learning has often been cited as “particularly promising for understanding adult learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 261)” because it focuses directly on
the learning process. Consequently, educators should focus on facilitating a continuous process of critical inquiry for adult learners as they go through the learning process. Learners are thus moved to new levels of consciousness, which bring about new ways of how they define their world—perspective transformation.

Mezirow (2000b) suggests that the process of perspective transformation begins with a disorienting dilemma comprised of the following ten steps:

1. Disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination
3. Critical assessment
4. Recognition (that discontent is shared with others)
5. Exploration of options
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge for implementing plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles
10. Reintegration into one's life based on new perspective (p. 22)

These phases are not necessarily linear, as several studies have demonstrated that it is of a spiraling and revolving nature.
Transformative learning results in perspective transformation, which Mezirow (1991) describes as follows:

Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 167)

Furthermore, Mezirow (1991) explained that individuals construct new meaning from learning experiences by incorporating the new knowledge into pre-existing meaning perspectives. Hence, new categories are created to accommodate the new information. Transformative learning occurs when the pre-existing meaning perspectives cannot accommodate the new information. Mezirow (1996) extends his thinking by saying, “learning is understood as the process of using prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action (p 162).” What occurs then is a dismantling of the existing meaning perspectives and the world is viewed from different lens.
In a similar vein, Cranton (2002) presents seven facets that can be used to foster the transformative learning process. These facets parallel Mezirow’s ten phases that were presented earlier in this chapter.

1. An activating event that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read
2. Articulating assumptions, that is, recognizing underlying assumptions that have been uncritically assimilated and are largely unconscious
3. Critical self-reflection, that is, questioning and examining assumptions in terms of where they came from, the consequences of holding them, and why they are important
4. Being open to alternative viewpoints
5. Engaging in discourse, where evidence is weighed, arguments assessed, alternative perspectives explored, and knowledge constructed by consensus.
6. Revising assumptions and perspectives to make them more open and better justified.
7. Acting on revisions, behaving, talking, and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed assumptions or perspectives. (Cranton, 2002, p. 66)

As educators, we can never guarantee that each individual will become transformed. Therefore, every educator needs to set a goal of fostering transformative learning by using strategies such as those suggested by Cranton. Gunnlaugson (2007) echoes this assertion by saying, “If bringing about such transformation is to be a realistic aim within adult and higher educational contexts, there is a value in establishing practices to cultivate such potentials in our lives (p. 147).”

Mezirow theorizes that change through adult education is generated by transformations of the meaning each adults frames from the new knowledge. There is clearly a distinction between the acquisition of skills as a means of acquiring new knowledge and the increase of knowledge that leads to profound difference in the learner’s perspective and understanding. Additionally, Mezirow (1991) argues that all learning is change but not all change is transformation.

Portnow, Popp, Broderick, Drago-Severson and Kegan (1998) highlight this point by using the terms informational learning and transformational learning. They point out that informational learning involves mastery of facts leading to concrete thinking. On the other hand, transformational learning involves the capacity to ‘think outside
transformational learning leads to thinking that questions the new knowledge acquired. It considers the perspective and bias of the facts learned, and reconstructs a new frame of reference based on the new knowledge. This transformation further influences how the learner interacts with his or her immediate surroundings as parent, worker and member of a community.

According to Cranton (1994), Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning has advanced “into a comprehensive and complex description of how learners construe, validate and reformulate the meaning of their experiences (p. 22)”. King (2005) furthers the theory by asserting that transformative learning deepens the adult learning experience as the impact of the learning extends far beyond the physical classroom. She points out that, “the stories of transformation tend to be the “big” stories of dramatic changes, but sometimes the changes are not visible in the classroom. Sometimes the changes have an effect on other aspects of individual lives (p. 9)”.

King’s research illustrates the far-reaching impact of transformative learning. (See Figure 2.1). Very significant is the ripple effect of the transformation that influences social, family and professional relationships. It must be noted that as learners reassess, evaluate and reflect on their new understanding relationships need to be renegotiated. This can bring distress, confrontation, confidence and
a whole range of different emotions as transformative learning is about critical questioning. According to King (2005), the decisions and actions that learners engage with their social, family and professional relationships, “are the outermost manifestations of their learning and development (p. 109).”

These adult learners must now function in a changing world where their worldview has shifted. Adults living in such a society must learn how to keep from being overwhelmed by these changes.

Mezirow (1991) suggested:

Rather than merely adapting to changing circumstances by more diligently applying old ways of knowing, [adults] discover a need to acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of changing events and a higher degree of control in their lives. The formative learning of childhood becomes transformative learning in adulthood. (p.2)

Above all, this new interpretation of their lives also consists of revising attitudes, behavior, and ways of thinking, feelings, discourse, and values in their interactions and discourse with their socio-cultural context. In sum, is a paradigm shift transpires that shapes the transformed individual’s personality, belief system and lifestyle. The adult learners’ transformation is articulated in the discourse and
interactions with their environment. In other words, while it is occurring cognitively it is not in isolation of the context the individual finds herself or himself. As such, the beliefs, values and sense of possibility are co-constructed by the transformed adult and their relationships with their context.

Mezirow (1991) believes that learning involves five primary interacting contexts. These contexts are:

1. The meaning perspective or frame of reference in which the learning is embedded.

2. The conditions of communication: language mastery; the codes that delimit categories, constructs, and labels; and the ways in which problematic assertions are validated.

3. The line of action in which the learning occurs. This has to do with implementing the purpose and intentionality of the learner and involves the exercise of their conative powers.

4. The self-image of the learner. This context is concerned with how the learner feels, how things are going, and how he/she sees their situation. The meaning of this "felt sense is implicit; that is, it is never equal to specific cognitive units. We explain our felt
sense by interpreting it and reflecting upon our interpretation, using it as a criterion for assessing the correctness of our interpretation of our situation" (p. 14).

5. The situation encountered. In other words, the external circumstances within which and interpretation is made and remembered.

Taylor (1998) sums up the key aspects of Mezirow’s transformative learning theory by positing that:

Three common themes of Mezirow’s theory are the centrality of experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse in the process of meaning structure transformation. The learner’s experience is the starting point and the subject matter of transformative learning. Experience is seen as socially constructed, so that it can be deconstructed and acted on. It is experience that provides the grist for critical reflection. (pp. 8-9)

The “grist” that Taylor refers to is in fact the socio-cultural context where learners and their relationships co-construct and deconstruct their realities. It is the process of constructing and deconstructing that Mezirow (2000b) refers to as “objective reframing and subjective reframing (p. 23).” In objective reframing Mezirow is
referring to the individual situating himself or herself within their environment to gain a deeper understanding of the system in which they live. The system is comprised of their economic situation, power in relation to politics and educational advancement or lack thereof. This consciousness awareness cannot exist in a vacuum but rather it exists both within and out of the self. Subjective reframing encompasses the individual grappling with the change as “old perspectives become challenged and changed (Mezirow 2000, p. 23).” The possibility of transformative learning must be understood from the perspective of the relationships the learners find themselves situated in. These relationships will help to validate the expanded frame of reference.

*Socio-cultural Theory and Adult Learning*

This section will examine how adult learning and development can be viewed from a socio-cultural perspective. While there has been a plethora of research on transformative learning and adult learning, little has been investigated in how socio-cultural factors affect this process. Socio-cultural theory as an underpinning theory for this study can help explain adult learning and development in particular in understanding the context in the transformative learning process. Many of the dominating theories in adult learning point towards an individual or cognitive perspective of learning. Such a perspective
suggests that socio-cultural factors have little or no influence or are not significant factors in the learning process. Alfred argued (2003) that

According to this perspective, one facilitates learning by breaking a complex task into component parts to be taught and learned in practical isolation by the individual learner. Those who anchor their work within this individual framework propose a clear relation among beliefs, attitudes and values as motivational forces for learning. In other words, the extent to which one engages in an activity depends upon the beliefs one has about self-competency or self-efficacy, how much one values a given task, and the degree to which this value is extrinsic or intrinsic. Those who hold this view see these individual beliefs, values, or goals for learning as critical determinants for academic success. (p. 4)

Alfred further posits that individualistic and cognitive theories of adult learning and development promote a Eurocentric worldview. A Eurocentric worldview promotes the dominant culture thus indicating where the power lies. As such, the predominating culture is promoted with little or no regard for the marginalized cultures. This suggests that the dominant culture prevails in the learning process, thus
representing a single culture, whereby there exists multiple cultures in the diversity now faced by adult educators. Internal forces such as motivation guide learning, a complex activity. For example, motivation stems from the social and cultural interactions of an individual that have been and shape the learners attitude towards learning. It is evident that such a Eurocentric perspective fails to account for the social and cultural context as factors that also determine how adults learn.

Similarly, Johnson-Bailey & Cervero (2000) uphold this view as indicated from a review of adult education literature over a fifty-five year time span. This review revealed that the literature placed value on promoting a Eurocentric worldview. They indicated that while the literature considered race an issue in terms of power relations it was not considered of great consequence “in the entire corpus of eight handbooks (p. 201).” This supports the point of view of Alfred (2002a) and Johnson-Bailey & Cervero (2000) of adult education promoting a Eurocentric worldview. For minorities, in particular women who are already marginalized, the hidden curriculum continues to perpetuate disempowerment. Tisdell (1993) makes a bold statement by writing that, “the emphasis on the white and male curricular content is typical of adult and higher education and is a
significant factor in contributing to reproducing power relations (p. 223).”

However, Merriam & Caffarella (1999) assert that “more recently there has been an increasing recognition that explaining development in adulthood is more than just focusing on the individualized self (p. 117).” Significant social and cultural factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, social class, socio-economic status and sexual orientation are major aspects that can better explain adult learning and development. The social, cultural and historical experiences adults bring to the classroom help determine what and how they learn and how this influences their interactions with their environment.

Recognizing that socio-cultural factors are significant in adult learning and development does not infer that individual and cognitive views are wrong. Rather, the idea is that there exists a symbiotic relationship between internal and external factors that influence adult learning and development. There is a “dynamic interdependence of social and individual processes (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 192).” Socio-cultural theory is underpinned by theories drawn from Vygotsky and asserts that learning does not occur in isolation but rather that it occurs through interaction with social beings (Wertsch, 1991).

A socio-cultural perspective is based on the premise that, “human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by
language and other symbolic systems, and can best be understood when investigated in their historical development (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191).” Additionally, Lantolf (2001) claimed that, “The most fundamental concept of socio-cultural theory is that the human mind is mediated (p. 1).” Mediation occurs through the interactions with self and others. For the field of adult education, the implication is that no longer can adult learning be viewed as an individualistic process but rather consideration for the social world in which the adult finds himself/herself is fundamental. The emphasis should be then on “…the socially constructed nature of how adulthood is defined (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 118).”

In contrast to leading theories in the field of adult learning and development such as those from Knowles, (1980) and Mezirow, (1991) that focus on the internal experience of the adult learner, socio-cultural theory focuses on the interdependence between self and the social process. This indicates that socio-cultural theory is not to be considered as a theory that only focuses on the external as the intention is not to create a dichotomy with internal factors. John-Steiner & Mahn (1996) further disclaim this viewpoint when they put forward that, “Vygotsky conceptualized development as the transformation of socially shared activities into internalized processes. In this way he rejected the Cartesian dichotomy between the internal
and the external (p. 192).” In addition, they also point out that human action, on both social level and individual planes has its origins in social sources. Interactions with social sources are first dependent on the source gradually moving so the learner takes more responsibility for his/her learning. This supports Vygotsky’s assertion of the interdependence between self and the social process (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Valsiner (1987) maintained that, “every function in the cultural development of the child comes on the stage twice, in two respects; first in the social, later in the psychological (cited in John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 192).” The argument being made is that social processes are the basis for cognitive processes.

Furthermore, Rueda (1998) aptly claims that, “one distinguishing feature of socio-cultural theory is the view that teaching and learning are social, not individual activities” (p. 1). He further maintains, “another premise of socio-cultural theory is that teaching and learning must be contextualized, or situated in meaning activities connected to everyday life (p. 2).” Additionally, Alfred (2003) aptly terms this connection as “a dynamic interaction between the individual and the environmental contexts within which one interacts (p. 244).” She suggests three levels of interaction that were originally suggested by Rogoff (1995, cited in Alfred, 2003). These three levels are:
1. The personal plane, which involves individual cognition, emotion, behavior, and beliefs. At this level, the unit of analysis is the individual’s psychological and cognitive characteristics, as well as self-efficacy beliefs.

2. The interpersonal or social plane, which includes communication, role performances, dialogue, cooperation, conflict, and so on. The interpersonal plane reveals the individual’s ability to successfully interact with others in various social and cultural environments.

3. The community or institutional plane involves shared histories, languages, rules, values, beliefs, and identities. An individual may belong to several communities, each with its own rules, histories, and cultural practices. (p. 244)

   The point must be made however that these levels are not independent but rather dynamic and interactive. To understand adult learning and development from a socio-cultural perspective one must explore the interaction of each of these three levels as they shape the experiences of adult learners.
Alfred (2003) explored how fifteen West Indian women construct and acquire knowledge in the host country and how their early learning experiences in the home country influence learning in U.S. postsecondary institutions. The study used socio-cultural theory as the guiding framework to understand how early learning experiences of culture, language and community influence in the Caribbean affected their participation in USA formal education. The study suggested that the early socialization experiences of the participants influenced their learning in adulthood. In particular, early experiences in the West Indies “created a disciplined structure and a solid foundation that enhanced adult learning in the host culture” (p. 249). The value of education and the significance of hard work came from the constant support of family and the community. The beliefs and attitudes that were learnt through economic struggles in the West Indies were great lessons. The economic struggles consequently set the foundation for the discipline required to be successful in a country where women were marginalized - simultaneously as immigrant and as women.

The women in this study came from a culture that did not hear the voices of women, as the Caribbean is a male dominated society. Therefore, upon entering American institutions of higher learning they held on to their position of being “silent knowers (Alfred, 2003, p. 39).
Speaking in class or challenging the teacher is unknown in the Caribbean. Therefore, the participants collectively experienced additional marginalization since, “in U.S. academic cultures, (where) silence often makes one marginal and invisible (Alfred 2003, p. 253).”

The example provided above supports socio-cultural theory as a framework for a better understanding of the transformation process of adults and how it impacts their context. The cognitive and social-cultural factors that led these women to be transformed imply that their early socialization experiences are significant factors to be considered when planning adult education curriculum. “Learning is a process of transforming participation in shared socio-cultural endeavors (Rogoff, 1994, cited in John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).” Additionally, Alfred (2003) reiterates this point when she wrote, “to fully understand learning from a socio-cultural perspective, we must give attention to the culture and the discourse communities within which individuals interact and learn (p. 245).”

Education in Belize and the Possible Impact on the Literacy Situation

In the last decade teacher education in Belize has received much attention as successive governments have sought to reform and improve the education system. Given that there is a continual demand for change, it is not surprising that teacher educators call for professional development that is both ongoing and dynamic (Fullan, 2003).
1995). He further adds that questions remain regarding how to conceptualize teacher learning and, correspondingly, how to construct professional development to foster meaningful change. He furthers this by saying that much of the recent research criticizes traditional approaches and advocate newer, innovative and more collaborative models. For Belize, this means among other things professional training and retraining of teachers with the knowledge and skills in to enhance instruction so that the literacy rate can be improved.

Fullan (1993) asserts that the key to successful change is the improvement in relationships between all involved and not simply the imposition of top down reform. The educational system namely schools remain unchanged for the most part despite numerous reforms as key stakeholders are not involved in the process. The stakeholders’ commitment is a crucial success factor and Fullan (1999, 2001) reiterates this when he asserts that people will not commit until they see a moral purpose. The literacy rate cannot be improved through teacher education alone but it is an important element in sustaining change. According to Penados (2000), “Change is not an event or project but a sustainable exercise and largely sustained by teachers. Change, however, can only be sustained by teachers who feel trusted and respected, are highly motivated and committed, and have the skills to investigate and improve their own practice.” The challenge for
teacher educators is therefore preparing and supporting such teachers while helping to create the environment of trust and respect where such practitioners can engage creatively with their task (Fullan, 1993).

Teacher education has gone through its normal share of curriculum reform movements with no significant change in the overall literacy results or increasing the number of students who attend high school. Jacobsen, Clifford & Friesen (2001) assert that no longer can teacher education use the same approaches used in the past. They further point out that teacher education is at a turning point requiring socially responsible individuals who will flexibly embrace the multiliteracies to enhance learning.

Compulsory education in Belize is primary education for those aged 5 to 14 or to the age at which they complete Standard 6 (eighth grade) whichever is earlier. The Government of Belize (GOB) has no obligation to continue educating children who complete Standard 6 younger than 14 or those older than 14 who have not completed Standard 6. Tuition is free but the registration fees and other fees make compulsory education neither free of charge nor equally accessible to all children. Access to high school is considered to be for the privileged. High school is not compulsory and acceptance is dependent on good grades, which is no incentive for low-performing primary school children to complete their compulsory education. Poor
children who do not achieve high Primary School Examination (PSE) grades cannot access high school scholarships.

*Literacy in Belize: A Socio-cultural Perspective*

Government of Belize (GOB) in 1990 initiated a National Literacy Task Force to identify existing literacy programs. The Task Force was comprised of representatives from several government ministries, NGO’s, and educational institutions in conjunction with UNESCO. The Task Force was commissioned to design, develop and implement a national literacy survey and a five-year literacy recovery program. In addition, the Task Force was to advise the government on how to deal with the literacy crisis the country was experiencing. To date no records exist to the knowledge of the researcher that indicates whether the goals of the task force were met or not. Moreover, there is scant research on literacy issues in Belize generally. There are nevertheless statistics that indicate that only 48% of the students who leave Std 6 (equivalent to Grade 8 in the USA) enter high school. It can be surmised that these individuals lapse into illiteracy with the limited programs that offer continuing education for school dropouts.

The Belize National Education Summit of 2004 sponsored by the Belize’s Ministry of Education (MOE) recommended the following derived from national consultations held throughout the country:

1. Declare illiteracy as a national concern, which
requires immediate attention.

- Conduct a year-long national literacy campaign
- Include a budget that reflects Belize’s commitment to literacy.
- Increase functional literacy by at least 75%

2. Conduct an awareness campaign to sensitize and motivate target groups.

- Utilize all media options – national and local.

(Maheia, 2004, p. 132)

To date none of the above-mentioned recommendations have materialized or to my knowledge is there any planning for future implementation of the recommendations. In researching for relevant material for this study, I was not able to obtain additional information.

Consequently, it is not known whether there is a link between the illiteracy dilemma and the socio-economic problems, which confront the Belizean people. High unemployment, high increase in crime, poverty and corruption to name a few are issues that confront the Belizean people. Corruption is higher in Belize than previous years according to Transparency International issues Perceptions Index (2006). Chairman Peter Eigen in the release asserted that, "corruption in large-scale public projects is a daunting obstacle to sustainable development, and results in a major loss of public funds needed for
education, health care and poverty alleviation, both in developed and
developing countries.” Belize was rated 3.5 in 2006 and 3.7 in 2005
out of a maximum of 10 pts according to the last published report in
2006. It ranked 66th out of 163 countries. Since no records exist to
document how literacy policy establishment (creation) would influence
the social, economic, cultural and political crisis that is pervasive in
Belize there is an urgent need to begin to fill this gap.

As has been noted, the illiteracy issue has become a national
concern resulting in several initiatives being instituted primarily by
Non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) in an effort to address the
situation and provide an avenue for those who cannot continue in
formal schooling. While there is scant research in the area of literacy
generally in Belize, there is need for an attestation of the practices,
trends and gains realized through these NGO programs. Given that at
the governmental level, a national initiative has not been undertaken
recently it is crucial to investigate NGO’s literacy initiatives to gain an
inside perspective of the impact of their programs.

Belize is a country with a high illiteracy rate as indicated
elsewhere in this study. For Belize, it means that the chasm between
advantaged and disadvantaged becomes even greater when one
considers a literacy rate of 42.5%. According to Collins and Blot
(2003) ongoing discussions on the role of literacy in economic
betterment and marginalized populations in developing countries post WW II has occurred. They claim that the debates have largely been inconclusive.

In light of this, in the early 1980’s UNESCO, an arm of United Nations was given as its mandate to focus on the needs of developing countries. Its main thrust was on non-formal education and literacy for adults (UNESCO, 2004). In a similar vein, the World Bank in the early 1990’s recognizing that illiteracy is directly related to poverty increased focus in the African region in the area of Adult Basic Education (ABE) (Lauglo, 2001).

It is pertinent at this point to note the definition of literacy as defined by UNESCO (1996) as it influenced how Belize defined literacy:

1. A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life.
2. A person is illiterate who cannot with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life.’
3. A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development.
4. A person is functionally illiterate who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development.

Conversely, both UNESCO and United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) another branch of United Nations, use the education criterion as the measure utilized in reporting literacy statistics for Belize. Belize formed part of a UNESCO sponsored workshop in 1996 and the following is excerpted from the proceedings of the workshop:

... in Belize which is a multi-ethnic country and was one of the countries that took part in the workshop, classifies:

- **Absolute Illiterates** - Persons with no formal education; and
- **Semi-Illiterates** - Persons who have limited primary education but did not go beyond standard 4. [grade 6]

These definitions apply to all persons, both male and female, aged 11 years and over. Compulsory education in Belize lasts until 14 years of age. Illiteracy was determined in relation to one of the two official languages among the
13 national ones. A particularity in the approach adopted in Belize is that literacy is linked to educational attainment, with the 5th grade of primary education as the criterion. (p. 2)

The aforementioned serves as background to what Collins & Blot (2003) point out, “Fundamental differences in human cognition and human social and cultural conditions were attributed not to differences in human nature or stages of civilization, but rather to literacy, conceived as ‘technology of the intellect (p. 112).’” Gee (1996) asserts that massive claims have been made for literacy. For example, he claims “countries with high literacy rates are better developed, more modern, better behaved (p. 27)”. Specific among these claims are political democracy, greater social equity, economic development, wealth and productivity, political stability and lower birth rate. Graff (1979, 1987) in Gee (1996) refers to the omnipotent view as “the literacy myth (p. 27)”. Gee claims that this “omnipotent view of literacy (p. 27)” has been disputed and that little evidence exists. Where evidence does exist says Gee, “the role of literacy is much more complex and contradictory, more deeply intertwined with other factors than the literacy myth allows (p. 27).”

In disputing the myth, Goody & Watt (1963) in Gee (1996) claim that after almost 3000 years of literacy “we all tend to believe strongly
in the powerful and redeeming effects of literacy, especially in times of complex social and economic crises (p. 32)." Gee adds that the myth is foundational in how "we make sense of reality, though it is not necessarily an accurate reflection of that reality, nor does it necessarily lead to a just, equitable and humane world (p. 32)." Gee posits that the continuity of the literacy myth has been used, "to solidify the social hierarchy, empower elites, and ensure that people lower on the hierarchy accept the values of the elite even when it is not in their self-interest or group interest to do so (p. 36)." Gee makes an important point: literacy has emancipatory power "a liberating side to the dilemma (p. 40)."

Ethnicity, low socio-economic status and illiteracy are often linked to minorities, which includes women. However, adult basic education, in particular literacy and ESL classes are often decontextualized based on the dominant culture with little regard on the unique social and cultural constructs these individuals possess. Literacy and ESL curriculum from a socio-cultural perspective recognizes where the learners came from and where they need to go. Kazemek (1988) had previously proposed a move from the deficit view of adult learning to one that took into account the socio-cultural experiences of the learners. He makes mention of adults’ reluctance to participate in literacy programs because their social and cultural
identities are neglected. Peck (1993) wrote that, “If participation in literacy programs is predicated on loss of socio-cultural identity, adults most often choose nonparticipation (p. 3).” Sparks (2002) proposed a socio-cultural approach to understanding adult literacy. She posits that “dominant social and political interests intervene in defining content, direction, and prevailing values in the literacy curriculum (p. 60).” In a similar vein, Sparks (2002) adds that:

Adult literacy education, from a socio-cultural perspective, recognizes contextualized cultural forms of literacy, including the social relations of active agents interacting with other active agents and locally produced meanings within a specific context. ...In other words, the degree to which people engage in learning or using literacy is a function of their cultural identity and the symbolic and practical significance of literacy in their particular socio-cultural context. (p. 60-61)

Literacy has often been associated with transformation (Freire, 1985). Language or literacy is one criterion in taking control of one’s life and one’s future by determining what social role or roles the individual will engage in. Bourdieu (1997) asserts that the power to name things is the power to organize and give meaning to experience. He adds that literacy is a resource towards achieving social
transformation. Therefore, literacy experiences that promote a Eurocentric stance hold the potential for continued oppression.

Sparks (2002) suggested, “A socio-cultural approach to adult literacy requires understanding the social meaning of literacy (p. 66)”.

This indicates that literacy programs ought to be contextualized for meaningful learning experiences that will create critical awareness. Literacy, ESL or ABE programs must make every effort to not be “capitalist agencies, of social, economic, cultural, and bureaucratic reproduction (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, p.139).” However, ABE programs need not perpetuate inequality but rather as Kincheloe & McLaren, (1994) argue:

Be venues of hope...sites of resistance and democratic possibility through concerted efforts among teachers and students to work within a liberatory pedagogical framework in particular, maintain that schools can become institutions where forms of knowledge, values, and social relations are taught for the purpose of educating young people [adults] for critical empowerment rather than subjugation. (p. 139)

As mentioned elsewhere, Tisdell (1993) found out that the hidden curricula in two higher education classes represented the experiences of white males, therefore sending the message that
Eurocentric ways of thinking are superior to that of non-dominant groups. Therefore, it is no wonder that Alfred (2002b) remarks:

The socio-cultural perspective holds promise for challenging the Eurocentric ideals that dominate the practice of adult education...Scholars of adult education are beginning to question the extent to which the adult education discourse community empowers some learners and silences others, according to their race, culture, gender, nationality, physical ability and sexual orientation, to name a few contexts. (p. 11)

Discourse is a system of norms, values, symbols, beliefs, and behaviors that shape our world. They are cultural practices that shape interactions and beliefs. Fenwick (2001) asserts that discourse affects how one views himself or herself, others and the possible choices one has. In other words, it shapes the lives of an individual and that is why discourse communities are important. Adult basic education programs are but one of many discourse communities the marginalized participate. It is an important discourse community and as Alfred (2002b) wrote, “according to the socio-cultural perspective, learning is embedded within discourse or social practice (p. 9).”

Therefore, literacy program for example can shape how one thinks and produces knowledge. It consequently holds tremendous
potential for transformative learning. Accordingly, putting forward a socio-cultural perspective for literacy programs can create discourse communities that are inclusive and foster opportunities for change. Gee, (1989) argued, “discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society” (p.20). Hence, discourse communities help to validate that the transformative process is a social rather than an individual process.

Conclusion

Adult learning and development viewed from a socio-cultural approach is a complex social practice that incorporates the interrelationship of social and cognitive factors of individuals. The research presented in this paper suggests that approaching adult learning and development from a socio-cultural perspective embraces the value of the more dominating cognitive and individualistic theories of adult education. A socio-cultural approach considers factors other than values, beliefs and attitudes as influences in how adults learn. Factors such as culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and socio-economic status to name a few are significant in the teaching and learning process of adults. The extent to which these factors are considered is indicative of whether education is liberating or oppressive. While the classroom can be a site for domination, it can also be one that empowers by fostering and creating opportunities for
challenging the oppressive influences that surround us. It is therefore imperative that adult educators consciously foster transformative learning by using good strategies as suggested in the vast literature on transformation.

All things considered, a socio-cultural perspective and transformational learning has implications for Belize. One cannot fully comprehend transformative learning in the Belizean context without accounting for its colonial history, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic context, social and educational politics, gender bias and literacy dilemma. The discourse communities that adults engage in are critical in changing how literacy is addressed. By taking into consideration literacy from a socio-cultural perspective, social, political and historical trends will be addressed in particular for women. Such a model will provide a critical lens in addressing the disparity in educational opportunities.

Much of the literature suggests that literacy and socio-economic status are closely related. In addition, it is also suggested that minorities in particular women are the most affected. There is little doubt then that the education of women should be a priority as the “consequences and effects can emerge in many parts of their lives (King, 2005, p. 106).” These changes are not limited being able to read and write but rather has a bearing on relationships, emotions,
actions, spirituality and health. See Figure 2.1 for the diffused impact on adult learners’ lives as it relates to this study.

In conclusion, as it relates to the Belizean context, it would be a major error in judgment to avoid investigating the consequences and effects of participation in adult literacy programs. Such studies would then serve as the impetus in designing adult education programs that will bring dramatic gains that trickles to several layers of society. Very significant in such studies is that a critical lens be used in analyzing as social and political structures can be identified. These are the very structures that need to be uncovered so that meaningful and sustained change can occur. To consider adult education in particular adult literacy programs is to ground the process of learning within the socio-cultural context in which individuals find themselves.
Chapter Three: Method

Too often we forget that genius, too, depends upon the data within its reach, that even Archimedes could not have devised Edison’s inventions." -- Ernest Dimnet

Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate and examine the lived experiences of four women who had been identified as having undergone a transformative experience as a result of participating in a literacy program. The participants were identified by purposeful sample based on the main criteria of having experienced a transformation in behavior, attitude and thinking. Furthermore, this study employed a case study design with aspects of critical ethnography. The overall focus was to develop an approach to understanding the conditions, circumstances and experiences that led to transformation. It further investigated the far reaching impact of the transformation and change on participants’ socio-cultural context. Because the context of the study and research questions guided the research design underpinned by a critical ethnography philosophy, qualitative data collection and qualitative analysis techniques were utilized. This chapter explains the research methods and procedures
employed in this study. It begins with a rationale and description of
the qualitative methodologies and procedures chosen for this study.
Following is a description of the research participants and context.
The research questions will next be restated, followed by an outline of
the data collection, instrumentation, and data analyses involved in this
study.

Research Design

The research design (see Figure 3.1) used a case study approach
and the theoretical underpinnings of critical ethnography as a primary
methodology. This study falls within the area of qualitative inquiry, as
such an approach affords us, “to gain a holistic, integrated view of the
context under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.6).” Denzin &
Lincoln (2005), define qualitative inquiry as:

A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It
consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that
make the world visible. These practices transform the
world. They turn the world into a series of representations,
including field notes, interviews, conversations,
photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this
level, qualitative research involves an interpretive,
naturalistic approach to the world...Qualitative research
involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interviews; artifacts; cultural texts and production; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding on the subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way. Hence, there is frequently a commitment to using more than one interpretive practice in any study. (p. 3-4) (Italics my emphasis).
Philosophical Orientation of Research: **Qualitative Research**
Umbrella concept for research methodology that explores the understandings of the members of X community as they narrate and interpret their lived experiences giving it breadth and depth.

Denzin & Guba; M Patton; M DeCompte

Type of Qualitative Research: **Case Study: A Critical ethnography using grounded theory**
Case study and cross-case studies from the perspective of the participants will provide descriptions, interpretations and understandings of their lived experiences.

S Merriam : R Yin; G Anderson; J Thomas, P Carspecken; J Gee; N Denzin; P Freire; b Hooks; P Cunningham

**Figure 3.1: Research Design**
It is apparent that this type of research draws attention to such themes as situated activity, interpretive, artifacts, field notes, case study, and to using more than one interpretive practice, which are premises that allowed me to investigate and examine the complex issue of transformation and empowerment. Moreover, Salomon (1991), and Patton (2002) maintained that the research questions should guide the methodology. Furthermore, qualitative researchers may proceed from many different paradigms depending on the nature of their studies. While there are multiple definitions and understandings of the case study (to be discussed later), for this study, an instrumental case study approach (Stake, 1995) with critical ethnography underpinnings was employed as an appropriate research paradigm. This allowed for in depth description of phenomena and a commitment to use the findings for change. Stake (1995) explains that an instrumental case study is used to provide insight into an issue. Therefore, an instrumental case study approach provided an advanced understanding of the multiple aspects of the transformative process as experienced by the participants.

A case study approach as described by Yin (2003) is defined as “an empirical study concerned with the description and analysis of contemporary, contextually-bound phenomena using multiple sources of evidence in an attempt to understand the phenomena in another,
more specialized manner (p. 24).” Furthermore, Merriam in 1988 defined case study as “…intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit (p. 21).” However, in 1998, Merriam added an additional characteristic to case studies, “…the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of the study, the case (p. 27).” Merriam’s definition is now more aligned with Stake’s (1995) description of case study as, “the case is an integrated system (p. 2)” and Miles & Huberman’s (1994) explanation, “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context (p. 25).” The bounded context in this particular study is a critical look at the conditions and circumstances that foster transformative learning for these participants and the impact on their environment.

Case study focuses its attention on a single entity, usually as it exists in its naturally occurring environment (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1988, and Patton, 2002). Case studies thus provide us with rich information, according to Stake (1995). Furthermore, case studies should always be small, as the nature of conducting case studies is designed to look at particular cases in a holistic manner (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1988, and Patton, 2002). Case studies always describe cases in their natural contexts often times using other
qualitative methodologies such as ethnography and more specifically in this study—critical ethnography.

This study subscribes to the above definitions of case study particularly as it is a “phenomenon occurring in a bounded context (Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 25).” This study was furthermore grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of critical ethnography as it seeks to “unmask (ing) dominant social constructions and the interest they represent (Anderson 1989, p. 254).”

Critical ethnography is grounded in critical theories that assume that society is structured by class and status among others that maintain the oppression of marginalized groups. Critical ethnography is used to uncover the hidden texts and experiences of the oppressed. According to Carspecken (1996) critical ethnography gives an understanding of the relationship between power and thinking presented thoroughly through the principles of thick description. Gordon (2000) illustrates how critical ethnography can create opportunities for increased awareness through in-depth interviews with participants serving as an intervention in creating awareness and demand change. Furthermore, critical ethnography is interdisciplinary and overlaps across genres and theoretical traditions. This combines various strengths of these genres and traditions, augmenting the
deficiencies of using only one research tradition (Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Gunzenhauser 2004, Murillo 2004). In addition, Murillo insists that, “...the degree and extent of utilization of each of these methods depend on the researcher’s purposes, the guiding questions, theoretical framework, and the scene itself (p. 157).” Furthermore, Thomas (1993) asserts that “the techniques by which we collect our data is not a neutral enterprise, and how we gather data can dramatically shape the critical potential of the project (p. 37).”

Participants

The study was comprised of four participants who were identified by purposeful sample. Purposeful selection of participants is a key decision in qualitative research (Creswell, 1994). A purposeful sampling technique was used in this qualitative design to obtain in-depth information-rich cases (Maxwell, 2005). Purposeful sampling presupposes that the researcher wants to discover and gain insight. I chose participants where the most can be learnt (Merriam, 1998). I selected the participants using the key criteria of being able to identify a transformative experience based on Mezirow’s definition of perspective transformation:

the process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about
our world, through a meaning reorganization reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive, discriminating and integrative perspective; and making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (Mezirow, 1998, p. 226)

Participants were selected with the help of adult educators who have knowledge of the transformation process and were fully aware of the literacy experiences of the participants. In addition, I used the "criterion strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28)" as participants were selected based on whether they met the criterion of experiencing a transformation as it relates to Mezirow’s definition. This allowed for the identification of common patterns. I believe that the selected participants represented a range of views on the subject of transformation and empowerment.

Thomas (1993) points out “It is crucial to identify the types of informants who are most likely to possess an insider’s knowledge of the research domain... (p. 37).” It was therefore imperative to choose participants that bear most directly with the study. Had I chosen a random sample of participants who had engaged in a literacy program, there would have been a disconnect with the purpose of the study. I would not have been able to pursue the guiding questions to a deep
level as the participants would not have necessarily experienced a transformative process.

I first sought the advice of a non-governmental organization (NGO) that offers a literacy program. They were very helpful in identifying participants. However, due to time constraints I was not able to gain access to the identified sample provided by the NGO. I then attempted contacting other NGO’s and was finally able to find participants that matched my time frame in collecting data. I made the initial contact with the participants and applied the criteria of establishing whether they had undergone a transformative experience according to aforementioned definition. This was done in the form of a conversation by asking questions such as, “How has your thinking changed since you completed your literacy program?” or “How do you handle certain situations now as opposed to before you attended the literacy program”? If the response indicated a change in meaning perspective as suggested by Mezirow (1998), I followed up then by asking them if they were willing to be a part of this study.

This initial contact was two-fold as it established a level of rapport and familiarity as well as identified participants. I engaged each of the participants in conversation that did not necessarily deal with the study. After the initial contact, I felt as if though I known
them for a long time. While Seidman (1998) supports the creation of rapport, he cautions against too much rapport. Too much rapport can lead to corruption of the data. It could mean then that the researcher’s lived reality is being told and not the lived realities of the participants. Participants were promised confidentiality. I explained to them that I was going to use pseudonyms in writing the study and would alter or omit any revealing characteristics to prevent anyone identifying them. Any alteration or omittance would, however, not compromise or corrupt the data.

I met with the participants and again explained the purpose of the study and gave them the adult consent form (See Appendix 4). I then gave them time to read and ask questions. They all asked questions, giving me the opportunity to fully give details and clarify the purpose of the study and further the rapport.

As mentioned previously, the participants were identified using the criteria of having experienced a transformation after attending a literacy program. It was imperative that participants be drawn from this population, as the data derived must represent the experiences of those who have had the opportunity of participating in an adult education program and assert to being transformed. Such data will give voice to their lived realities. I believe that in speaking directly to
the stakeholders involved, I most effectively portrayed the issues presented in the guiding questions that guide this study.

An important concern in carrying out the interviews was the language used in carrying out the interviews and the probability that the language would shift during the interview. The questions were written in English and I planned to use English to conduct the interviews. However, I was aware that Belize Creole, the country’s lingua franca could be chosen by the participants. As a Belizean interviewing Belizeans and a speaker of Belize Creole, I foresaw the possibility that the interview might shift into Creole. I, however, chose to use English as it is the official language, yet recognizing that the language could shift. Seidman (1998) notes that “As in most issues regarding interviewing, there is no one right way to respond to these situations, except to recognize the importance of language and culture to thought (p. 88).”

Since I was aware of the linguistic differences that could occur, I took precaution of observing those differences during the interview and during the transcribing stage. If participants’ code shifted, I interpreted that they opted for use of the lingua franca as that was the best way to explain their experiences. Every attempt was made to ensure that transcriptions represented the full sense of the word used
by the participants, as there is no standard orthography for Belize Creole. From my own experience as an educator in Belize, I know that most Belizeans understand Standard English but feel more comfortable speaking in Belize Creole. Therefore, the assumption was that the data was not corrupted due to translations. I am also a fluent speaker of English and Belize Creole and understand the nuances between the two languages.

To add credibility to the data collected, I had the interviews peer-reviewed by two fluent speakers of Belize Creole and then conducted member checks of the transcribed interviews.

Data Collection

Data was collected using the following methods:

1. Open ended semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants using a modified version of Dolbeare and Schuman’s (1982) three-interview series approach.

2. Field notes from interview sessions.

3. Public artifacts and documents about adult education program.

4. Researcher’s reflective journal.

Employing multiple strategies to gather data is an attempt at creating trustworthiness in the data collected. This method of utilizing several gathering techniques is known as triangulation. (Denzin &
Lincoln, 2005. Triangulation allows for enriched data, possible thick
descriptions and the examination of a phenomenon from more than
one vantage point. Triangulation, however, does not mean that all
data sources necessarily converge to reveal the truth. Hammersley &
Atkinson (1983) caution that adopting a view that triangulation will
produce a more complete picture is naïve. They contend that
differences emerging from the different data sources are just as
important and shed light, establishing further validity. “What is
involved in triangulation is not just a matter of checking whether
inferences are valid, but of discovering which inferences are valid
(Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 200).”

Moreover, the data was subjected to peer reviews by colleagues
who have experience in the area of research in particular qualitative.
In addition, member checks were conducted once the interviews were
transcribed. This allowed me to get clarifications from the participants
as I reconstructed my journal writing and the interviews. Therefore,
the member checks were critical if I was to adequately present their
experiences and lived realities.

The following are the questions that guided the study, previously
presented in chapter one:
1. What conditions and circumstances foster the transformative learning process?

2. What critical incidents have enhanced transformation?

3. How does participation in a program transform the participants to create change in their lives? How is this change manifested?

4. How have the transformations influenced participants’ relationships at home, school/work and within the larger community?

Data was collected over a two-week period enabling me to interview participants twice using an interview guide (See Appendix 1 and 2). I later transcribed the interviews verbatim and conducted member checks. I also collected documents and artifacts from the government archives for later analysis if it would contribute to a deeper understanding of the findings. I was able to use some of these documents in the literature review section of this study.

Thomas (1993) reminds us that data sources “can include a person, a group, documents, or any other artifact… (p. 38).” Therefore, participants engaged in an open-ended semi-structured interview and a subsequent follow-up interview. These interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed for data analysis. In an
unobtrusive manner, I took field notes that I later expanded in my reflective journal. Most often the field notes consisted generally of key words or short questions that I later elaborated in the field notes after the interview was over.

Participants were asked to use reflexive inquiry as suggested by Simon & Dippo (1986). The three-interview approach discussed later in this chapter is correspondingly aligned to reflection and thus supported the reflexive inquiry. I do not intend to be a storyteller but yet attempt in an objective way to tell the stories or if you will, give voice to the realities of the participants as they reflected on their lived experiences of transformation and change. How the voices are heard will consequently determine how it will be translated and interpreted by others. This process gives the researcher “the power to define and transmit reality (Thomas 1993, p. 9).”

This is seen by Spradley (1979) as “almost friendly conversation (p. 9)”. According to Seidman (1998), this allows for the interviewer and interviewee to engage in an exploration of the participant’s responses. In effect, the interviewer can build and delve into participant’s experiences. The effect, is to create rapport without compromising the data collection process. Interview questions consisted of open-ended semi-structured questions. The interviews
were spaced a week apart with each interview lasting approximately one hour each.

The interviews followed the basic three-interview series approach posited by Dolbeare & Schuman (1982) discussed in Seidman (1998, p. 11-13). See Figure 3.2 for the modified interview structure created for this study modeled from Dolbeare & Schuman three-interview series. The modified version used in this study comprised of two interviews set a week apart. This is in keeping with Seidman’s suggestion on spacing interviews at least three days apart.

This approach is designed to place emphasis on the context as Seidman (1998) reasoned, “Without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience (p. 11).” However, Dolbeare and Schuman’s three-interview approach was modified using two interviews yet maintaining the essential structure of the three-interview approach thus providing a viable method of inquiry. This modification was required because of time constraints on the part of the participants and me. Seidman (1998) acknowledged that researchers would have reasons for altering the structure and procedures of the three interview series. He however contends that:

As long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct their experience within the context of their lives, alterations to the three-interview approach...
structure and the duration and spacing of interviews can easily be explored. But too extreme a bending of the form may result in your not being able to take advantage of the intent of the structure. (p. 15)

Seidman (1998) further emphasizes preserving the structure as it is related to the goal of the interview approach. The aim of the three-interview approach is to have participants reconstruct and reflect on their experiences. He explains that in the three-part interview method the:

1. First interview focuses on a person’s life history associated with the context.
2. The second centers on the details of present experiences.
3. The third interview incorporates the narratives of the previous two by reflecting on the essential meanings for the individual. (p.16)

This rigorous one-to-one approach provided a detailed exploration of the meanings for the participants in this investigation as they explored issues of transformation and change. However, this three-interview approach to interviewing was collapsed into two interviews comprised of the three corresponding sections that addressed the objectives of this study. This was done without
compromising the structure and integrity of the interview as the structure and process was maintained (see figure 3.2).

As suggested by Seidman (1998) the first interview focused on participant’s life history associated with the issue of transformation and change and details of their experiences. The second interview integrated the details of the participant’s present experiences asking them to reflect on the essential meanings of their experiences. Subsequently, the interview questions were divided into three sections.
namely (a) life history; (b) details of present experiences; and (c) reflection on the meanings of their experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription and analysis.

Acknowledging Seidman’s caution on respecting the three-interview structure, I was cautious to adhere to the structure by focusing on the questions set for each interview. This was difficult as sometimes participants were presenting interesting information, but which was pertinent to the second interview. Seidman emphasizes that it is important to avoid the temptation of pursuing the participant’s lead as doing so, “can erode the focus of the interview” (Seidman, 1998, p. 13). He strongly challenges his point by claiming that:

There is a logic to the interviews, and to lose control of their direction is to lose the power of that logic and the benefit from it. Therefore, in the process of conducting the three interviews, the interviewer must maintain a delicate balance between providing enough openness for the participants to tell their stories and enough focus to allow the interview structure to work.

Furthermore, to add trustworthiness and integrity to the interview process I considered Seidman illustration on the reliability of collapsing the interviews with the following anecdote that occurred in one of his studies. He mentions that a participant was leaving for
vacation the day after agreeing to take part in a study. As a result the
three interviews were conducted all on the same day “with reasonable
results (p. 15).” In my study the collapsed interview structure that was
used yielded reasonable results as participants were able to explore
their experiences and reflect on the meaning presently and what it
means for the future.

In addition to the interviews, public official documents and
artifacts were obtained. Critical ethnography is under the assumption
that there exists “hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions
that inhibit, repress, and constrain (Thomas,1993, p. 2-3).” This
suggests that there exist documents and artifacts to support or refute
experiences of the participants. I searched in the local newspapers
archives, government archives and archives at the other libraries for
references that had potential relevance to this study. These artifacts
were sought after the interviews had been conducted as they had the
potential to amplify and add significance to the lived realities of the
participants.

Additionally, I also keep a reflective journal recording personal
feelings and questions throughout the study. My reflective journal was
supplemented by the field notes I wrote before, during and after
conducting the interviews. The reflective journal was crucial in allowing
me to incorporate aspects of critical ethnography. Reflexivity is fundamental in both critical ethnography and transformative learning involving all the constructs that play a role in the research. (Anderson, 1989; Soto, 1992, 1997). Soto (1997) as a proponent of self-reflexivity claims that, “The ability and willingness of researchers to self reflect is critical in the evolving field of multicultural research (p. 13).” Reflection being key in this study was evident in the interview process, my reflective journal and throughout the analysis process.

Self-reflexivity is a principal concern in doing qualitative research because the researcher is so closely involved in the research process and outcome. Subjectivity is unavoidable in qualitative research; however, subjectivity may be employed in particular ways to further enhance the research (Patton, 1990).

The reflective journal commenced when the preliminary contact with the NGO. This journal consisted of any or all of the following: gut feelings, my own questions formulated after reflecting, anecdotal records, reflections of specific events and general observations as the study progresses. “The ability and willingness of researchers to self reflect is critical in the evolving field of multicultural research (Soto 1997, p. 13).” Soto further maintains that self reflection “places
researchers in a state of vulnerability yet has potential for the
initiating alternative and experimental research paradigms (p. 13).”

Reflection “entails being able to step back from the immediacy of
the situation and examine knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitudes, values,
and behavior in a dispassionate manner. Reflection is that kind of
thinking that extracts meaning from experiences as a mechanism to
propel development (Guillaume & Yopp, 1995, p. 96).” Consequently
Richert (1990) puts it as the "ability to think about what one does and
why. Reflection influences how one grows as a professional by
influencing how successfully one is able to learn from one's
experiences (p.525).” From this perspective, I stepped back and
examined my own beliefs, values and attitude in particular. This
reflection enabled me to examine any biases I held and added to the
trustworthiness of the study.

Researcher as Primary Research Instrument

In describing the researcher as the primary research instrument,
and as a participant observer throughout the study, there is some
obligation on my part to provide a more extensive description of who
“I” am, and of my background, so that you may form a context in
which to situate the comments and the conclusions of this study.
Given the subjective nature of qualitative research in general, I served
a major role in the collection of the data due in large part to the design of this study. Graue and Walsh (1998) assert that:

   The choice of role should be a theoretically driven decision, at least in part, because it is related to the kinds of understandings the researcher hopes to generate. The role negotiated by a researcher makes some things more prominent in data generation than others, thereby constituting reality in quite specific ways. (p. 75)

   As the key person in obtaining data from the participants, my facilitative interaction created a context where participants shared rich data regarding their experiences and life. An argument can be made that the data may be influenced by my biases since I have a passion for my study. Corbin & Strauss (2008) support the idea of drawing upon personal experience. They however point out that the idea is not to have the researcher “impose his or her experience upon the data(p. 28).” I saw it more as giving me a deeper insight into the restructuring and meaning making of my participants. I do have personal experience in the area of literacy as I have been working in adult education environments for the last fifteen years and consider myself a social change agent. I am fully aware of the power relations and politics of privilege and the possibility of consciousness-raising through education. I am very passionate about issues of diversity, oppression,
power and structural differences and have a stake in the findings of this study. As insights emerged, I related it to my own transformational experience. I began college nine years after graduating from high school. Like my participants, there was a gradual discovery within myself upon the realization that I needed a higher level of education to make a significant difference in the life of my daughter. Audrey closely paralleled my own transformational learning process.

I also share a common culture with the participants and was able to draw upon my lived experience as a Belizean educator in the data analysis process. As an educator who has insight on the literacy situation in Belize I can relate to many of their lived experiences. My intention was not to use my experience with the collected data but “rather, we [I] want to use our experiences to bring up other possibilities of meaning (Corbin & Anselm, 2008).”

Even as a Belizean, I faced many challenges in carrying out the interviews. I had to travel to different parts of Belize on public transport, which was often slow, and hardly ever on time. In some cases, I would travel and then find out that my participant had postponed for one reason or another. While I tried to arrange interviews considering the time and travelling constraint, it did not always work out the way I planned. While very familiar with the
culture of my participants, I yet had to learn their own personal culture so they could view me without attaching a label of authority. I aimed at building and establishing a trusting relationship with the participants as I considered this also part of the meaning-making process. This process is crucial for the discovery of the transformative experience.

As I reflected on some of the potent moments of my life, I realized my own transformation (as I mentioned previously) and discovered the connection between learning and transformation. Graue and Walsh (1998) uphold that the role of the researcher is theoretically driven. Therefore, I considered myself key in obtaining the data as I underwent my own transformation and contributed an emic perspective to this study as I reflected on the findings. Finally, I argue that no procedure can guarantee total objectivity, but it is possible to add credibility using triangulation as a strategy. Ultimately, the objectivity of the research lies in the honesty, integrity, and objectivity of the individual researcher rather than in the particular method used.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of a process that brought order, structure, and meaning to the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Data collected for analysis consisted of the transcripts created from the interviews, field notes and my reflective journal. In addition, official
documents and archival records were scanned for themes that emerged as the data was coded and analyzed. This section details the data analysis procedures used in this study. In this study I strive to portray the close-up reality through "thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973 cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 17)" of participants lived experiences of conditions and circumstances that have led to transformation.

Data analysis took place over three phases. At each stage of the analysis the aim was to reduce the data into manageable chunks as suggested by Corbin & Strauss (2008). They suggest that doing this brings meaning and insight to the words and actions of the participants in the study. Once the interviews were transcribed I shared the typed transcripts with participants in a process known as member checking (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005). Member checking and peer reviewing contributed to the trustworthiness of the study.

**Phase one.** Phase one, involved the transcribing of interviews and field notes of the first interview. I immediately scanned the interview for emerging themes or significant information that might be pertinent for the second interview. I refined the questions before the next interview to ensure that I adhered to the structure of the three-step interview approach. I additionally, made notes in my reflective
journal on specific information I needed from each participant. This was necessary, as the same questions were not refined for each one. It was important at this point to engage in this activity as I used this process also to get further clarifications for the subsequent interview. I later filed the interviews with corresponding field notes for each participant. As suggested by Cresswell (1994); Huberman & Miles (1994), and Wolcott (1994). I read and reread data writing notes on the margin as I attempted to make sense of the data. In other words, I started to look for patterns and themes. Labels were attached which began the coding process. However, caution was taken to not lock in categories but rather to reduce the enormous amount of data that in-depth interviewing generates. Artifacts and documents were labeled should their need arise later in the analysis process. Following Seidman’s (1998) advice, no in-depth analysis of data was attempted.

*Phase two.* The second phase entailed the line by line coding of the interviews. I wrote notes in the margins of the interviews. In other words, I broke down the data and what emerged were over 300 codes. Categories were formed from these codes. These codes were then compiled into manageable categories using constant comparison. This was done in order to manage the data. Fifteen categories were built and developed from the integrated codes. Some codes were discarded
at this point as they bore no relevance to the guiding questions.
Additional memos were also created at this point of the analysis.

As the categories were developed, they were tested against the data. The fifteen categories were then collapsed to seven again relying on constant comparison. The analysis was then subjected to inspection by two colleagues knowledgeable in qualitative research.

Data was coded using the principles of grounded theory, as the goal was to ultimately build theory from the data generated. I used constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) to eventually arrive at a core category. This core category represented the substantive theory generated from the data.

According to Merriam & Associates (2002), the goal of grounded theory is to derive inductively a theory that is grounded in the data. The emphasis is on description rather than on verification. Research in this mode has as a goal to build a substantive theory. They further explain that a substantive theory is distinct from grand or formal theory, as it is “localized (p. 7)”. Substantive theory deals with specific real-world situations such as the impact of transformative learning. “Substantive theory is not grand theory, but theory about some facet of professional practice, about real-world situations, about ‘slices of life’ (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522) (p. 142).”
The usefulness of substantive theory is for purposes of replication of the study in similar contexts and whether the results can be generalized leading to a grand theory. This generalizability does not indicate a static process as it is rather dynamic since it allows for refinement or modification of the substantive theory thereby building grand or formal theory.

Qualitative coding is not the same as quantitative coding. The term itself provides a case in point in which the language may obscure meaning and method. Quantitative coding requires preconceived, logically deduced codes into which the data are placed. Qualitative coding, in contrast, means creating categories from interpretation of the data. Rather than relying on preconceived categories and standardized procedures, qualitative coding has its own distinctive structure, logic and purpose (Charmaz, 1983). The substantive theory emerged from the data without any a priori categories. Using a systematic constant comparison a core category was interpreted.

The issue of reliability was addressed by having two independent researchers code each of the transcribed interviews and look for emerging themes. No preconceived categories were offered,. The themes from the two independent researchers were then compared with my coding for congruence. Via discussion, we agreed on the themes that they had discovered.
Phase three. Individual cases for each participant was conducted. I used Clark’s (1991) dimensions of change manifested in transformational learning psychological, convictional and behavioral to organize the individual case studies. (See below for more information on the three dimensions). The cross case analysis was created to reveal similarities or differences in the experiences of the participants using the categories that had emerged in phase two of the data analysis. These categories were later collapsed into a core category, which led to the substantive theory for the study.

In using a case study approach incorporating essential elements of critical ethnography for the analysis phase, I was able to “allow an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events” (Yin, 2003 p. 2).” During the data analysis phase, I analyzed the data bearing in mind issues such as power, privilege, socio-economic status and colonialism. In other words, the context was taken into consideration during the analysis stage.

In a seminal study, Clark (1991) uncovered three dimensions to perspective transformation that were used as a guide for the analysis of data. This aided in identifying major components of a transformative learning experience that are aligned with the working definition of this proposed study. These dimensions were utilized as a guide and not to prove its theoretical underpinnings. Clark’s three dimensions entail:
1. Psychological changes: changes in understanding of the self.

2. Convictional: revision of belief systems.

3. Behavioral: changes in lifestyle. (p. 123)

Clark’s dimensions lent themselves to exploring the impact of context on the process of transformation. According to Clark, any transformative learning experience manifests all three dimensions. However, this manifestation appears in different proportions with one predominating.

Generating cross-case analysis revealed a more generalizable understanding of the transformative learning process while at the same time protecting the anonymity of the participants.

Summary of Analysis

In terms of data analysis, I followed a grounded theory approach and broke down the main steps in the systematic analysis of the data. As shown above, I analyzed the data using 3 phases that involved interrogating the data at progressively deeper levels. First, I highlighted key passages in the transcripts labeling them with key terms from the transcript. This is subjective but a vital step in reducing the data. The next phase, known as ‘open coding’ I assigned the key terms to categories that were created from grouping the key
terms. These categories were then assigned to pertinent quotes to be used later in the actual analysis writing. Memos were also created throughout the analysis phase. A category is an abstract conceptual label, which summarized the key characteristics of a section of the transcript. This is a time-consuming stage, which involves working through the transcripts in turn to collect numerous quotes and examples of each existing category and to identify new ones. Many categories were identified from the first transcript and then progressively fewer new categories from each successive transcript, as the proportion of new information decreased. This process of assigning quotes to categories was repeated for each of the four interviews. For each transcript, I asked two independent reviewers to look for themes/categories in the transcript after which we discussed any differences in categorizing. This ensured consistency and credibility. The end-point of this process is the production of an initial list of categories.

The next stage of the analysis involved refining this list by deleting or combining some categories, followed by making connections between the categories and defining properties, for instance context and preconditions. This led to a set of 15 categories that were refined and trimmed 7 categories using constant comparison. These 7 categories eventually were integrated to build the substantive theory.
This final stage identified a core category that for the substantive theory. At this point, a high-level comparison analysis was conducted to ensure that the emergent theory was a rendition of the raw data.
Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect....Your silence will not protect you.

"The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action", in *Sister Outsider* (Audre Lorde, 1994)

*Overview*

Learning is a process and when considering how learning fits into the fabric of a person’s life, several dimensions emerge. When the participants in this study engaged in their learning journey, little did they realize the impact of participating in a literacy program. They were in the process of becoming certain types of individuals unconsciously. Each participant was studied under the assumption that transformative learning exists and that it can be investigated to gain a deeper understanding of the process. Furthermore, one of the assumptions of this study, as stated in Chapter 1, was that each participant had experienced a transformation in her life. In order to gain a richer understanding of how these participants created change in their lives, it was essential that I studied individuals who according
to Mezirow (1988) understood learning as a “process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide to decision and action (p. 223).” They were each selected on the primary criteria of being able to identify a transformative learning event in their life. Participants were identified through informal conversations with adult educators who have knowledge of transformative learning and the literacy experiences of the participants. Thus, four participants, all women, were included in this purposive sample enabling me to pursue the guiding research questions.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the process of transformation in order to determine its impact on the participants and their socio-cultural context. More directly, this study addressed the following questions:

1. What conditions and circumstances foster the transformative learning process?
2. What critical incidents have enhanced transformation?
3. How does participation in a program transform the participants to create change in their lives? How is this change manifested?
4. How have the transformations influenced participants’ relationships at home, school/work and within the larger community?

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the research data. This chapter is presented in two parts. The first part is the with-in case studies of the four participants’ data and the second part is the cross-case analysis. The with-in case analysis provides a profile of each participant. Each case is organized using Clark’s (1991) dimensions of change manifested in transformational learning experiences: psychological, convictional, and behavioral.

Clark (1991) in her seminal study on the process of transformational learning and the role of context claimed that these three dimensions are manifested in every transformational experience. According to Clark (1991), these dimensions are found in every transformational experience but in different proportions. Psychological refers to an altering of the self; while convictional refers to change in belief system and, finally behavioral entails a change in lifestyle. Clark (1991) asserts that:

The exact blend of these three dimensions is a subjective judgment which can only be assessed by the person who has the experience. However, it is possible to identify the
primary dimension of change in these transformational learning experiences. (p. 123)

Point in fact is that these dimensions are found in every transformational learning experience but in varying degrees. She contends that one of the dimensions becomes the primary while the others are secondary. While Clark argues that one dimension predominates, I challenge this view, since for all participants involved in this study the dimensions were manifested equally. While it is a subjective judgment as to which dimension is deemed primary or secondary, I found it difficult to assign one dimension as the primary since each participant exhibited all dimensions to an equal extent. I want to propose that Clark’s model be expanded by considering all dimensions equally as each are significant in the transformative experience. It is my theory that these dimensions are not independent of each other or should not be pigeonholed as either primary or secondary. In other words, they all occur in equal proportions each enhancing the other. In short, they are integrated as each influences the other.

From the data gathered in this study, it is evident that categorizing the dimensions into primary and secondary destroys the equilibrium the interrelatedness of the dimensions requires. This equal
manifestation of the dimensions was displayed by all participants involved in this study and classifying the dimensions as primary or secondary would be contrary to the transformative experience of all four participants. Audrey, Jayna, Gida, and Imara underwent a change in the self that consequently altered their belief system and subsequently caused a change in behavior.

The cross-case analysis examined the themes that emerged across cases. It further analyzed the far-reaching impact of the transformative experiences of the participants. Through the identification of four women who had taken part in a literacy program, I searched for a deeper understanding of the impact of the transformation process on the individuals themselves, their families, workplace/school and their communities. These four cases present and shed light on the deeper meanings that the transformative process holds. If the transformative process indicates a reconfiguration of perceptions that allows individuals to become critically aware of themselves and their social context then these participants are in an advantageous position to ascertain how their perspective has changed. More than that, they are in a position to indicate the impact the transformation has had on their socio-cultural context.
As described in Chapter 3, the confidentiality of participants was vital and I stressed that point upon initial contact with them. Every one of the participants indicated that I had their permission to use their real names if I wished to use them, as they were pleased to share their experience. One of the participants said to me, "I have no problem with my real name being used as I believe everyone should know I am proud." I, however, explained to them that for research purposes I had to use a pseudonym. We did not decide on names during the interview. I later conducted a Google search on names whose meanings personally matched each participant. I then chose a name for each participant reflective of who they were. None of the participants knows each other or has met previously to my knowledge.

*Case one: Audrey (noble strength).* Audrey, age 27, is the youngest participant. She is single and lives at home with her mother and siblings. She is of Creole descent and very notably spoke English throughout the interview. I say notably since the language of everyday conversation for Belizeans is the lingua franca Belize Creole. Belizeans of all ethnic groups will generally use Belize Creole even though English is the official language of the country used for education.

Audrey describes a home where her mother valued education and was very instrumental in helping her to where she is today. She is
the fifth child in a family of seven. They lived in house where she
shared a bedroom with her sisters. Audrey grew up in poverty typical
of the in the inner city and adamantly emphasized that she is part of a
strong and loving family. She considers her family very hard working,
an example set by her mother.

Audrey attended an inner-city school as the family lived with
limited resources. She believes that she is a role model for her sisters
since she is the only one who has attained this high level of education
and she is looking forward to accomplishing more educationally.
Audrey mentioned to me that she “provides support and gives an extra
push to her sisters.” The motivation and exemplar she is providing is
aimed at inspiring others to strive, in particular the motivation is
aimed at her sisters. Her strong desire to become educated
demonstrates critical self-reflection and an understanding of poverty.
She positions her transformation in the context of her family and the
community she works in and wants to change.

Audrey highlighted her change from living with limited resources
to a life with more financial resources. Her optimism, self-esteem and
sense of responsibility were displayed throughout the interview and in
the information, she offered. She believes in herself and strives for
opportunities to improve professionally. She is determined and goal
oriented which is displayed in her pursuit of attaining the highest education possible. This young woman is a teacher by profession and is now pursuing an undergraduate degree in elementary education. This is one example of persistence and diligence because against all odds she is now at the local university. She was teaching at an inner city school with a provisional teaching license and got accepted to do an undergraduate degree in elementary education. She believed that her experience prior to teaching has given her the knowledge to be able to reach the children she teaches. She mentioned that she often uses stories from her life to motivate her students. She mentioned to me that she tells them, “If I can make it so can you.” Audrey has dreams of one day attaining a PhD. From the look on her face, I could see the determination and will that one day she will have a PhD. She used the word perseverance several times, as she described her experience.

It is this strength that she hopes to pass on to the children she teaches in the inner-city school as she has plans to return to teach at the same school. After graduation, she would have a choice of where to teach but believes that she needs to return to the children “that need her most.” Audrey shares her experiences with the youth group she belongs to and believes that she has inspired many of them to do more than completing high school. In other words, she has become a
role model for her students and youth group members especially those who come from families that are experiencing financial difficulties. She has a strong belief that sharing her life experiences is a more effective way of bringing change with young people than simply telling them what to do. She has seen ways that some young people have changed and therefore believes she has played some role in that change.

Audrey does not ascribe her transformation solely to academic achievement but extends it far beyond to the identity she has found which include increased self-esteem, self-awareness, and a sense of possibility. Her participation in an adult literacy program was powerful as it made her aware of her strengths and intelligence. She, however, asserts that even if she had not gone to that particular program she believes that she would still be in the same position she finds herself now. She underscored this by saying:

If you have enough confidence in yourself you can achieve anything. I am a very persistent person so I know (her emphasis) that I will be successful, that one day I will have a PHD. Once I put myself to something I will get it, I will get it. Just look how far I have come. I have my own room now.
According to Clark’s convictional dimension of change, Audrey manifested it in how her belief system was altered. She realized how successful she could become by attaining the highest education level and she aspires to one day have a PhD. She confidently said, “I am about to finish my undergraduate degree and I am working towards my PhD.” Her new understanding of herself made her aware of her intelligence and increased her belief in attaining the highest degree possible. This conviction is what makes her want to return to teach at the inner-city school even though she has a choice of other schools that would be willing to hire her. She has lived the experience of being in an inner-city school as a student and believes she is better suited to serving the needs of those schools. Like Friere (1973) she believes she can address change at the societal level through education.

Audrey’s psychological dimension of change is displayed as she emerged a confident and assertive person. During our interview, she spoke very confidently of her experiences. She claimed that though a shy person she is assertive. She has assumed responsibility for her learning and reflects on how to improve it. Furthermore, she claimed that as person she is more tolerant of others, behavior that she did not have before. Her way of thinking was altered in how she viewed education and poverty. Audrey sees a new self that has evolved overtime and she focuses on the struggle yet highlighting the
achievements this is bringing. Her focal point is that there is a way out of poverty and is education. She said,” you can succeed even if you are poor; you can do anything if you put your mind to it.” This indicates to her that poverty should not exclude anyone from the opportunities education affords the individual.

On the behavioral dimension of change, Audrey’s lifestyle changed since she was able to buy things she could not afford before. With a mother who struggled financially to put food on the table, clothes on her back and those of her sisters and give her an education there was nothing left for wants. She proudly explained to me that she now has a room of her own where before she had to share one with her other sisters.

The role of context was clearly a factor as it helped to shape and structure how she wanted to pursue further studies. She mentioned that her mother played a significant role in encouraging and offered the moral support required. As the only one in the family that attained that level of education, she believed that she would influence not only her immediate family but also the members of the church group she belongs. Audrey is very confident that she is a role model for the children she teaches given that they have few positive role models.
Case two: **Jayna** (bringer of victory). Jayna, 44 years of age is a mother of three children and a wife. She is of Belize Creole descent and spoke English for the most part during the interview. She however resorted to Belize Creole when she wanted to make clear that I understood her and received the message the way she was intending it. Her husband is a carpenter by trade and could read and write. He works with the government but does private work when available on the weekends or evenings. She is of Belizean Creole descent. She often helped her husband in his work. She mentioned driving big trucks and doing heavy work along with her husband to help him as he built houses. Her current socio-economic situation is much better than the one she grew up. She said that they live comfortably as she can afford provide food and pay for her utilities.

She comes from a large family and is the eldest of 14 children. Her mother was a single parent as her father left when she was quite young. Since Jayna was the eldest, it was expected that she would stay home to help care for the rest. She along with another sister were the ones given the task of helping out with the large family. Both Jayna and her sister only attended the first three grades of primary school and were then taken out of school to help care for the rest of the family. The three years that she attended school she missed at least half of the time. Often the reason for not attending classes was
because Mom needed to run an errand and the younger siblings needed a babysitter.

Jayna mentions that her younger brothers and sisters got the opportunity to go to primary school and even further education. She has brothers and sister who have received university education. She however, along with her sister who cared for the family, did not get the opportunity to go to school thus both were not able to read and write. Even though, she was not able to read and write she recognized the value of education and encouraged her children to become educated. She wanted her children to get the best education possible and sacrificed to ensure that they received the best education. She mentioned to me that she did not want her children to go through what she had gone through, that is not being able to read and write. While she believed that as a woman, she could get a husband and some of her problems would be solved; she also believed that with an education she could achieve even more.

Jayna would often pass signs and always would wonder what they said or meant. She shared a story that was part of her motivation for wanting to learn to read and write. Jayna mentioned that the center of the town has a big clock and she would always pass by it and would want to know the time. But, of course she could not read time.
She told herself each time she passed by the town clock that one day she would be able to tell the time. Jayna proudly explained how each time she passes by the town clock she looks and reads the time.

Jayna was encouraged to join a literacy program by her son who saw the advertisement in the newspaper. She knew the value of reading even though she could not read herself and made sure that her children had reading material. Reading the newspaper was strongly encouraged and her son would often relate the newspaper stories to his mom. He remembered Jayna always saying that one day she would learn to read and write. Therefore, the day he saw the advertisement in the newspaper he mentioned the literacy program to her. He said to her, “mammy you have always talked about going back to school...well here’s your chance.” He further explained to her where the literacy program was being held. She then talked with her husband about joining the literacy program and he was very supportive in her interest in attending. For Jayna having the support of her husband was very significant as in her experience men would generally not support the wife or partner joining such a program.

This motivated woman went to the literacy program and received all the information on joining and she enrolled in the program. Jayna mentioned that her husband made sure that he drove her to school
whenever it was raining. This was significant for her as it proved his support in her endeavor. Her children were her tutors at home, as they helped her with assignments and constantly encouraged her in particular when problems other than schoolwork challenged her. She mentioned that, “as a wife and mother I am very proud of myself.” She continued by saying, “for the record I don’t think that in those years aback I could explain and express myself this way if I didn’t go back to school. You understand what I am saying.”

Jayna felt the caring and support of the teachers at this literacy program also played a significant role in how she learnt. She attended this program for almost six years and claimed that she had the full support of the school throughout her time attending. She described her time at the school as “fascinating”. She mentioned that she was not sure of the experiences of other adults in her program in relation to returning to school. However, for her it was fascinating.

Jayna was very dedicated and made every sacrifice in order to be successful in her program. She remarked had it not been for that literacy program she more than likely would not be as successful as she is. She indicated that “a whole new world opened for her” and she could now “express herself better.” She revealed that she could stand up for herself and was very confident as well.
Jayna pointed out that the way she handled different situations presently was so different than before. She mentioned that before attending the literacy program she would have behaved unbecoming to the point of being shameful in some instances. She mentioned that her husband had a lot of patience during this time with her. For example, in instances where things were not done her way or if she did not like the situation, she would more than likely degrade the other party. She was easily angered even when the situation did not call for anger. On reflecting about those times, she explained to me that it was not necessary to behave that manner. Looking back she could recognizes her ignorance and today she manages touchy circumstances very differently. She listens attentively and thinks logically not resorting to berating the other person with whom she is communicating. She has reached a level of mutuality which was not evident prior to attending the literacy program.

Jayna pointed out that before she would not have agreed to an interview with me. She stressed the fact that she would have seen no purpose in sitting down with someone to share her life. Today, she understands the purpose of the interview I was conducting and its significance. On the day of the interview she had just arrived from out of town where she looking to buy some land. She was tired but had committed to the interview and made sure that she kept her
appointment with me. She was a few minutes late and apologized several times for being late. I joked about her tardiness in an effort to calm her. She then mentioned that many people had supported her when she embarked on her endeavor to learn to read and write. She said:

I understand the people that supported (stood there) for me; my family, friends, teachers and everybody. Therefore, I understand the purpose of the situation and I would do this 100 times for you or anyone that comes if that is what is required because I know what they have all put out there for me.

She further emphasized her change in relation to her attitude and way of thinking this point by relating it to her relationship with her husband:

Now I understand him a lot more and maybe that is one reason why we’re married and lived together for so long. If I didn’t go (gawn) back to school, maybe we would not have been together all these years and that’s because there is only certain things a person can take. There is only so much. But since I went back to school, it has made a big difference. It has made a very big difference.
Jayna with the help of her husband first built a six-unit apartment building that she manages. A few years later, she was able to build another apartment unit in another area. She hopes to keep adding to her business. She is able to do the paperwork that is required for the management of the apartments. She is always looking for other ways to invest and has explored real estate. She claims to be a businesswoman now. Her husband is now retired from the government service, which gives them both more time to look into other business ventures.

She later went to a school that offered a GED equivalency in the evenings. It was here that she encountered major problems. The school population consisted of mostly young people and she was one of the few older learners there. Firstly, she claims that the teachers at that school did not have the patience with adult learners like her. At her previous school, she felt she was more valued and respected as an adult. Her experience was taken into consideration unlike this school. Secondly, the young people in the class deliberately tried to belittle the older learners. She tried very hard to ignore them and justified their behavior by saying, “them just being young people.” By this she meant that, they were immature and just behaving their age.
But, eventually this took a toll on her along with the lack of considerations of one particular teacher. She explained that she needed further explanation in understanding a math problem and asked the teacher for further clarification. This teacher told her in front of the class that she should pay more attention even though she was paying keen attention, which is why she was now asking for clarification. She felt that the teacher knowing she was an adult and one who had started school very late in life did not respect her as an individual. She left the school then and never went back. However, her yearning for learning was never quenched as she continued to educate herself by reading.

Before she was able to read and write, she was fascinated with looking at signs and always wanted to know what they said. Today, she still continues with her fascination for signs but is now able to read them. She always reads all signs wherever she goes. She recalls that her husband was always encouraging her to learn to drive but she did not want since she could not read road signs. She said:

it is something else when you see a stop sign and you don’t know that that sign says ‘stop’ that you should stop there. But now that I know it says ‘stop’ I don’t fear
anything because when I reach that sign I know it says stop.

A significant event in Jayna’s transformation was the time she learnt to read an analog clock. She remembers that moment very clearly as the teacher drew a circle and demonstrated reading the clock. The others in the class were not interested in learning to read a clock but that was important to her as she often passed the town clock in the center of the town and always wondered what time it was. She is always reminded of the times she could not read and write when she passes the town clock. This reminder gives her a deeper appreciation of the person she has become. This new awareness creates in Jayna a better understanding of herself. Consequently, she strongly believes that as a result, she has become a better mother, wife, and neighbor.

Jayna has manifested behavioral dimension of change in the major changes to her lifestyle. She has become a businesswoman in her own right. She illustrates this dimension by explaining that she is very confident and feels comfortable conducting business even if her husband is not around. She is secure in making decisions and knows that her husband will support her decisions. Moreover, she can now help her children with school assignments and looks forward to supporting them. Jayna’s social and moral support has mainly been
from her children and husband. She however attributes support from the teachers at the literacy program.

This change in behavior in Jayna has caused her to change her communication style with others as prior she alienated herself. She has toned down her approach and is has far fewer confrontations with others. Jayna has created a new confidence that has encouraged her to explore new avenues. Her change in lifestyle is evident as she is successful in what she is engaged.

On the psychological dimension of change, she has undergone a change in personality as she explained, “she does not consider herself ignorant anymore.” The manner in which she handles different situations is distinctive from the way she operated before she attended the literacy program. This change has an impact on her relations with her children and husband. It also extends to her relationships with her extended family. She finds that she can now hold a conversation with any of her siblings without getting into a “rage” even if she does not agree with them. She explained that there have been times when the other party would attempt to tell her off and she positively controls the situation diminishing the other person’s anger. She said, “not so before.”
On the convictional dimension of change, Jayna displays an even deeper understanding of the value of education as she encourages her children and others to attain the highest education possible. This change has also given her a new sense of identity—a new understanding of herself as a mother, wife and businesswoman.

Case three: Gida (strong fighter). Gida is a strong fighter as her name indicates. She is a 46-year single mother and grandmother. She has one son and four grandchildren. Five years ago, she lost a son to gun violence leaving her with one son and the two children from the dead son to take care of. The death of her son was one of the many disorienting dilemmas that Gida has undergone. She was raised by her grandmother who passed away when she was only fourteen. Her death caused a major impact as she had lived with her grandmother since the age of two. When her grandmother died, she had to literally, take responsibility for raising herself. She claims that she went through some serious hard times living in poverty in the inner city.

She did not have any role models to follow and thus hung out with a crowd that had little ambition. She began to spend time “hanging out” with the crowd with no positive goal for her future of her children. She sadly explained that the word future had no meaning for her. She lived for each day. She practically lived like a homeless for a
time, as she had no permanent home. She became a single mom at an early age and raised her two sons with very limited resources.

However, after more than 30 years of being out of a formal education setting she decided to return. She tells the story that the decision to attend school was the result of an encounter with a student and the realization that she could understand the school assignment that student was engaged in. On looking at the assignment, she could comprehend most of it and that realization motivated her to consider getting a high school education. The parents of this student were instrumental as well in encouraging her as they noticed that she had the intelligence, will, and determination to want to return to formal education after more 30 years of not being in the classroom.

During those past years, she was never inclined to learning. She existed and struggled to feed her children. She did mediocre jobs, which, paid very little. At this point, she became more aware that this was not how she would live the rest of her life. She surmised that maybe unconsciously she might have been thinking of making a change in her life. She repeated several times the idea of having no dreams or even an idea of what the future held for her. Future for her was the next meal or the next day.
She spoke very proudly, of where she is at this point in her life and the many opportunities that are now available to her. She became emotional for a little bit, as she recounted her story.

The idea of reading for example never existed as in her world it was a useless activity. She was in a survival mode for herself and two children. Gida describes this time as a very difficult time in her life. To survive she did what she had to do such as taking menial jobs. There were many times when she felt useless and powerless. She remarked that, “I did not live comfortable and did not know anything about goals and about the future.” Gida explained to me that she lived “hand to mouth” an expression meaning that as soon as she had any money it was to buy necessities such as food. Her sons were little and it was rather frustrating and depressing to live that way but she knew no other way. She describes feelings of anger and rage that were often the reason for irrational outbursts on others. She would often berate others for little or no reason. Her entire outlook on life was very negative and it appeared doomed.

Her sons passed those formative years living with examples that were not positive. School or education was not a priority or even encouraged. Her sons were grown-up when she decided to return to school. She was a grandmother and realized that there was still a
chance of her making a turning point in her life. She recalls thinking of her grandchildren, and their life appeared as doomed as hers did. She had no skills and no education and often wondered how she could make a difference in the lives of her grandchildren.

Very early in this realization the idea of returning to school was not there. She credits God as putting the right people in her way since it seemed like suddenly things were falling into place. Positive things began to happen and she was then able to enroll to get a GED equivalency. She was very motivated at this point and had such a quench for learning catching the attention of others. It was quite unusual for a grandmother particularly one from her socio-economic level to aim at getting an education. She speaks with pride of her determination and persistence to excel. In May 2003, the local television channel featured her as she was completing her second year in the GED program. She recalls how she could have been the mother of all the other students as all the others were young people. She tried to motivate her sons to attend the same program but they had no interest. Her sons had children at this point and were not supportive of Gida. In the May 2003 television interview, Gida mentioned that her sons believed that she should be at home taking care of the grandchildren and cooking. She affirmed during this 2003 interview:
But I don't have time for them right now, I want to go to school, I need my education because out here if you don't have an education, you have nothing.... I do not have good memory like the younger ones. I don't have good mind to hold in everything like the younger ones, but I will try harder for me because I know that is something I wants to do. I find that challenging to get up in the morning do my chores and after doing my chores I take a bath and get my books... (May 2003, Belize Channel 5)

Very unfortunate, a week after having been interviewed by the local television station, her 22-year-old son was killed in urban violence. Gun violence has escalated in recent years and the latest statistic for the first quarter indicates a record number of 28 for the first three months of the year. This number is high in relation to the country’s population. She is still becomes emotional when she talks about the death of her son even five years later. After the brutal killing of her son, Gida along with another mother whose son was also brutally killed organized Mothers Organized for Peace (MOP). The mission of this organization is to bring awareness of the brutal killings that have occurred; and creating a consciousness for parents to positively influence their children. She is become an activist in protesting the unacceptable high number of senseless killings and
increased laws for gun possession. She calls the radio station on a
daily basis to protest and asks the authorities to do something to
decrease the crime rate. Gida is on a campaign to educate young
people to avoid a life of crime in an effort to stop the violence before it
starts. She has become very vocal in the campaign to decrease crime
and uses her experience to educate others. She is very active in the
MOP and helps to organizes rallies to bring awareness of the impact of
gun violence and the need for need for families to be involved in the
lives of their children.

In relation to the dimensions of change asserted by Clark
(1991), as previously mentioned, I found it difficult to lay claim to one
dimension as the primary for Gida and the other participants. Like
Clark, I agree that it is a subjective judgment in assessing the
dimensions for others as it can only be assessed by the individual who
has the experiences. Gida restructured herself undergoing a change in
the self for the psychological dimension of change. She emerged a new
person from the experience of returning to school and getting a GED
equivalency. She spoke with such pride as she explained to me that
she was going to graduate with an associate degree in a few months
and planned to take a paralegal course at the local university so that
later she could go and study law. Being actively involved as a
community activist, she developed a sense of identity and self-confidence.

In relation to the behavioral dimension of change, Gida claimed a new power that “empowered” her and dramatically influenced her behavior. In a corresponding manner, she displayed a change in her lifestyle. She no longer ‘hung out’ and spent the time learning, or engaging in quality time with the grandkids. She looks forward to the day that she can defend the poor in court. Today, she maintains a habit a reading and enjoying surfing the internet. She is self-directed in that aspect.

On the convictional dimension of change, Gida belief system changed as she created a new identity for herself. Her newfound belief in herself created an assertiveness that she had not known before. She now strongly believes and is convinced that parents play an important role in guiding their children. She had previously not been able to provide that guidance and was determined to do so now for her grandchildren and the community she lived.

**Case four: Imara (strong resolute).** Imara the name given to this participant displayed a determination very unlike women from her ethnic group. Imara is 37 years of age of Ketchi-Mayan descent and has eight children. Ketchi-Mayan culture is a male dominated society
and women have no role in the decision-making processes. I believe it is appropriate to say something of her ethnic group as it forms a background of who she is and how she fit the criteria to participate in this study.

The Ketchi Mayan is one of two distinct Mayan Indian groups in Belize. They migrated from Alta Verapaz District of central Guatemala in the 1870’s to the lowlands of Toledo, the southernmost region of Belize and have a distinct language different from Mopan Maya the other Mayan group in Belize. They are considered the poorest of the many ethnic groups found in Belize according to the Government of Belize 2002 Poverty Assessment report (CSO, 2004). The report claimed that the Toledo district had the highest level (79%) of poverty and that the incidence of poverty was highest among the Mayas (77%). Toledo has a predominantly high proportion of this ethnic group and they form 11% of the total population.

On the issue of gender equity Ketchi Mayan women will normally speak through their husbands. “It is difficult in traditional communities to gain the confidence of women so that they speak independently and freely and not through their fathers, husbands, or brothers” (SATIM, ND). The women are generally not actively involved in decision-making
activities whether in the home or the community. Their traditional role is to be mother and wife.

Imara is an active member of a women’s group associated with her ethnic group. The members of this group come from different remote villages. Often individuals travelling from these areas need to walk or use a canoe before boarding a bus that will take them into town. Buses normally will only travel once a day. This group seeks to address gender issues and economic well-being through leadership training, marketing, communication, administrative, and business management skills. This group is also linked to direct advocacy through the mediation of domestic violence cases. Domestic violence is prevalent which is associated with high use of alcohol. An illustration of this was presented in a United Nations report:

Alcoholism in Belize’s indigenous Maya population contributes to a pattern of widespread domestic violence and a women’s group worker tells of Maya women running into the bushes with their children to escape beatings. There is nowhere else for them to run. The same worker notices signs of more Maya girls marrying “out” – choosing Garifuna or East Indian husbands in order to escape domestic violence in their villages. Prostitution is said to be
becoming another escape route from domestic violence (Children and Adolescents in Belize, 2004).

Imara’s women’s group is also part of a larger network called Southern Alliance for Grassroots Empowerment (De Vries, 2003). Her women’s group is involved in income-generating projects such as sewing and basket-weaving (See Appendix 3).

On the day of the interview, Imara was along with other women from her women’s group at the center where they normally meet. This group is a non-profit organization, which work towards the advancement of Maya women in the Toledo district. This group has several projects in Toledo but their biggest project is the Literacy project. This project is operating in several villages in the Toledo District and Imara is working on this project. This literacy program is similar to the literacy program she participated. Today she is forms part of a group who are attending a series of workshops to become literacy trainers. (Wright, 2008 personal communication, March 23, 2008)

The women’s group is presently training some of the women to be basic literacy trainers for a basic literacy program that will be implemented in remote surrounding villages in the district. This group of women is also involved in other projects whose ultimate goal is to
empower women and subsequently influence their family relationships and community. (Wright, 2008 personal communication, March 23, 2008) These women had planned to bake black fruitcake that day for the holidays. The cake making was more of a social event since it is not a normal activity of the group. I could hear the noisy chatter and camaraderie of the women as they shared stories of how each had arrived into town and what time their buses were leaving. A colleague of mine who worked with these women facilitated the interview. I explained my study to all the women as I joined them in the cake making process. They had organized themselves before we arrived at the center. They had a group who would prepare lunch for everyone and arranged which group would start to make their cake first. They decided which group would start with the cake making based on what time their bus left. As a group, they had donated money in order to provide lunch for everyone. Lunch consisted of a chicken soup with lots of onions (a traditional Belizean dish) and handmade corn tortillas that we all enjoyed.

In normal circumstances when making cake a cake mixer is used to cream the butter, sugar and eggs. However, a cake mixer is not one of the appliances these women will normally use in their kitchens. Therefore, they used the next best thing that would equally do the job - their hands. In all my experience, I had never seen the hands work
like a cake mixer. Had I not seen it I would have concluded that a cake mixer was used. In rhythm with the conversation, they mixed their cakes with their hands having no need for a cake mixer. It was an eye-opening experience, as I had not expected such creativity and improvisations such as the mixing of cake batter with the hands. They all helped each other to mix and bake so that they could accomplish the task they had set out to do. As they worked, they shared stories with me of their lives and of what they were engaged with in terms of community involvement. My knowledge of women from this ethnic group was one of shy, submissive women who had their husbands or brothers speak for them. That myth was broken that day as they shared many experiences, which go beyond the scope of this study but which indicated that these women had a new consciousness.

From our interactions, it was evident that these women had a new understanding of themselves in terms of social roles and attribution of values and connecting their feelings with actions. Their experiences were one of transformation. This new understanding according to Mezirow (1981) is perspective transformation. He furthers defines perspective transformation as:
The emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psychocultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see our relationships, and ourselves reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understanding. (p. 6)

I write all this about the group because I feel it is relevant and gives context to Imara’s experience. While I was not able to observe the other participants engaged in a similar activity, I felt that because Imara belonged to the group it offered some context for her story.

After my interaction with the group, I then conducted the interview with Imara in a room away from the others. She explained to me that she was able to find her voice after engaging in a literacy program. She was able to engage in discourse that she never imagined before. She shared a story with me:

When I join the women’s group, I was afraid and shy to talk to a whole crowd of people. So when I started to go out, to go for a meeting I could barely say my name. When I stand in front of people, I can’t talk but I improve when I go to every meeting now. I see that I could talk now even if there are a lot of women there, I could explain
myself…. Yes because the women in my village always tell me that I could lead anything. If they call a meeting to get into a group and they select a lady to be chairlady, they would say they can’t do it and that I should do it. They seem to have more confidence in me now.

Imara has a newfound confidence that she proudly displayed as we spoke. She explained that financially life is a little better than a few years before since she has a little income from what she does. When that is combined with her husband’s income, she believes they have enough to feed the family and have the basics. She maintained that while they might not have extra food they had food everyday for the family.

Imara attended public school for six years and like most girls in her culture married very young. Education for women, in the past was not encouraged and often a girl would miss school for reasons such as helping with home chores. In her culture, it is the norm for girls to marry at the age of 14. The minimum legal age to get married in Belize is 14. The Children and Adolescents in Belize Report, (2004) pointed out:

With traditional family pressures on girls to learn from puberty how to be good wives and mothers and to marry
early, many leave school early or under-achieve: many Maya girls in remote villages are reported not to have reached beyond Std 3 or 4 (grades 5 or 6) by the time they reach 14, the end of compulsory education.

She could read very little and from what she explained would more than likely fall in the semi-literate level based on years of schooling according to the United Nations definition of literacy. However, she always felt that she wanted to become a teacher. Today, five years later after having been in a literacy program she is in preparation to be a literacy trainer. A significant part of her motivation comes from the knowledge of having participated as a learner and now getting the opportunity to be a facilitator.

The women’s group she belongs to has received a grant to organize a literacy program for women in the various villages. She was very excited about the program since she is aware that many women in the Mayan communities are illiterate or semi-literate. She reflected on what life would have been had she not received the opportunity to become part of a literacy program. Before she joined the literacy program, she remembered hearing of a literacy program in a nearby village and wished that she lived there. She recollected by saying:
So I thought, well if I lived in San Antonio I would do literacy and that was years ago. Maybe four to five years ago. I remember it. I just thought that if I lived there I would take literacy to learn more, to improve more.

About a year later, her village offered the same program and she was one of the first to join. When she joined the literacy program she told herself, “one of these days I could do teaching. I could teach children at school”. While she may not be teaching at school, she is training as a literacy trainer and is also a sewing instructor for three villages. Imara attributes her participation in the literacy program as the catalyst for the opportunities she is receiving today. As a sewing instructor, she earns a stipend, which helps her family financially.

As an active member of her women’s group, she has many times held key leadership positions such as secretary or treasurer. The members of her group recognize her leadership qualities and encourage her growth. Being involved outside the home does not mean that she neglects her family. Rather, she now has the knowledge to help her children with their homework something she could not do for the older ones. In addition, she has earned a high respect from her husband as he seeks her advice in important decisions. She supported this assertion by saying:
I explain things to my children and husband. I understand their feelings much better and I can help them. I read for them and can explain homework now. My husband now asks me questions about maybe a paper he has to sign.... well I could talk much better to him and he seemed to have a different attitude...better in understanding.

This suggests that Imara also has better communications skills acquired because of becoming engaged in a literacy program. This change has given her greater self-esteem and self-confidence evident during the interview and the cake-making interaction prior to the interview. While this assessment is subjective, I come to this conclusion based on Imara recounting of her personal journey—a deep shift in her frame of reference (Mezirow, 2000).

In Imara’s case, there was a building of competence and self-confidence in her new roles and relationships. She admitted that she had little personal power and was overwhelmed with feelings of hopelessness. Therefore, her aspiration to participate in a literacy program while not provoked by a disorientating dilemma as posited by Mezirow (1991, 2000) was more of “integrating circumstances (Clark, 1991 p. 117).” Clark explains integrating circumstances as “indefinite periods in which the person or persons consciously or unconsciously
search for something which is missing in their lives; when they find this ‘missing piece,’ the transformation process is catalyzed. (p. 117)"

Imara either consciously or unconsciously thought of getting the opportunity of being involved in a literacy program but it was not “an acute and personal crisis (Taylor, 2000 p. 298).” Taylor further supports this view by saying that, “generally they (referring to integrating circumstances) do not appear as a sudden, life-threatening event; instead they are more subtle and less profound, providing an opportunity for exploration and clarification of past experiences (p. 299).”

In relation to Imara’s transformational learning experiences dimensions, in the psychological dimension, her personality was altered as an assertive and confident person emerged. She had a newfound power that was not evident prior to becoming part of a literacy program. She found her voice and no longer considered herself, “a shy person” or “having no voice.”

The convictional dimension is displayed by new understandings of herself. She displays a type of feminism that is generally not found within her culture. Women in her culture generally speak through the significant men in their lives i.e. husbands, brothers or fathers. She spoke of her husband consulting her for important decisions and she could voice her opinion in such matters. This change in her belief
system on the role of women is in my opinion passed on the women she interacts with namely those she teaches sewing. She mentioned to me talking about her experience to other women brought me to this conclusion.

Finally, transformation in the behavioral dimension was a change in her lifestyle. No longer was she only a mother, homemaker, and wife but she was now a feminist in her own right. Note that she never used the word feminist but her conversation alluded to this. In addition, my personal knowledge of how women in that particular culture are treated brings me to that conclusion. Very recently, women in Imara’s culture have become involved in community activism. This is displayed by the women who are now participants in women’s group such as the one Imara belongs. She articulated her involvement in the community as a way of taking responsibility for their lives (the women’s life’s). In her words:

Because whenever some women visit and come to my house I try to explain to them how they should live. I encourage them and explain how much better is for me.”

In speaking about her changed relations with her husband she confidently said, “When we are at home now we think equal. That is what he told me, that both of us have equal
rights. That is what he told me, but before he didn’t think that way but because he sees the interest I put into it now, he doesn’t tell me anything again.

Summary of Transformative Learning Experience of Participants

The transformative learning experiences of the women in this study are similar in two specific ways. First, I do not believe that any of my participants experienced a dramatic disorienting dilemma but rather they were influenced by what Clark (1991) refers to as “integrating circumstances.” The data indicates that no dramatic event triggered these women’s involvement in an adult literacy program. Rather, the participants had a series of integrated circumstances which, involved conscious and unconscious reflection allowing them to explore and prepare themselves for the process of transformation. It is not really known how long these integrating circumstances occurred as it will vary from individual to individual. The reflection takes place as they think of what is missing in their lives and prepare themselves either consciously or unconsciously for the change in their lives. In the case of these women, they all unconsciously contemplated the idea and opportunity to change the way they saw and experienced the world. These integrating circumstances were preparing the women with the ability to cope with the change in their lives; taking them to a fuller understanding and restructuring of their meaning schemes.
Secondly, transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). This shift of consciousness dramatically and irreversibly alters one’s way of being in the world. Such a shift entails understanding ourselves, our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world.

Furthermore, it also gives rise to an understanding of the relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender. For the participants in this study there was an awareness of alternative approaches to living and a sense of possibilities that took into account their socio-cultural context.

Cross Case Analysis

The transformative learning experiences of the women in this study shared several similarities. Out of the data emerged 15 themes that were later trimmed and integrated into seven themes that support my original assumptions that transformative learning can be studied and that the participants in the study had experienced transformation thus a shifting of their meaning schemes. The integrated themes were always compared back to the raw data and to the memos that were created during the analysis.
The substantive theory that emerged from the raw data was related to Metamorphosis as it relates to a permanent change similar to a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly—irreversible (Mezirow, 1991). The metaphor includes the struggle of the pupa as it forms itself into a butterfly. This is aligned with the personal sacrifice, previous financial situation, world of not knowing and ignorance of each participant as they blossomed with emotional maturity. They became self-regulated and had more control over their live. I further added that given the opportunity to shift frames of reference, one has the innate capacity to alter ones life and impact one’s socio-cultural context.

I further validated the substantive theory with individuals not related to the study to interpret the substantive theory. This was done informally. I also presented the co-coders with the substantive theory and asked them to evaluate the theory based on the interviews they had coded. The consensus arrived collectively related to a change in perspective. Some terms used were change in mindset, paradigm shift, becoming a different person mentally, improvement in life, and opportunities lead to better things. The validation is critical as it adds credibility and trustworthiness to the substantive theory.
The following analysis supports the substantive theory, giving it depth, power, and consistency. Corbin & Strauss (2008) stress that a theory grounded in data can be validated by comparing it with the raw data. It should further apply to all the large concepts.

Above all, this study suggested that individuals with low or no formal education when given the opportunity manifest the core values of the society—education as a means of restructuring the self and their relationships; understanding the change in their belief system and those of their relationships and understanding their change in lifestyle and supporting others to understand their change. Finally, it extended the notion that the transformative experience does not follow a rigid format beginning with a disorienting dilemma but rather that it is dynamic. It also opened up the question of whether a ‘disorienting dilemma’ is absolutely necessary.

After codes had been collapsed and categories created the following themes emerged from the data (see Figure 4.1 and 4.2). The 15 categories included (1) discovery of self, (2) great personal sacrifice, (3) development of sense of possibility for family & community, (4) construction of identity and self, (5) discovery of beliefs and values, (6) increased spirituality, (7) becoming assertive, (8) becoming self sufficient, (9) becoming a role model, (10) improved
economic condition, (11) improved understanding and ability to handle tense situations, (12) impact of caring teachers, (13) recognizing value of education, (14) improved communication skills, and (15) social action awareness.

Gida’s return to formal school, Audrey’s determination to attain the highest education possible, Jayna’s confidence in business and Imara’s quest to improve her family’s lifestyle are all encompassed in the above fifteen themes. Each displayed all of the above descriptions. For example, each of them clearly explained how they would become irritated and upset at situations that did not merit getting upset over. On reflecting, I can best attribute this to what Mezirow (1991) calls “premise reflection”. Each questioned why they behaved in that manner and each was able to understand why. They are all very conscious and sensitive of others and have a deeper understanding of attitudes and behaviors.
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<tr>
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<th>Themes Emerging from Phase 2 with Sample Dimensions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Discovery of self</td>
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<td>• Seeking support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Changing goals; having a vision</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Great personal sacrifice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Managing home and school</td>
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<td>• Human support</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Development of sense of possibility for family &amp; community</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Education as a way to improve life in general</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Support and encouragement of family and friends</td>
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<td>• Problem-solving</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Construction of identity and self</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Self-esteem; self-confidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Finding voice; overcoming shyness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Overcoming fear and isolation</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>discovery of Beliefs and values</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Core belief and value of family</td>
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<td>• Saw the value of education for all</td>
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<td>• New perspective</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Increased spirituality</td>
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<td>• Increase in spirituality</td>
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<td>• Greater belief in self and in a higher being</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Becoming assertive</td>
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<td>• Speaking up for oneself; stepping up</td>
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<td>• Not being taken for granted</td>
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*Figure 4.1. Themes Emerging from Phase 2 with Sample Dimensions*
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<td><strong>8. Becoming Self sufficient</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Being able to get some ‘wants’ which were not possible before</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Living comfortably</td>
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<td>• Taking risks</td>
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<td><strong>9. Becoming a Role model</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Role model and motivation to others</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Using experience to motivate</td>
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<td><strong>10. Improved economic condition</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Able to contribute financially to the home</td>
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<td>• Be able to afford some ‘wants’ not possible before</td>
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<td><strong>11. Lack of understanding  improved understanding and ability to handle tense situations</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Not jumping to conclusions</td>
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<td>• Ability to handle tense situations</td>
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<td>• Not easily angered</td>
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<td><strong>12. Impact of caring teachers</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Thankful for teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Encouragement from teachers made a difference</td>
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<td><strong>13. Recognizing value of education</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Encouraging educational attainment</td>
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<td><strong>14. Improved communication skills</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Aware of how to respond to others even in tense situations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Sensitive to the feelings of others</td>
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<td><strong>15. Social action awareness</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Community activism</td>
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<td>• Giving back to community</td>
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Mezirow (2002; 2004) and Merriam (2004) contend that a certain level of education is required to participate in discourse necessary to experience transformational learning. Paolo Freire's (1973) work with illiterate peasants in Brazil refutes this prerequisite as well as the participants in this study. Mezirow (2000) pointed out that not everyone can participate in rational discourse requisite for the transformative process as “preconditions” of “maturity, education, safety, health, economic security, and emotional intelligence” (p. 15) need to be present. Correspondingly, Mezirow (2003) was
unequivocally clear, as he was in Mezirow (2000) about “hungry, homeless, desperate, threatened, sick, or frightened adults are less likely to be able to participate effectively in discourse... (p. 15-16). I counter this view and illustrate it by referring to Gida, as she was essentially homeless and desperate. She exemplifies the concept of transformation learning as she engaged both consciously and unconsciously to an analysis of her situation, concluding it as socially and politically created. In our interview, she emphasized that her change subsequently her transformation had involved “a massive questioning of herself” after she became conscious that she had been thinking of this all along. This unquestionably is parallel to Brookfield (2000) espousal of Mezirow’s concept of transformative learning:

...transformation is a transformation in perspective, in a frame of reference, in a personal paradigm, and in a habit of mind together with its resulting points of view together with its resulting points of view. For him (referring to Jack Mezirow) transformation thereby involves a fundamental reordering of assumptions (p. 139).

Pursuing this further there have been several studies on transformative learning that included participants for whom the transformative experience was effected without conscious critical
reflection. Taylor (1994), using intercultural competency studied adults who had lived and worked in a culture different from their own, and McDonald (1998), investigated how people become ethical vegans, reported that some participants had transformed their perspective without being aware of the change process. Also, Kovan and Dirkx’s (2003) study of environmental activists found that their transformations "rarely indicate(d) a strong reliance... on critical reflection and self-analysis.... The inner work that characterize(d) this approach to transformation is grounded in affective, emotional, spiritual, and transpersonal dimensions of life (Dirkx, 1997)" (p. 115). Merrill (2006) studied Mexican women from low-socio-economic settings who found resiliency through a literacy program. All participants were from low socio-economic levels and through participation in a literacy program have increased their self-esteem and confidence.

Likewise, Jayna’s experience with literacy transitioned her to being a businesswoman today. She explained to me her desire to be able to read an analog watch. When she started the literacy program that was the first thing she asked to learn. Like all the other participants, she attributed her success to the caring and dedication of the teachers. She described the teachers as understanding of adults and not treating them like children.
The profound experience of their participation in a literacy program has influenced their immediate family and the other relationships outside the home. For example, Audrey uses her experience of growing up in poverty in an inner-city area as motivation for her students to aim for the highest standards. She also, stands as a role model to her sisters and to the members of her youth group. The great sacrifice of her mother is a major influence as she aspires to one day attain a Ph.D.

Imara, often talks to other women of the transition she made. She attempts to influence other women to seek a similar life change-transformation. She was so proud that now she “she had a voice, could talk”. It is not surprising that she did not have a voice before since her cultural upbringing would not have encouraged her to speak out. For her it is a not a pebble thrown into the water but a large stone that made a huge splash since her influence will be everywhere. Women in her culture are encouraged to be submissive and quiet in particular in the area of domestic violence.

Gida, based on her experience is now very active in advocating laws dealing with guns. She is part of a movement to educate against the use of violence. She spent a lot of time on the streets where most of the gun violence takes place, can relate to their norms, and is able
to reach out with the confidence she now has. She aims to get a law degree and with her determination, it is possible.

Finally, all participants reported critically reflecting often as they engaged in activities that they did not have the opportunity before. Many opportunities were created after their participation in the literacy program. These are findings that one would expect to see of individuals who have participated in a literacy program. However, it is not guaranteed that participation leads to a change in perspective. I conclude that these women are empowered and have bigger waves to make yet. Discovery of their identity coupled with the challenges of their transformation has made each woman display an increased spirituality.
Chapter Five: Conclusions, Insights and Recommendations for Future Research

*Within every difficulty lies opportunity*
*Anonymous*

This chapter first provides a review of the purpose, procedure and research questions related to the reported lived transformative experiences of the four participants who participated in this study. Finally, a discussion regarding the limitations of these findings and recommendations for further research end the chapter.

This research study investigated the extent to which participation in a literacy program affected the lives of its participants and how the change was manifested. In addition, it assessed the affective impact as felt in families, relationships, work and the community the participants participate according to the participants. Using a critical ethnographic case study approach, this study sought an understanding of the experiences of its participants as they moved toward finding their voice and identity, and overcoming barriers as they significantly shaped their socio-cultural, economic and historical context. Data was collected using semi-structured open-ended interviews and my reflective journal. A grounded theory approach
using a critical inquiry stance was adopted for the data analysis. The critical inquiry stance was included so that issues of power, privilege and gender would be considered in the final analysis.

The overall focus was to gain an understanding of the transformations in the participants’ own lives, their experience of personal change and its extension to their socio-cultural context. This is important, as their experiences, knowledge and perspectives are the most valuable and valid in gaining insight on how participation in an adult program affects them. More specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What conditions and circumstances foster the transformative learning process?
2. What critical incidents have enhanced transformation?
3. How does participation in a program transform the participants to create change in their lives? How is this change manifested?
4. How have the transformations influenced participants’ relationships at home, school/work and within the larger community?
Summary of Findings of Study

I believe that it is fitting to present the definition of transformative learning that guided this study:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and action. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alerts our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body-awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy (O’Sullivan, Morrel & O’Connor (2002, p. xvii).

The findings revealed a deep structural shift within the last 5-8 years. The findings suggest that participants are now consciously aware of the impact of participating in a literacy program. This was indicated as they confidently relived their experiences and reflected on the personal sacrifice, shift in consciousness that made them a better person. They indicated a vision that was not evident before. Using reflective inquiry, participants were able to look back at the risk taken
and hear themselves on the impact they are making. The findings are closely aligned with O’Sullivan et al.’s definition of transformative learning. Participants have a better understanding of the political and social structures that affect women in particular. Without talking about politics, participants were aware that without the opportunity given to them they would not have broken out of the ‘cocoon stage’ to be able to move in different directions making an impact.

**Substantive Theory**

Metamorphoses (Changing paradigms): Given the opportunity to shift frames of reference, one has the innate capacity to alter one’s life and impact one’s socio-cultural context creating possibilities for self and others.

The data collected has discovered a substantive theory based on changing paradigms which I call *Metamorphoses*. This *Metamorphoses* or Changing paradigms applies to contexts where individuals have been involved in what Mezirow (1991) terms “premise reflection” (p. 107). Premise reflection claims that individuals engage in awareness and questioning of oneself in relation to why they perceive, think, feel or act in a particular way. The new paradigm replaces old assumptions, values, goals, beliefs, expectations, theories, and the like with its own. The themes that emerged from this study support the substantive theory as they indicate a change in perspective.
transformation yet going beyond as the data supports that their socio-cultural context was impacted.

Implications of the Study

According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning theory is particularly suited for adult learning as it enables learners to critically reflect. Likewise, one of the goals of adult education is to create new possibilities for adult learners. The findings of this study support the depth of the new possibilities and potential of transformative learning. The implications of the new suggested way of thinking about the transformative learning process are that:

1. There are elements that must be in place in order to be ready for transformation.

2. Adult educators can enhance perspective shifts through the conscious use of strategies that foster transformation.

3. With this understanding, adult educators may be able to better understand how to foster transformative learning as well as why transformative learning occurs in some situations and not in others.

4. Additionally, there are far reaching implications related to the responsibility of adult educators in providing individual as well as social change.
5. Thus, this study will inform program and curriculum developers as well as policy makers about the potential impact of adult literacy education programs for individual and societal transformation. This is as it relates to individuals of low socio-economic status, little or no education, lack of economic security (Mezirow (2004).

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, I propose further research in the following areas with programmatic implementation of their findings to better facilitate and foster transformative learning experiences and environments:

1. Longitudinal research of participants in this study as they continue to engage in transformative learning experiences.
2. Replication of this study using men as participants.
3. Replication of the study considering ethnicity as a factor in determining participants.
4. Replication of study leading to a grand theory.

These recommendations are important as it relates to the purposes of adult education. According to Beder (1989) the overall purpose of adult education is to facilitate change. One way of doing this is to foster transformative learning. If adult educators are to become engaged in the practice of fostering transformative learning
then more research needs to be conducted in particular for populations that are at the margins and those from under-developed and developing countries. In this way adult education will be fulfilling its overall purpose.

The Last Word

The dissertation process was a transformative experience for me as I delved in the raw data and discovered the deep meaning it held. My own life is different not necessarily because of having written the dissertation but because of the impact of the experiences of these four women. I was under the assumption that there existed a change in their lives and that it could be studied. While I was aware of this, little did I know that the depth of the restructuring reached out so far and deep. The interviewing process was especially transforming for me as it gave me the opportunity of reflecting on my own transformation. While not having faced the lack of resources to the extent of my participants, there was a similarity in that aspect as I grew up on the lower end of the socio-economic scale. I like my participants, was thankful to that greater being for giving me the opportunity to be where I am today and for what the future holds.

As an adult educator, I am more aware today that I have a responsibility to foster transformation. At the same time, I am
conscious that there will not always be a transformative experience, yet I must make every attempt to promote it.

Like a caterpillar, they have metamorphosed into colorful butterflies discovering the endless possibilities their wings can generate. The findings underscore the importance of education for social change and enhancing family life. The wings of the butterfly transcends, fostering transformative learning experiences.

Mezirow (1991) claimed that the transformative learning experience was irreversible. I support this assertion as the four participants began their transformative journey within the last 5-8 years. As the findings indicate, they have not reversed and all have a vision for the future. A suggestion for future research is to investigate the participants in the next five years to see whether the transformation has held. The intensity and profoundness of the findings is a transformational experience.

I want to conclude with this quotation from Dirkx (1997):

If we want to learn about fostering transformation among our learners, the most important way to begin the work is with this particular, common, and sacred life one has been given. It is a simple and humble, yet incredibly profound, place to begin transformation among our learners, the most important way to begin the work is with this
particular, common, and sacred life one has been given. It is a simple and humble, yet incredibly profound, place to begin.
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Appendix 1: Interview Protocol for First Interview
Appendix 1

1. Life history and details of experience
   a. Demographic information: All responses are open-ended (i.e., allowing for elaboration). Survey items are (1) age (2) gender (3) ethnicity (4) present socioeconomic status, and a brief socioeconomic history; (5) geographic place of origin, and a brief history (6) the length of time that the participant was in the adult education program.

2. Do believe you have changed as a result of taking part in this program

3. How are you behaving differently in response to the change you have experienced?

4. Tell me a story about yourself.
Appendix 2: Interview Protocol for Second Interview
Appendix 2

Reflection on the meaning: Past to present

1. From your early experiences to the present, how would you describe the overall process of transformation in your life?

2. In what ways do you believe the program has provided opportunities for this change to occur?

3. Are there deeper meanings behind this process for you?

4. What does the term empowerment mean for you now? In addition, does it hold deeper meanings for you personally?

5. How has your transformation influenced your relationships at home, work, social environment etc? What kind of discourse takes place in these significant relationships?

6. Given what you have reflected on during this interview, where do you see yourself going?

7. As a last question in the interview, I will ask: Can you think of any other questions that you would add to an interview like this one? In addition, how would you answer it?
Appendix 3: Typical Ketchi home and Women’s group project
Appendix 3

Typical Kekchi home

Women participating in income-generating project
Appendix 4: Adult Consent Form
Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people
who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study.

We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called:
The far reaching impact of transformative learning: A critical ethnographic case study

The person who is in charge of this research study is Alina Harrison
Other research personnel who you may be involved with include:

The research will be done at N/A

This research is being paid for by N/A

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which participation in a literacy program affects the lives
of its participants. In addition, it will assess the affective impact as felt in families, relationships, work and the
community the participants participate.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to
1. Take part in two interviews. Questions will deal with the participant transformative learning process and
   its impact.
2. Participate in interviews that are scheduled to take approximately 2 hrs each.
3. Participate for an additional hour for member check of transcribed interview to check for any
discrepancies
4. Agree to a location where interviews will be conducted
5. Participate in interviews that will be tape-recorded for later transcription and data analysis

Alternatives

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

Benefits

You will not directly benefit, however, by participating you will be contributing to the scant research on literacy
and transformative learning in Belize.
Risks or Discomfort
There are no known risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation
I will not pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Confidentiality
We must keep your study records confidential.
- The tapes will be stored for 3 yrs as required by IRB
- They will be used for one year
- They will be kept under lock and key in a cabinet at USF
- The data collected will be used for this research only

However, certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, dissertation committee.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study must look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety. These include:
  - the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff that work for the IRB. Other individuals who work for USF that provide other kinds of oversight may also need to look at your records.
  - People from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are.

Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal
You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study, to please the investigator. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Questions, concerns, or complaints
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Aline Harrison at telephone numbers 824-3329 or 605-1449. Belize country code is 501 if calling from outside Belize. I can also be contacted by email at al_1406@yahoo.com

If you have questions about your rights, general questions, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-9343.

If you experience an adverse event or unanticipated problem call Aline Harrison 824-3329 or 605-1449. I can also be contacted by email at al_1406@yahoo.com

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study
It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.
I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands:

• What the study is about.
• What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used.
• What the potential benefits might be.
• What the known risks might be.

I also certify that he or she does not have any problems that could make it hard to understand what it means to take part in this research. This person speaks the language that was used to explain this research.

This person reads well enough to understand this form or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her.

This person does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give informed consent.

This person is not taking drugs that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give informed consent.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

APPROVED

IRB Number: 176

IRB Adult Minimal Risk ICF Template Version: 2006-12-1

IRB Consent Rev. Date: Page 3 of 3
About The Author

Aline E. Harrison received a Bachelor’s degree in English Education from the University College of Belize, Belize; and a Master’s in Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction with concentrations in Literature and TESOL, from the University of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL. Her Doctor in Philosophy from the University of South Florida (USF) is in Curriculum and Instruction in the Department of Adult, Career and Higher Education. Her focus has been in the area of language teacher education, literacy and technology. Aline has spent 25 years teaching at various levels. More recently, she taught courses at USF, designed to prepare pre-professional (pre-service) teachers to provide linguistically and culturally appropriate instruction and assessment for English Language Learners (ELL’s). She is originally from Belize and was recipient of a fellowship from the Organization in American States (OAS) in 2004.