PERCEPTIONS OF DISPLACED MANUFACTURING WORKERS ABOUT THEIR
TRANSITION TO SUCCESSFUL RE-EMPLOYMENT THROUGH A COMMUNITY
COLLEGE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE: SIX STORIES OF SUCCESS

A Dissertation
by
KIMBERLY WYATT SEPICH

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ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF DISPLACED MANUFACTURING WORKERS ABOUT THEIR
TRANSITION TO SUCCESSFUL RE-EMPLOYMENT THROUGH A COMMUNITY
COLLEGE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE: SIX STORIES OF SUCCESS (August 2011)

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The significant economic shift of the past ten years within the United States has
forced thousands of long-time manufacturing workers to change careers. Within this life
transition process, dislocated workers have chosen to attend community colleges using
the education benefit within the federal Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program.
Using narrative methodology, this qualitative study explored how North Carolina
workers, dislocated from traditional manufacturing jobs, successfully navigated transition
from work to college into a new career field through the use of TAA benefits. Six
individuals who earned an associate's degree from a North Carolina community college
and began work in a new field were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Because
all six participants successfully navigated the transition, determining how and why they
were successful was a focus in data analysis.

Three major themes emerged from data analysis: predisposition for learning,
opportunity, and competing identities. Findings indicate that dislocated workers who
discover and use their natural abilities for learning and view TAA support for college as
an opportunity are likely to successfully complete a degree program regardless of prior
levels of education. Findings also indicate that workers, upon graduating from college

and beginning a new field of work, may, for a period of time, be situated between former and newly developing identities associated with formal education and becoming a professional. These findings, in combination with prior research findings, may have implications for federal worker assistance programs, the agencies that administer them, and community colleges, particularly in the manner in which the complexities of life transition are addressed.

Acknowledgments

In 2006, I began doctoral study because I thought continued education would help me become a more effective community college administrator and leader. I knew that studying the complexities of education at all levels would be challenging, and it was, in the most fulfilling way possible. Through this journey, I have grown intellectually, personally, and professionally with the love and support of friends, family, colleagues, and ASU faculty.

Although these words feel inadequate, I wish to offer my heart-felt gratitude to my dissertation committee: Dr. Jim Killacky and Dr. Kelly Clark/Keefe, co-chairs, and Dr. Patricia Mitchell and Dr. Les Bolt. Dr. Mitchell, thank you very much for keeping me focused on my research question and the economic perspective of this study when my thoughts and writing tended to stray. Dr. Bolt, thank you for taking a genuine interest in further exploring this research in the future. I would love to take you up on the offer to continue research and writing projects around community colleges and dislocated workers. Dr. Killacky, I am so appreciative of the interest you have shown in my academic and professional work and for your kind support. You work with so many students, but you always made it seem as though I was your only one. Dr. Clark/Keefe, your creativity, passion, and encouragement have been so uplifting for me. I will be forever grateful to you for the wonderful advice and reassurances you gave me with great kindness throughout this journey. To everyone - I do hope our paths cross in the future.

I am very fortunate to have colleagues and friends who were my personal champions throughout the program. To my community college colleagues who enthusiastically

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telling me I could do it and for being proud of me. I look forward to the days when I can say yes to every family event!

Finally, this doctoral journey is dedicated to my precious husband and best friend, Bryan Sepich, without whom I could never have earned this degree. Bryan, during the past five years, you did everything you could to make it easier for me to be a student – you took care of the house, cooked, left me alone, hugged me, celebrated milestones with me, and brought me chocolate! But above all, your unconditional love is what helped me achieve this goal, and words cannot describe what that means to me. Thank you for supporting me every day. I am looking forward to our golf and dance lessons!

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Record unemployment, economic crisis, survival, recovery: These terms and phrases have appeared regularly in news broadcasts since the beginning of 2009. The past 11 years have been ones of considerable economic downturn for the United States. Volatility in the automobile, banking, and housing industries, thousands of Americans out of work, and significant reductions in tax revenues collected by states have placed the country in a major recession. The federal government, in an effort to quickly stabilize the crisis, has responded by providing funding to industries and states for use in rebuilding the economy and recovering from a worrisome economic situation.

Within the first decade of the 21st century the United States experienced two recessions, one beginning in 2000 and one which began in 2007 that continues to affect the country's economy into the second decade (The State of North Carolina, 2009). Although the current situation is the result of steady economic decline precipitated by a variety of factors, the economic force of globalization that moved American industry overseas is a common denominator in both periods of distress. During the past eight years, globalization has caused United States manufacturing plants to close, leaving thousands of dislocated workers unemployed and unable to quickly find new work (Employment Security Commission [ESC] of North Carolina, 2009; North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, 2004a).

The movement toward globalization gained momentum in the 1980's and 1990's when low-skilled labor became more accessible in other countries, and the North American Free Trade Act was passed in 1993 (Aheron, 2004; Estes, Schweke, & Lawrence, 2002; Rocha,

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2001). By 2001, technology, increased global trade, and the use of logistic supply chains led to a considerable decline in United States manufacturing jobs (Drayse, 2008; North Carolina Department of Commerce, 2009a). This economic shift led to significant job loss in North Carolina, resulting in a 30.6% decrease in manufacturing employment between 2000-2008, with the state's traditional textile, furniture, and apparel industries experiencing the largest losses (The State of North Carolina, 2009). While such a transition might present some benefits, such as an increased consciousness of global culture, society, and interdependence (Levin, 2001), its effect has been devastating for thousands of North Carolina workers, as illustrated in the following newspaper quotes:

> Lexington Home Brands announced yesterday that it will close its last case-goods production plant in the nation and lay off 360 employees, drastically cutting the company's presence in its namesake home town. The closing of Plant 2, which primarily makes bedroom and occasional pieces, will leave LHB with two facilities in Lexington - an occasional-furniture plant and distribution facility - in addition to an upholstery plant operated by LHB in Hildebran. After the job cuts, LHB's work force will have been reduced to about 580 workers, down from about 4,000 five years ago. (Gunenzel, 2005, ¶ 1-2)

> Thomasville Furniture Industries, Inc. today announced the closing of its plant D manufacturing facility in Thomasville. Approximately 278 people will be impacted by the closure, which is expected to be completed by the end of July of this year. ("TFI to close plant D in Thomasville," 2006, ¶ 1-2)

> KANNAPOLIS, N.C. (AP) — Textile giant Pillowtex, which has been scrambling to find a buyer as a big debt repayment deadline approached, said Wednesday it would shutter its 16 plants and eliminate about 6,450 jobs. ("Pillowtex closing 16 plants, laying off 6,450, 2003," ¶ 1)

Since 2001, North Carolina has lost approximately one third of its manufacturing jobs. The population of dislocated workers who are no longer working in traditional manufacturing jobs must now accept that their services are no longer needed (ESC, 2009). Forced to find new ways to make a living, these dislocated workers and their experiences with

unemployment, higher education, and subsequent re-employment, were the subjects of this research study.

Who are dislocated workers? In a review of empirical literature, Fallick (1996) found the definition of the term "dislocated worker" to vary. However, across the research, authors agreed that to be deemed dislocated, workers should meet the following three criteria: be unemployed due to a structural change in technology or government regulations, have limited ability to return to a similar job, and be strongly connected to the industry sector in which they were employed. Fallick (1996) also noted that a disproportionate number of dislocated workers tended to be from the manufacturing industry. Almost six years later, Estes, Schweke, & Lawrence (2002) followed the same thinking by defining dislocated workers as "individuals who lose their jobs due to a facility shutdown or layoff, and who have previously maintained a stable employment history but face structural barriers to reemployment" (p. 3).

By this definition, most dislocated workers in North Carolina (N.C.) are women from rural areas, age 45 years or older, Caucasian, earning $12,000 - $20,000 annually prior to layoff, and have little or no education beyond high school (North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, 2004b). The Rural Center reports that less than 37% of N.C. rural workers have education at the post-secondary level, a characteristic that becomes highly significant for older workers seeking new careers.

Similarly, in a national survey of dislocated workers from five manufacturing plants that closed due to international trade, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the majority of workers were 40-54 years of age, had a high school education or less, and were employed by their plants between 10 and 20 years (United States Government

Accountability Office [GAO], 2006). These recent findings are consistent with Howland's

and Peterson's (1988) research and Fallick's (1996) findings from the previous two decades

indicating manufacturing workers with little education are most susceptible to dislocation,

and those who have the most difficulty becoming re-employed are the older, less-educated

workers (GAO, 2007). Thus, the profile of dislocated workers has remained consistent since

the 1990's, making past research relevant to and amplified by the current global economic

situation.

Manufacturing workers impacted by layoffs due to economic change may find difficulty

in adapting to a new labor market where there is no longer sufficient need for their workplace

skills (Beneria & Santiago, 2001; GAO, 2006). Some dislocated workers must accept that

their jobs have permanently ended, an emotional task giving them a unique identity among

the larger population of the unemployed (Estes, Schweke, & Lawrence, 2002; Owen & Fitch,

2003). In addition to lack of education and the emotional trauma of permanent job loss,

outdated job searching skills and unfamiliarity with community support systems also serve as

barriers to reemployment (Crews-Klein, Beacham, & Moga, 2002; Estes, Schweke, &

Lawrence, 2002; Howland & Peterson, 1988). North Carolina is now faced with

transitioning from a traditional manufacturing-based economy to one grounded in

knowledge, technology, and service (North Carolina Department of Commerce, 2009a,

2009b), and for the thousands of dislocated manufacturing workers, education and training

are necessary for reemployment in the state's emerging high-skilled, high-tech industries

(Gresser, 2007).

In the 1980's and 1990's, researchers predicted that due to rapid technological change and

a growing global economy, by the year 2000, the job market would become less stable,

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workers would be displaced from career fields, new career fields would become more complex and require postsecondary education, and the number of available workers age 45 and older would increase (Caro & Morris, 1991; Fallick, 1996; Simmons, 1995). According to Caro & Morris (1991), these workers are most "vulnerable to job loss and to prolonged unemployment in their later years…discovering that their work skills are obsolete" (p. 3). Calling for new attention on adult occupational education, the authors cited community colleges as the "country's most important resource for employment training of mature adults" (Caro & Morris, 1991, p. 7), because by mission, the institutions are accessible, serve disadvantaged populations, and emphasize vocational education (Caro & Morris, 1991; Simmons, 1995). Their prediction has come to fruition, and many workers, dislocated from traditional manufacturing jobs, have engaged their Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) benefits to enroll in community college education programs.

The federally funded TAA program provides education and training support to dislocated workers who lose jobs "through no fault of their own" and were "laid off due to changing business practices, an economic downturn, natural disaster, or relocation or closure of the business" (Aheron, 2004, p. 5). A goal of the program is to prepare workers for new jobs in high demand, as determined by state and local trends (Marcal, 2001; Mastel, 2006). Under TAA, qualified individuals can receive up to 156 weeks of education/training, which is about four times the support offered by standard unemployment insurance and other programs. However, funding for education/training is inadequate, and time limits for receiving benefits apply, potentially affecting choices for new career paths (GAO, 2004, 2007; Mastel, 2006).

Although an intention of the TAA program is to help dislocated workers prepare for new careers, unemployment rates remain high, continue to have far-reaching effects on the

economy and may be a contributing factor in budget reductions for state agencies dislocated workers need most, including community colleges. Community colleges, hailed as important economic development vehicles in terms of graduate employment, earnings, and economic prosperity, attract a diverse student population and offer training and education programs designed to meet employment demands in their service areas (Caro & Morris, 1991; Estes, Schweke, & Lawrence, 2002; Marcotte, Bailey, Borkoski, & Kienzl, 2005; Miller & Tuttle, 2007; Osterman, 2005). State budget cuts to community colleges can limit the educational opportunities provided for workers, particularly in terms of offering programs in new, high-tech career fields, as new programs are often expensive to begin and maintain. Additionally, budget cuts could limit the rates at which existing education programs can expand to meet increased demand.

In a 2009 report to the United States Department of Labor, the State of North Carolina states that system-wide student enrollment in North Carolina's community colleges increased by 17,235 full-time equivalent students in the fall 2008 semester, making budget reductions all the more serious. Estes, Schweke, & Lawrence (2002) and Douglass (2008) assert that increasing funding for higher education in the face of economic downturn is imperative to recovery. If re-employment of dislocated workers is to be fully realized and economic prosperity achieved, higher education delivery systems and worker assistance policies must become more compatible and flexible (GAO, 1994; Hopkins, Monaghan, & Hansman, 2009; Rocha, 2001), and funding must be provided to ensure adequate education for those most in need. With many individuals depending upon community colleges for economic and career renewal, it is especially important to understand, from the perspective

of those most affected, how federal worker assistance policies and community colleges serve individuals and their effectiveness in providing needed education for economic recovery.

My experiences as a community college professional working with dislocated workers began in 2002, when furniture and textile manufacturing plants were closing and news of mass lay-offs was frequent. As an Admissions Office representative, I participated in Rapid Response Teams comprised of community college and local agency staff members that visited closing plants to talk with workers about how to begin anew. Workers appeared to listen but responded little to what we said. We were there to encourage, give hope, and help them believe that higher education offers opportunity and promise of a better future.

Some of the manufacturing workers eventually came to community colleges. Many were older adults who had been in their jobs for a significant number of years. Some wanted education in anything that would quickly get them back in the job market, asking, "What do you have that's easy?" or "What is the quickest program you have?" or "I'm only here because I have to be." Others indicated a desire to do something they had always wanted to do and said, "I always wanted to be a teacher, but I couldn't go to school when I was younger." For yet others, job stability was the primary concern, and said "I want something medical because that's where the jobs are. I need something that won't go overseas." It quickly became clear that community colleges needed to engage these new, first-generation, adult college students in significant enrollment and career counseling to help them enter academic programs suited for their needs, skills, and career desires.

Layoffs have continued into 2011, and workers have depended upon community colleges for new career training. Although ten years have passed since the initial layoff boom of 2001, workers recently released from traditional manufacturing jobs due to international

trade face the same trauma, decision dilemmas, and confusion as in earlier years, and the same concerns for what happens to them still exist. The Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program, a federal support program that provides income, health care, and education benefits to workers laid off as a result of globalization, is a primary source of income and education benefits during unemployment and might serve as the foundation for their decision-making. Although TAA provides support to trade-affected dislocated workers during unemployment, evaluations of the program have indicated that support is inadequate, and problems with its administration have created barriers to training and education for workers (GAO 2004, 2007).

Over the years, I have worked with adult students who are caught paradoxically between an opportunity for education toward what they see as better careers and the policy requirements of TAA. My professional encounters with manufacturing workers entering higher education and their stories of navigating the Trade Adjustment Act and community college education inspired me to research the transition from unemployment through higher education to a new career field. North Carolina dislocated manufacturing workers who completed community college degree programs using TAA funding were the participants in this research.

Statement of the Problem

In this current setting of continued recession, increasing community college enrollments, and the threat of budget reduction, understanding the experiences of dislocated workers in navigating the maze of federal assistance programs and higher education becomes increasingly important. Recently, President Obama declared community colleges to be one of the most important vehicles for economic change and proposed a funding plan intended to

increase colleges' capacity to develop new programs to better serve the unemployed (Fischer & Parry, 2009). Given such a large call to action to states for economic development, understanding the experiences of dislocated workers is important so that new funding for community colleges can be effectively used to help unemployed individuals learn new job skills. The federal government provided economic stimulus money to states and community colleges under the condition that spending, and the results of it, be completely transparent to the American public. Thus, states and community colleges have an increased responsibility to make sound program and policy decisions that will truly benefit unemployed workers.

Within this context, colleges need to understand what works for adult displaced workers. Now that a means for increasing capacity is on the horizon, colleges and governments should ask the following questions: For the purposes of increasing access to and participation in higher education, what do we need to understand about the experience of beginning college as a dislocated worker from a manufacturing job affected by international trade? Is TAA providing workers with what they need to obtain an education credential, or does it place more hardship on students and colleges than necessary?

Most of the literature on this issue is comprised of empirical studies attempting to demonstrate the effectiveness of TAA in terms of the numbers of workers who have participated in education/training programs, their re-employment rates, and new salary levels. Very little qualitative research documenting the transition experience of dislocated manufacturing workers exists. Thus, little is known about how dislocated workers have personally experienced such a significant life transition. Without this perspective, we cannot say with certainty that TAA has sufficiently met their needs, made higher education more accessible, that colleges have responded appropriately to their unique needs, or that workers,

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from their own personal perspectives, are benefiting from higher education, however that meaning is individually constructed. Understanding more about how workers use TAA to make decisions and how they experience higher education can influence future research and affect federal, state, and local worker assistance and education policy and practice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand how North Carolina workers, dislocated from traditional manufacturing jobs due to industry moving overseas, have experienced a successful transition from job loss to higher education to a new career field utilizing their Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits. An intention of this study is to contribute to the current knowledge base on TAA by illuminating the voices of workers who have had the very experiences TAA strives to address. Additionally, by seeking to understand how study participants accessed and experienced higher education, another intention of this study is to contribute to the knowledge bases on college access and adult learners.

Research Questions

The primary question of this study is, "How do adult learners, displaced from their jobs in traditional manufacturing due to that manufacturing moving overseas, who successfully completed a community college degree program and transitioned to a new career field, describe their experiences with accessing the community college using their federal Trade Adjustment Assistance education benefits?" Guiding questions, based upon the perceptions of dislocated workers are:

    1. How did the federal Trade Adjustment Assistance program influence decision-making for dislocated workers as they transitioned from work to higher education?

2. In what ways did the community colleges they attended influence workers' adult student experience?

3. What personal and/or professional changes did dislocated workers experience as a result of the student experience?

4. What do dislocated workers' descriptions of their education experiences help us better understand about successfully addressing issues of significant job loss, re-education, and re-employment?

Significance of the Study

Research indicates that the United States lags behind other countries in post-secondary degree attainment and the development of a highly skilled workforce, a finding that raises alarm as economic global competition increases (Douglass, 2008; Reindl, 2007). As the demand for high-skilled, high-tech jobs in the United States increases, and education becomes the primary vehicle for advancing our global competitiveness, leaders need to develop a clearer understanding of how policies may serve to maintain current social and economic structures rather than inducing change as intended (Douglass, 2008; Sumner, 2008). Research on the changing economy and the effects of Trade Adjustment Assistance has been mostly empirical in nature, and the narratives of manufacturing employees most affected by the change are missing. Their lived experiences will lend the human element and voice needed for a thorough understanding of how policy and practice are serving dislocated workers.

This study sought to understand how permanent job loss, the Trade Adjustment Assistance program, and community college policy and operations inform decision-making and mold experiences of dislocated workers seeking higher education. Knowing how these

elements merge to form the student experience for dislocated workers might be helpful to government and college administrators charged with wisely managing resources.

Results of this study provide information about the education experiences of dislocated workers, a perspective missing in the literature at this time. Illuminating the voices of dislocated workers not only adds an element of research that is lacking, but demonstrates how current policies and programs affect participants and the decisions they make after job loss. Subsequently, an increased understanding of the actual experiences of dislocated workers in higher education may then inform designs of new funding initiatives for workers and new educational delivery systems within community colleges. In turn, improved programs will mean more opportunities for dislocated workers to gain stronger footing in a new economy.

Most importantly, information from this study may be useful to government and community colleges in creating academic experiences that meet the specific needs of dislocated workers. Existing literature suggests that removing guesswork in applying for and using Trade Adjustment Assistance funding, providing seamless entry into higher education, offering relevant academic programs and aligning the administration of TAA and other worker assistance programs with community college operations could significantly improve the transition of dislocated workers from unemployment to new careers (Hossfeld, Charleston, & Schulman, 2008; Miller, 2008/2009; Osterman, 2005). In this study, dislocated workers themselves described their actual experiences which both verified and augmented what is empirically known about the topic.

Through telling the stories of transitioning manufacturing workers affected by job loss due to international trade, this study illuminates idea about how to address issues of job loss,

worker transition, and re-employment. Secondly, it adds dimension to the research base of what is known about the impact of dislocation on North Carolina manufacturing workers and community college education and suggest strategies for effectively navigating through economic change. Thirdly, the study examines the importance of education and government policy compatibility for helping students in need. Finally, the study provides implications for policy regarding the TAA program and higher education.

Preview of Methodology

In my professional experience, displaced manufacturing workers often tell stories of their personal backgrounds, plant closing, career interests, and fears about attending college when they first inquire about admission to community college programs. Their stories are rich and emotional, leaving me with questions about the meaning of unexpected participation in higher education and transition to a new career. Thus, narrative research was the primary methodology for this study, as it seeks to determine "the meaning of a particular experience or event for the one who had it, and tell[ing] about it in a story" (Kramp, 2004, p. 108). Additionally, because I was simultaneously engaged in this study as the researcher and a higher education practitioner, my own reflections and subjectivities are presented. According to Trahar (2009), "research and practice are inextricably linked and continuously evolving" (p. 1). As a researcher/practitioner, I was located "in" the field along with study participants rather than being in a position to "enter" the field once research begins (Trahar, 2009). Narrative methodology, as central to this study, is discussed in more detail in the methods chapter of this paper.

Conclusion

This narrative study honored the voices of North Carolina dislocated manufacturing workers for whom governments and community colleges are working to help. Their stories provided information associated with program and policy administration at both the federal government and community college levels that can be used to make changes beneficial to workers.

Study results may be useful to federal, state, and local government and agency officials, community college practitioners, and policy-makers. Information from this study may reveal how funding can be used for designing needed educational opportunities and maximizing the desired outcomes of employment for dislocated workers and renewed economic prosperity.

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the context for this study, a statement of problem, statement of the research purpose, the research questions, and significance of the research. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature about economic change, dislocated workers, the Trade Adjustment Assistance program, community colleges, and adult learners, concluding with an overview of the conceptual framework for the study. Chapter 3 describes the methodological approaches chosen for the study and the rationale for the research design. Methods utilized for participant selection, data collection procedures, interview protocol, and data analysis are also defined. Additionally, Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the role of the researcher, ethical considerations and the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter 4 outlines research methods, introduces study participants as a group and as individuals, and presents a discussion of research findings. Chapter 5 concludes with an analysis of research findings, implications for policy and practice drawn from research, and limitations of the study and opportunities for further research.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, **dislocated workers** are those who qualify for TAA benefits and are defined by the language offered by Estes, Schweke, and Lawrence (2002): "individuals who lose their jobs due to a facility shutdown or layoff, and who have previously maintained a stable employment history but face structural barriers to reemployment" (p. 3). The term **worker assistance programs** refers to any federally funded program designed to help unemployed workers find employment. The **Employment Security Commission** (ESC) refers to the government agency primarily responsible for administering TAA benefits, and finally, the term **transitions** will be defined according to Merriam's (2005) explanation as a life change resulting from an event.

Chapter 2
Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this study is to better understand how North Carolina workers, dislocated from traditional manufacturing jobs due to industry moving overseas, have experienced a successful transition from job loss to higher education to a new career field utilizing their Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits. This literature review focuses on globalization and its impact on North Carolina workers, the Trade Adjustment Assistance program, the history of access to higher education, adult student identity formation, roles, and stress, adult education practice and theory, and the educational experiences of trade affected dislocated workers.

Globalization

Astiz, Wiseman, and Baker (2002) suggest that globalization is an "active, even aggressive process of social transformation" (pp. 66-68) characterized by broad movement toward uniform goals and structures in business and industry that require substantial adaptation to change at local levels. Estes, Schweke, & Lawrence (2002) add economic dislocation to the discussion, defining it as "a process of change within a local or regional economy, which by virtue of its size, speed, or particular character exceeds the capacity of the area economy to absorb the change without a significant decline in or overall negative economic growth" (p. 8). The current paradigm shift in the United States economy involves movement from a production-based to a knowledge-based economy, which carries with it a greater need for workers to obtain higher levels of education to remain competitive in the world's shared market space (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Levin, 2001; McSwain & Davis, 2007).

In its 2004 report to the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, the United States Government

Accountability Office (GAO) acknowledged a steady decline in manufacturing jobs from

2000 to 2002 that resulted in a 12% reduction in manufacturing employment, affecting many

workers who lack transferable skills needed to reenter the workforce quickly. Although

North Carolina manufacturing employment began to decline earlier, a recession began in

North Carolina in mid-2008 that further advanced the rate of decline. More jobs were lost

during that time in the North Carolina manufacturing sector than in other employment sectors

(North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development, 2011). U.S. manufacturing

workers, released from their jobs due to globalization forces, may find difficulty in adapting

to a changing labor market where there is no longer sufficient need for their workplace skills

(Beneria & Santiago, 2001; Estes, Schweke, & Lawrence, 2002; GAO, 2006).

The federally funded Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program, established in 1962

and amended several times since, provides assistance to qualified individuals who lost jobs

"through no fault of their own" and were "laid off due to changing business practices, an

economic downturn, natural disaster, or relocation or closure of the business" (Aheron, 2004,

p. 5). Mastel (2006) offers that "TAA is sometimes referred to as a "Cadillac" of worker

adjustment programs because it generally provides considerably more assistance for a longer

period of time" (p. 47). Many manufacturing plants in North Carolina closed as a result of

increased international trade and the relocation of product production to other countries.

Workers affected by this shift who qualify for TAA benefits use them to seek education in

preparation for re-employment. The requirements of using TAA education benefits can

influence how workers choose particular education and training programs and their

experiences with transitioning into new careers.

Trade Adjustment Assistance

While re-employment and health care services are available through TAA, its training

support benefits for displaced workers were the focus of this review. Although the primary

goal of the TAA program is to support worker transition and facilitate quick re-entry into the

workforce, a number of problems with implementation were identified through the 2004

GAO study. Because training is a primary benefit, and the need for higher education is

becoming increasingly important for the new knowledge-based economy, the discussion in

this study focused on the problems workers and agencies experience with receiving and

administering the training benefit.

First, workers are required to enroll in training by a set deadline according to when they

are approved for benefits. While the deadline, a 2002 amendment to TAA, encouraged

workers to engage in training earlier, it also made assessment of worker needs more difficult

for local agencies overwhelmed by increased workloads. Second, a quick approaching

deadline does not allow sufficient time for workers to process the trauma of job loss and

reach acceptance of the need for re-training. As a result, workers may hastily enroll in

programs unsuitable for their needs. Third, because demand for TAA benefits increased in

2002, and funding provided for training was considerably less than funding provided for the

income support benefit, states exhausted their funds and employed strategies such as using

funds from other resources to pay for training, enrolling workers in shorter-term programs,

and discontinuing placement of workers in training altogether. This presented a

contradictory set of concerns for some workers and an untenable situation for others, because

in order to receive extended income benefits, they were required to be enrolled in training.

Fourth, the TAA training benefit is not an entitlement as commonly perceived by individuals

and administrators. In fact, workers must meet several criteria to qualify for training, one of which is that appropriate work is unavailable. Once approved for training, workers had to enroll full time. Lastly, workers often missed the training enrollment deadline and thus lost their eligibility for income support (GAO, 2004).

From 2002 to 2007, workers could receive up to 104 weeks of training plus an additional 26 weeks if remedial training was needed under TAA (Decker & Corson, 1995; GAO 2004, 2006; Marcal, 2001; Mastel, 2006). This equated to roughly three traditional semesters in North Carolina state supported community colleges. A 2006 GAO study found that lack of basic skills, particularly in science and math, and the need for General Education Diploma (GED) or English as a second language instruction were barriers that either limited or prevented training options for some workers. Research on displaced workers in North Carolina found that for those attending basic skills and GED programs or who needed developmental coursework, the time provided for training by TAA was inadequate. Training beyond the allotted 130 weeks was needed for workers beginning education at that level (Aheron, 2004; Estes, Schweke, & Lawrence, 2002; McAtee & Benshoff, 2006). Another barrier was program start dates. Community colleges, for example, started some programs only once per year which often conflicted with the TAA training enrollment deadline and resulted in workers deciding to attend a proprietary school with more enrollment options or choosing another program to avoid losing income support benefits (Aheron, 2004; GAO, 2006). Additionally, training funds and unemployment benefits, including transportation support allocated by states, ultimately influenced workers' education decisions, as they depended upon the benefits and made choices based on that dependency rather than on their preferences for learning (Aheron, 2004; GAO, 2006).

The 2006 GAO study also examined the impact TAA had on developing a new workforce. One finding was that a minority of workers enrolled in training, often because they were re-employed by the time of the study, and those who were age 55 and older tended to choose retirement instead of training. Of those who did take advantage of training, most enrolled in short-term vocational programs lasting one year or less (Beneria & Santiago, 2001; GAO, 2006). Popular programs were health care, office skills, construction or related trades, and transportation. Proprietary (for-profit) schools were the most popular choices for training in metropolitan areas, while community colleges and technical schools were more popular in other areas (Beneria & Santiago, 2001; GAO 2006).

In a 2004 review of the TAA program, Baicker and Rehavi applauded the reformation that had occurred over the years to address problems but called for more structural flexibility, stating that the "ideal program would give workers more control over the resources available…" which would in turn "…both reduce administrative costs and improve worker outcomes…" (p. 252). Under such a structure, workers could choose benefit combinations that best meet their needs (Baicker & Rehavi, 2004). Four years later, Douglass (2008) agreed, stating that restricting access to higher education during times of peak unemployment is unwise.

In a paper written for the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Aheron (2004) posited that the objective to facilitate a quick return to work is based "in a history where jobs were more readily available and education and job skills were less important than having people to do the work" (p. 24). Now that education is crucial for developing a new economy, and training is viewed as a step toward developing a "resilient workforce," education providers need to examine policies and access issues. Designing education

programs to meet today's economic needs to include flexible entry points, training schedules

that resemble a typical workday, and auxiliary support services such as child care and

transportation could increase access to higher education for dislocated workers (Aheron,

2004). Mastel (2006) agreed, stating that TAA program regulations are not applicable in

today's economic change and that funding for training is inadequate. He called for

expansion of the TAA program as an investment in the U.S. economy in order to maintain

political support for worker adjustment programs in general.

With continued mass layoffs and recession persisting well into the first decade of the 21st

century, the current federal government has taken steps to expand TAA benefits as research

has suggested. In the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the federal

government authorized the TAA program through December 2010, providing expanded

program benefits. Specific updates include additional funding for training in 2009-2010,

expansion of allowable training options, including prerequisite, pre-layoff, and part-time

training, an extension of the amount of time dislocated workers have to enroll in training and

to complete training (now 156 weeks to complete) and additional funding allocated to states

to develop case management workflows in order to better meet the demand for services

(American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 2009).

Effectiveness of TAA for Dislocated Workers in Higher Education

The 2006 GAO study found that little is known about outcomes of the TAA program, as

performance data has not been consistently gathered nor has been accurately reported across

states. Empirical research on the economic effectiveness of the TAA program has focused

primarily on rates of reemployment and reemployment wages of workers who received

benefits and of those who did not (Benedict & VanderHart, 1997; Decker & Corson, 1995;

Marcal, 2001; Osterman, 2005). Researchers found that generally, dislocated workers earn

10% - 25% less after reemployment (Benedict & VanderHart, 1997; Estes, Schweke, &

Lawrence, 2002; Gresser, 2007; North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center,

2004a; Owen & Fitch, 2003). Reemployment wages for those who participate in training

may be higher than for those who do not, but some researchers have found the primary

significance of education and training to be in higher rates of reemployment (Benedict &

VanderHart, 1997; Decker & Corson, 1995; Marcal, 2001). In a longitudinal study of the

economic returns of a community college education, Marcotte, Bailey, Borkowski, and

Kienzl (2005) found that those earning an associate's degree from a community college

earned higher salaries and wages than their peers with no education beyond high school.

History of Access to Higher Education

In addition to some barriers presented by the Trade Adjustment Assistance program, other

policies and practices render higher education inaccessible for displaced workers and the

working poor. In a broad overview of the effects of institutional and public policy on college

access, Orfield (1990) presents several questions central to the study of educational

opportunity, pointing out that educational policy is often driven by political ideology rather

than economic and student needs. His questions involve who is getting into college and

finishing, who makes access decisions and the fairness of those processes, how influential

family income is to determining access, and what difference college degrees make in future

life. To gain a thorough understanding of how access to college has changed through the

years, a brief historical perspective of recent higher education policy is in order.

The introduction of the GI Bill after World War II set the stage for reducing projected

unemployment by making college accessible to veterans, and college enrollment surged in

the 1950's (Douglass, 2008; Orfield, 1990). Skyrocketing enrollments created questions about the value and quality of mass education, and in response, colleges began to limit enrollment (Orfield, 1990). In the 1960's, emphasis was placed on equality in higher education, and the role of the federal government was to provide access to historically excluded groups in an effort to produce social change (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Mortenson, 2000; Orfield, 1990). The Higher Education Act of 1965 was one mechanism for creating access, as it provided college financial aid to low-income students and fixated the federal work-study program in higher education policy (Orfield, 1990). Additionally Talent Search and Upward Bound programs were created to transition low-income high school students into college (Orfield, 1990).

Equality in access continued to be the federal focus through the 1970's. During this decade, the federal Pell Grant was established, civil rights court battles sought to increase access for minority students, and federal spending on higher education continued to increase (Orfield, 1990).

Change came with the Reagan administration in the 1980's. Federal and state spending on higher education was drastically reduced, focus on equal access lost momentum, and college became less accessible for minorities and the working class at a time when its economic value was increasing, as knowledge and service-based jobs began to replace unionized industrial jobs (Mortenson, 2000; Orfield, 1990). Federal student aid programs were funded, but less aid was awarded to low-income students than in previous years (Orfield, 1990). At the time, the U.S. Department of Labor predicted that the 1990's would see a shortage of college-trained workers in the labor market (Orfield, 1990).

The focus of government policy shifted toward economic goals in the 1990's, particularly for community colleges, as globalization placed them at the forefront of work-based training initiatives for a newly developing economy, reducing but not altogether replacing prior focus on accessibility and social development (Levin, 2001; Mortenson, 2000). This shift is exemplified in the language of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act through its 1995 amendment, where global competitiveness and the development of academic, occupational, and technology skills for all populations is emphasized (Levin, 2001). Community colleges were required to change practices in order to better align with workforce training goals and were pushed to improve efficiency, respond to business and industry, and graduate more workforce-ready students (Levin, 2001). The Job Training Partnership Act of 1992 and the Workforce and Career Development Act of 1996 were designed to establish a means for those dealing with significant employment barriers to receive training and become employed so as to improve the productivity and competitiveness of the United States (Levin, 2001).

Currently, the Obama administration is emphasizing the role of community colleges in higher education and has established the Community College and Career Training Grant Program, which awards grants up to $1 million to community colleges for the development of training programs for eligible workers (The Workforce Alliance, 2009). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 also promotes greater access to higher education by expanding TAA training benefits, increasing Pell Grant awards, allocating funds for adult employment programs, and providing competitive grants for worker training and placement into emerging industries (The Workforce Alliance, 2009).

Role of Government in Higher Education

Although the Obama administration is implementing some of the very reforms called for by the research, some researchers question the role government should play in educating a workforce. In studying the role of government and public policy in community college education within two Canadian provinces and three U.S. states, Levin (2001) found that in all cases, "government was interventionary, endeavoring to influence community colleges directly in programs, management, and resources, and indirectly in goals and purposes" (p. 250). Requiring institutions to do more with less state funding resulted in heightened economic efficiency and a loss of focus on access and equity, components of the original mission of community college. As a result, college became less affordable and accessible, a particularly alarming outcome in a time when there is a shortage of highly educated workers in the labor market (Levin, 2001; Mortenson, 2000). Thus, some authors assert that higher education can be viewed as a vehicle for government policy and an extension of government that preserves social stratification (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Mortenson, 2000) rather than as an avenue for the personal development of students (Leigh & Gill, 1997; Levin, 2001; Sumner, 2008). Sumner (2008) suggests that globalization has transformed the role of adult education into a consumer-oriented service industry functioning to "train people to adapt to the current economic order" (p. 35) with emphasis on quantifiable outcomes such as higher enrollments and graduate earnings rather than promoting "individual and social transformation" (p. 34). As Levin (2001) asserts, "the business approach to education has become the norm" (p. 255). Interestingly, in a pilot study of this topic I conducted in 2007, one study participant, a trade-affected dislocated worker returning to higher education,

observed and felt the business emphasis, pointing out that the college just wanted to push students through a program in order to collect more money.

Adult Education

Although the business approach to administering higher education may be a strengthening model within which institutions are increasingly required to live and operate, adult learning theory continues to be an important consideration in the design and administration of degree programs. Adult education is a widely studied topic, the full scope of which is too broad to be addressed within the context of this research project. For the purposes of this study, a more focused review of research regarding (1) adult student transition into higher education, (2) the meaning of higher education to adult students, (3) questions of identity change, and (4) the implications of these concepts for institutions was appropriate and applicable to the research questions. The literature is rich with research indicating that individual learner needs, identity development, and social transformation should be well nurtured within the higher education environment. Knowing why adults attend college, how they choose programs, and the barriers facing them helps institutions plan and deliver quality student experiences (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). When institutions make navigating the environment easy, engage in flexible practices, demonstrate care and respect for adult students, acknowledge the life experiences adults bring, and offer a variety of support systems, adults are more likely to develop student identities through integration into the higher education environment. Adults are also more likely to feel that their learning matters, and thus become more likely to enroll and persist in programs of study (Bamber & Tett, 2000; Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Kasworm 2003b, 2005, 2008; MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994; Merriam, 2005; Quinlan & O'Brodovich, 1996; Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

Quinlan and O'Brodovich (1996) assert that for some adult students, "initially, an education program is an encounter with a new experience in an unfamiliar setting…" (p. 178). This notion is directly related to Merriam's (2005) discussion on transitions, in which she defines transition as a life change resulting from an event. Citing research completed by Brickell in 1980, Merriam (2005) illustrates that even years ago, most adult learners indicated returning to higher education as a result of transition. Similarly, Sargent and Scholossberg (1988) suggest that understanding transition, rather than understanding life events related to chronological age, is the key to understanding adult behavior, asserting that most transitions are not related to age. Adults in transition may feel inadequate and incompetent, often questioning their identity and relationships while orienting themselves to a new set of norms and beliefs. The authors emphasize the importance of mattering and belonging to adults in transition, saying that it is often the little things others do to offer support that eases transition and fosters a sense of confidence. Likewise, Kasworm (2008) suggests that adults entering higher education as a result of a crisis may be experiencing emotional chaos, within which they are questioning identity and negotiating their multiple worlds, roles, and demands. At the point of entry into academia, adults in transition often feel self-conscious about their abilities, their place in college, and may experience high levels of anxiety. However, after entry, anxiety begins to fade, and adult students begin to develop a more solid sense of place and self (Kasworm, 2008; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Consistently, authors emphasize that support from institutions is critical for adult student success, citing that faculty respect for adult students is key, as college does not constitute a physical separation from past worlds as it might for traditional students (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Kasworm, 2008; MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Sorey, 2008).

O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) studied the transition of adult students into higher education to determine how adults participating in a pre-college orientation course described their experiences in the course and their overall integration into the college environment. Utilizing qualitative methodology involving semi-structured interviews with participants, the researchers found that early in the course, participants had differing senses of belonging to higher education. While some participants felt a solid sense of place from the beginning, many did not, indicating that they had always viewed college as a place only for smart people, with one participant saying "'they are going to catch on that I don't know anything'" (O'Donnell & Tobbel, 2007, p. 323). Once initial anxiety faded and students became more comfortable in the classroom, a student self-image developed, with many participants labeling themselves as students rather than people taking a class. Eventually, the student label transformed into an identity associated with achievement, a finding consistent with earlier research conducted by Kasworm (2003b, 2005). The researchers concluded that academic practices are important to transitioning adult students into the higher education environment, and that sense of belonging mediated student identity change.

As previously mentioned, adults in transition often question their identity (Kasworm, 2003b, 2005, 2008; Merriam, 2005; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Institutions desiring to help dislocated workers enter and complete an education program and find subsequent employment should understand what is important to adult learning and identity development in the context of higher education and design practices that satisfy adult student needs. Using qualitative case study methodology, Bamber and Tett (2000) studied a group of academically underprepared adult students participating in a accelerated college degree program designed to grant access to traditionally underserved

adult populations. For these students, entry into higher education was characterized by uncertainty and challenge to assumptions. Research outcomes indicated that students negotiated four challenges/crises/stages in the process of moving through the degree program: (1) Entitlement, where students wrestled with previous feelings that they did not belong in college. Successful negotiation of this stage meant that students moved from a position of not belonging to belonging; (2) Disposition, where students find academia to be irrelevant to real-world life. Successful negotiation of this stage is signified by an acceptance of the academic culture; (3) Theory and Practice, where students learn to distinguish between theory and practice. Initially, students view theory as a set of instructions to be followed only to learn that theory is meant to inform practice. Successful resolution of this stage occurs when students begin to think critically about their work and apply theory to what they do vocationally; and (4) Becoming Professional, where students receive their credential. In this stage, students understand the difference between merely having a credential, or "ticket" and being professional. Being professional becomes an identity, a transition that proved difficult for students with little previous association with professionalism. From the study, Bamber and Tett (2000), like other researchers, concluded that supporting adult students, particularly those traditionally underserved by higher education, is crucial to their success and learning. The authors assert that institutional support means taking into account the context in which students are learning and integrating the learners' life experiences into the academic setting. Further, while acknowledging that students must adapt to the collegiate environment, the authors believe that students and institutions should work collaboratively to achieve change and development. Specific actions institutions can take to promote such a shared understanding are valuing the personal and social differences of students and utilizing

different forms of knowledge to draw connections across disciplines and real-life experiences.

Similar findings resulted from a case study conducted by Kasworm (2003a) of 90 adult students over the age of 30 from three types of institutions. In this study, the researcher found that participants, living in multiple worlds and questioning sense of self, struggled with reconciling the relationship between academic knowledge construction and their adult roles outside of academia. Through the qualitative interview process, student participants described two types of knowledge – academic or "book" knowledge, which involved learning for class, and real-world knowledge, which drew on their prior experiences and involved learning for use in the real world. The classroom was their focal point for defining their college experience and making meaning of new knowledge, and students were found to progress through five belief structures or knowledge voices: (1) the Entry voice, where becoming a successful college student is the focus. In this voice, faculty are seen as all-knowing and are there to show students what to do; (2) the Outside Voice, where knowledge is grounded in students' personal, work, and family lives and academic knowledge is valuable as long as it relates to individual lives. In this voice, "book learning" is different from practical learning, and students are suspicious of faculty and their authority; (3) the Cynical Voice, where college is a "ticket" to something better and academic learning is a game one must play in order to qualify for certain types of work. In this voice, students passively resist learning and view the classroom as a place for incompetent faculty who are unaware of life in the real world; (4) the Straddling Voice, where learning is connected to both the real-life and academic worlds, and both arenas are equally valued. In this voice, academia informs real-life and vice versa, and faculty are viewed as catalysts for bridging

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knowledge; and (5) the Inclusion Voice, where students fully integrate academic thought across their life roles. In this voice, classroom instruction is one of many learning resources, and faculty are seen as co-learners. Regardless of the learning voice within which they were grounded, all participants appreciated faculty who valued and honored their life experiences in the classroom.

In a later study of how 30 adult community college transfer students at least 30 years of age perceived their involvement in the college environment, Kasworm (2005) found there to be no single adult student identity that applies generally to adult learners. Research questions focused upon how adults describe their learning in relationship to their broader life and how they perceive their involvement in the collegiate environment. Interviews with participants explored the topics of college choice, beliefs of place within the classroom, the meaning of classrooms, their relationships with faculty, younger students, and their adult learner peers, and their sense of engagement in the classroom, within the college, and within their larger life roles. Kasworm (2005) found that one third of the participants were anxious about going to college, a place they perceived to be for younger people, and revealed conflicting feelings regarding the need for college and actually being there. Additionally, participants believed that the decision to attend college is a serious life commitment, that their life experience offered value to the classroom setting, and judged themselves against the notion of an "ideal student," a concept they defined as a person who is seriously committed to education by giving it great time and energy. The author suggests that institutions can better serve adult students by designing programs and processes around the concept of the "ideal student." Both Kasworm studies indicate that for adult students, the academic process is tumultuous in a variety of ways, and higher education institutions must design environments, from

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admission to graduation, that value the life experience and multiple roles adults bring with them.

Adult Student Persistence and Retention

Empirical research on adult student persistence also provides insight into understanding the factors associated with adult student retention. Sixteen years ago, Simmons (1995) empirically studied the variables influencing persistence and retention of dislocated workers enrolled in a community college. Student data consisting of enrollment patterns and graduation rates were collected from the home state's community college governing board. Study results indicated that progress (as measured by credits completed versus credits attempted) was the strongest predictor of persistence, while income potential of the pursued occupation was second. Surprisingly, previous education correlated negatively with persistence, contradicting prior research by indicating that dislocated workers with lower academic skills were more likely to persist because education led to re-employment. The author suggested that usefulness of and commitment to education were strong forces in the retention of dislocated workers, iterating that institutions must offer support through early assessment, career counseling, and flexible programming to help students complete degrees.

Research on adult student persistence conducted since then demonstrates that these same factors continue to influence the retention of adult students. Studying the predictors of persistence among traditional-aged and non-traditional adult students attending a public community college, Sorey and Duggan (2008) collected demographic, grade point average, and student enrollment characteristic data at two points within an academic year. Additionally, the researchers invited students to participate in the study by completing surveys widely used in retention research. Consistent with aforementioned qualitative

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studies (Kasworm, 2005; Simmons, 1995), results indicated that generally, students who perceived high levels of encouragement and academic integration were more likely to complete a degree program than those perceiving lower levels of encouragement. Additionally, data revealed that across both groups, students who perceived their education as useful to future employment were also more likely to persist in a degree program. For adult students, the two strongest variables in predicting persistence were social integration and academic integration. Adult students who were satisfied with friendships, relationships, and interactions with faculty outside of the classroom were more likely to persist; likewise, those who believed in the utility of their degree programs were more likely to persist. Encouragement and support also influenced persistence for adult students, but to a lesser extent than found in previous qualitative studies. Consistent with their qualitative counterparts, Sorey and Duggan (2008) suggest that the role of faculty in challenging and supporting adult students may significantly influence students' decisions to continue with or abandon higher education. Echoing other researchers, the authors recommend that institutions offer supportive practices and clear polices if they wish to retain adult students.

Life Roles and Stress

As the literature indicates, becoming a college student is another role adults assume when entering higher education, competing with all other roles for resources such as time, energy, and money. Assuming an additional role is stressful, and additional stress impacts the collegiate experience for adult students. Giancola, Grawitch, and Borchert (2009) conducted empirical research testing a stress model designed to correlate positive and negative coping mediators with different inter-role conflict among work, school, and life. Results indicated that work stressors were more significant for participants, as it was the only variable that

directly predicted general well-being and was the greatest source of stress over which students had the least control. However, the highest level of inter-role conflict existed between school and family. This research supports the notion that institutions must acknowledge the multiple roles and lives adult students bring to academia, as academic outcomes may be more dependent upon how students interpret their experiences than previously thought. Additionally, the authors state that institutions must understand the unique stressors adult students carry in order to positively influence persistence and retention, suggesting that peer and faculty relationships are important in helping adult students manage stress. Thus, institutions have a responsibility to help adults transition into the academic environment by offering separate support programs designed to meet the unique needs of adult learners.

One such support system is counseling. In examining the role of counseling services in helping adult students persist through a degree program, MacKinnnon-Slaney (1994) offers a model encompassing the many factors adult students face when entering higher education. Citing that higher education is often inflexible and difficult to navigate, "providing little leeway for adult learners who are juggling the complexity of multiple commitments" (p. 269), the author suggests that persistence may be encouraged by offering adult students the survival skills needed to successfully meet the challenges of college. Because adults bring a multitude of experiences, beliefs, and commitments with them to the academic environment, MacKinnon-Slaney (1994) proposes a counseling model, derived from literature on adult learning that involves three major arenas of challenge for adult students: (1) personal issues, (2) learning issues, and (3), environment issues. Within each component are subsets of "issues of concern" (p. 269) for adult learners that are continually negotiated during a

student's time in academia. Overall, the model allows college counselors to support adult students through the myriad of challenges they face rather than supporting just one aspect of the collegiate experience, thus increasing the likelihood of student persistence and degree completion.

In summary, the research questions explored in this study developed primarily from my experience as a community college administrator working directly with workers displaced from traditional manufacturing jobs due to international trade. This review of literature about globalization, the Trade Adjustment Assistance program, higher education, and adult students served to inform my thinking about the questions and to confirm that although prior research on the topics is plentiful, a need for further study remains. Particularly, the review revealed that we need to understand more about the effectiveness of TAA and that adult learner and transition theories appear to be relevant and applicable to trade-affected dislocated workers entering higher education. A qualitative study combining the elements of trade-affected job dislocation, TAA, college access, and the adult student experience might fill a gap in the knowledge base regarding how dislocated workers make meaning of their community college education experiences. Gaining a deeper understanding of their lived experiences could prove useful to educators and policy makers who work to ease life transitions for trade-affected dislocated workers.

Conceptual Framework

This study seeks to better understand how North Carolina workers, dislocated from traditional manufacturing jobs due to industry moving overseas, have experienced a successful transition from job loss to higher education to a new career field utilizing their Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits. The federal government is responding to the current

economic crisis with urgency, requiring states and higher education entities to take swift and responsible action to educate the unemployed for new careers. Going forward in this environment, it is imperative to know how workers have used the Trade Adjustment Assistance program in higher education, what they encountered in navigating community colleges, and how these experiences influenced their transition to a new career field. Three conceptual frameworks intertwined to guide the research design and interpretation of data in this study: social constructivism, Merriam's (2005) notion of transitions, and Kasworm's (2008) notion of adult student identity formation.

Constructivism is an epistemological framework holding that there is no objective reality existing outside individuals (Lee & Greene, 1999). The process of understanding "is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship" (Gergen, 1985, p. 267), and humans actively create reality (Lee & Green, 1999).   Social constructivism holds that individuals construct reality from their social experiences with the world (Creswell, 2003; Gergen, 1985; Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Lee & Greene, 1999). Cultural, social, and historical contexts are the means by which individuals construct reality, and because knowledge is socially constructed, it can change over time and across cultures (Creswell, 2003; Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Lee & Greene, 1999). Researchers working within this framework focus their work on the complexity of participant views, the specific social and cultural contexts within which they live, and tend to address the processes of lived experience (Creswell, 1993). Additionally, researchers understand that their own experiences serve to shape research and position themselves within their studies as a means of data interpretation.

Merriam's (2005) concept of adult life transitions, defined as a change resulting from an event, and Kasworm's (2008) concept of adult student identity formation blend to represent the second and third frameworks that informed this study. Merriam (2005) found that most adults enter higher education as a result of a life transition. Kasworm (2008) found that adults entering higher education as a result of a crisis question identity as they negotiate the transition into academia. These conceptual frameworks were appropriate for this study, as workers forced into higher education as a result of economic dislocation are experiencing unanticipated life transitions and may question their identity while engaged in educational preparation for a new career.

Chapter 3
Methodology

Introduction and Overview of Research Design

This study sought to better understand how North Carolina workers, dislocated from traditional manufacturing jobs due to industry moving overseas, have experienced the transition from job loss to higher education to a new career field utilizing their Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits. Local, state, and federal governments are working to overcome the current economic crisis. Community colleges are struggling to educate thousands of anxious unemployed workers with limited resources. The Trade Adjustment Assistance program, supporting qualified dislocated workers with education/training and other benefits, has become over-burdened, and its effectiveness cannot be clearly understood from research. In this context, now is the time to more fully understand what it means to be a trade-affected dislocated worker and the experience of navigating the TAA program, designed to help with education and reemployment. Most research on dislocated workers and TAA has been quantitative in nature; thus, engaging a qualitative design for this study served to highlight the lived experiences of trade-affected dislocated workers entering higher education through the Trade Adjustment Assistance program, addressing a gap in the knowledge base. Research participants had stories to tell about their experiences with job loss, higher education, and career transition. Therefore, narrative was the primary qualitative methodology used in this study. Additionally, because I was at once the researcher and a community college administrator situated in the same social and political context as participants, my own subjectivity and reflections were incorporated, as my perspective cannot be separated from those of participants.

Within a social constructivist epistemological framework, narrative research methods were used to tell the story of how adult learners, displaced from their jobs in traditional manufacturing due to that manufacturing going overseas, who successfully completed a community college degree program and transitioned to a new career field, describe their experiences with accessing the community college using their federal Trade Adjustment Assistance education benefits. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe, "stories function as arguments in which we learn something essentially human by understanding an actual life or community as lived" (p. 8). Narrative research data was gathered through non-intrusive interviews with six participants who were laid off from traditional North Carolina manufacturing jobs due to international trade, successfully completed a community college degree program utilizing TAA benefits, and were reemployed in a new career field. Participants for the study were selected through purposive sampling, and open-ended interview questions focused on their experiences with job dislocation, entering college, the TAA program, views of work and education held prior to becoming an adult student, their community college experience, and the process of entering a new career field. Data was also generated through my own journaling prior to, during, and after participant interviews and through documenting my professional experiences with the topic. My own narratives about being a community college administrator were included within the research report. Each of these design elements is described in more detail below.

Research Questions

The primary question of this study was, "How do adult learners, displaced from their jobs in traditional manufacturing due to that manufacturing moving overseas, who successfully completed a community college degree program and transitioned to a new career field,

describe their experiences with accessing the community college using their federal Trade Adjustment Assistance education benefits?" Guiding questions, based upon the perceptions of dislocated workers were:

1. How did the federal Trade Adjustment Assistance program influence decision-making for dislocated workers as they transitioned from work to higher education?

2. In what ways did the community colleges they attended influence workers' adult student experience?

3. What personal and/or professional changes did dislocated workers experience as a result of the student experience?

4. What do dislocated workers' descriptions of their education experiences help us better understand about successfully addressing issues of significant job loss, re-education, and re-employment?

Research Design and Rationale

Narrative Methodology. Because of my interest in understanding how trade-affected dislocated workers used their TAA benefits to make meaning of their job loss, higher education, and reemployment experiences within the social context of economic crisis and renewed national interest in community college education from those most directly affected, narrative inquiry was the primary research methodology. Narrative methodology has gained popularity in social science research in recent years, particularly in the field of education (Collins, 1985; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Moen, 2006; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). In addition to its increasing presence in educational research, I had three primary reasons for choosing narrative inquiry as the primary

methodology for this study. First, narrative inquiry seeks to understand how humans construct meaning from experience (Bell, 2002; Conle, 2001; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Moen, 2006; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). Emerging from a realization within research communities that "human voices have been systematically excluded from the kinds of traditional research texts" (Barone, 2007, p. 463), narrative methodology aligned well with my goals as a researcher: to give attention to how trade-affected dislocated workers have successfully transitioned within the context of economic change and to explore issues about TAA and community college policies and practices that held particular importance in the workers' experiences with job loss and academia (Barone, 2007; Moen, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2007).

Second, the review of the literature revealed that studies of dislocated workers and policy analyses of the TAA program have primarily been conducted through quantitative means (Benedict & VanderHart, 1997; Decker & Corson, 1995; GAO, 2004, 2006; Ghilani, 2008; Kletzer & Fairlie, 2003; Marcal, 2001; Mastel, 2006). The effectiveness of the TAA program has been questioned through quantitative means, but the voices of those most affected by globalization, job loss, and a subsequent entry into higher education were noticeably missing from the research base. This narrative study provides policy makers and educators with different information about how resources can be used to facilitate successful worker transition. In addition to giving voice to trade-affected dislocated workers, another intention of this study was to explore worker assistance and education policy through the narratives of those who have been directly impacted by economic change and a resulting life transition.

The third rationale for choosing narrative inquiry stems from Moen's (2006) belief that "narratives are not abstract, remote, or inaccessible. Instead, they can rather be perceived as familiar, informative, and relevant for those who hear about or read them" (p. 9). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) also suggest that narrative research is invitational, allowing others to see and experience what researchers have experienced. This project invited readers into the worlds of trade-affected dislocated workers (Reissman, 2008) who have experienced tremendous life transitions and had stories to tell as a result. Because research participants were students at community colleges and clients of the TAA program, their stories can intimately inform work for future dislocated workers. Practitioners need to understand these experiences in order to really help dislocated workers, as "stories reveal truths about human experience" (Reissman, 2008, p. 10). As Moen (2006) points out, in troubled times, the voices of politicians and various others are well heard, while the voices of those for whom we are politicing and educating often are not.

Participant and Site Selection. Upon receiving approval from the Appalachian State University Institutional Review Board, this study was conducted primarily in the Piedmont Triad area of North Carolina whose economy, until the first years of the 21st century, was heavily dependent upon traditional manufacturing. Given my interest in exploring depth of meaning rather than breadth of diverse experiences, I choose six participants through purposive sampling. Particularly, I used network and homogenous sampling (Glesne, 2006) to select adult learners, over the age of 30 and displaced from traditional manufacturing jobs in North Carolina due to industry moving overseas, who qualified for and used Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits to successfully complete a community college degree program and subsequently begin a new career.

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The population of the Piedmont Triad area of North Carolina is 1.6 million with a 1.6%

annual rate of growth. Individuals aged 40-49 comprise a small majority of the population

(14.6%), while those aged 50-59 make up 13.8%, and those aged 30-39 make up 13.1% of

the total area residents. The largest industry segment in the area is the service industry,

which includes fields such as information, professional and technical services, educational

services, health care and social assistance, and accounted for 39% of the workforce in 2009.

Manufacturing is the next largest industry in the area, accounting for 15% of the workforce,

and at 14%, government is the third largest industry (North Carolina's Piedmont Triad

Partnership n.d.). During 2009, the region's unemployment rate fluctuated between 9.4%

and 11.4% (North Carolina Employment Security Commission n.d.). Nine community

colleges are located in the region, including 28 campuses and centers (North Carolina's

Piedmont Triad Partnership n.d.).

In order to obtain a general perspective on issues of access and practice in North

Carolina's community college system, participants were selected from two colleges.

Originally, one participant was to be selected from each of five community colleges located

in urban areas suffering from significant job loss resulting from forces of globalization.

However, this plan for participant selection proved to be difficult, as colleges struggled with

identifying graduates who met all research criteria. Two participants were identified and

selected through this original plan. In an effort to follow the plan, other means for selecting

participants were explored, such as contacting local workforce development organizations

and local branches of the Employment Security Commission. These institutions also had

difficulty identifying individuals who had completed a community college degree program;

thus, the participant selection process was revised, and through convenience sampling, participants were selected from only two colleges.

One college is located in an urban area within the Piedmont Triad area of North Carolina that was affected by the closing of traditional textile and furniture manufacturing plants. This college's annual enrollment is 4101 with a majority of students over the age of 25. The second college, located in an urban area of the foothills region of North Carolina, reports an annual enrollment of 5,528 with a majority of students under the age of 24 (National Center for Education Statistics n.d.). The unemployment rate of this region fluctuated between 11.1% and 12.1% in 2009 (North Carolina Employment Security Commission n.d.). I began the sampling process by contacting the president of each college, explaining my research and asking for participation. When the colleges agreed to participate, I then asked appropriate staff members within each college to recommend former students who successfully completed an education program utilizing Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits for participation in the study. Once potential participants were identified, I asked for assistance from community college staff members in contacting the students. Exploring the meaning of job loss and education with this targeted group of participants facilitated a deep, rich understanding of how meaning is constructed from experience.

Data Collection and Interview Protocol

The primary data collection method for this study was individual interviews with participants. Rogan and de Kock (2005) advise that the choice of interview technique depends upon the number of participants involved, the research objectives, and the time available for interviewing. A structured approach is recommended when a particular aspect of experience and meaning is sought within a limited amount of time. A less structured

approach is recommended when working with a small number of participants, when time together is more plentiful, and the research goal is to fully explore many facets of experience and meaning. In an analysis of one of their own narrative studies, Rogan and de Kock (2005) found that structured interviews resulted in researcher controlled conversations with participants. Thus, the researchers transitioned mid-study to a more conversational, unstructured interview style, which fostered "a personally more comfortable, less intrusive approach that also seemed to reduce the narrator/researcher control tensions" (Rogan & de Kock, 2005, p. 632). The tell-your-story-in-your-way approach privileges the narrator and opens the interview to more authentic participation from both researcher and participant (Reissman, 1993; Rogan & de Kock, 2005). Thus, I used a nonintrusive, unstructured interview approach in this study, as in addition to favoring participants, it also provided opportunities for "'little stories'," or anecdotal episodes, significant to the meaning of the larger story, to emerge (Rogan & deKock, 2005).

Open-ended interview questions were centered around the meaning constructed from being dislocated from a traditional manufacturing job, the process of transitioning into college using TAA benefits, and the transition into new career fields. Following Reissman's (1993) advice, I created an interview guide containing several broad questions and a series of probe questions that helped participants begin a story. The use of a guide, rather than a prescribed set of questions, made interviews more conversational where participants and I "develop[ed] meaning together" (Reissman, 1993, p. 55). Allowing participants to construct answers in meaningful ways was crucial to giving them a voice in the current economic time (Reissman, 1993). For example, drawing upon a sample question Reissman (1993) suggests to researchers, I asked participants something like, "Tell me, in your own words, the story of

your career in manufacturing. I have no specific questions; rather, I'd like to hear about your

work at your manufacturing plant as though it were a story with a beginning, middle, and

end." Similar questions were designed to help participants tell about being an adult college

student and how they transitioned to a new career. In keeping with the conceptual

framework of social constructivism and transitions, questions were designed to help

participants explain the meaning of their successful life transitions resulting from job

dislocation and encourage them to describe how workforce and higher education policies and

programs influenced the choices they made. Because of the complexity of the subject matter,

I met with each participant at least three times for approximately one hour. In one case, I

asked for and additional meeting to continue exploring a particular concept. Meeting three

times allowed us to fully concentrate on and deeply explore points within their life stories

related to upbringing, working in manufacturing, and transitioning from work to college to a

new career field and the meaning they drew from their experiences.

Interviews took place at the community college participants attended or as in one case, a

community college in the participant's home town. Participants were informed of the

purpose and process of the study and the benefits and risks of participation I gave them

during the participant selection phase of the project. Signatures indicating agreement by

participants were obtained at the bottom of the form. I retained original copies and give a

copy to each participant for his or her records. Participants had the right to redirect or

discontinue conversation at any time they became uncomfortable. Participants also had the

right to discontinue participation at any time. An outline of interview protocol is included in

Appendix B. The study was approved by the Appalachian State Institutional Review Board

(IRB); the IRB application includes the procedures for destroying the data upon conclusion of the study.

Participant identities and the information they shared with me were kept private and confidential at all times. With their permission, I tape recorded conversations so that I could better understand and accurately remember responses to questions. I was the only person who listened to the tape recordings and read the notes during the study. All tapes and written notes I made were kept in a secure locked file cabinet, and I was the only person with a key to that cabinet. In my final write-up of the study, names and any other form of identifying information such as address(s) and workplace(s) were changed.

I used journaling to capture my own reflections and subjectivities, as I was naturally as involved in the research as participants. While participants had their stories to tell, I offered the perspective of an administrator working within a community college to address issues of access and flexibility for students. I recorded my thoughts after interviews with participants, along with events and discussions in my administrative work, and attempted to make sense of my learning and subjectivity related to the research topic in relationship to the experiences of participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Role of Researcher. Several authors describe narrative research as a collaborative process between researcher and participant (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell & Miller, 1997; Moen, 2006; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Such openness strengthens the researcher/participant relationship and reduces potential authoritative gaps between researcher and participants (Berger, 2001). As the researcher in this project, my own experiences as a higher education administrator could not be totally separated from participant experiences. Because I had both personal and professional interests in learning

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from trade-affected dislocated workers, and because my place within the social context allowed me to meaningfully contribute to the story, I was fully present in the research (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). My own perspective was reflected in the questions I asked participants, the conversations we had, and my thoughts throughout the process about how my own experiences contributed to the research (Creswell, 2003). Presenting myself within the research as researcher/practitioner was appropriate for this study, as my professional experiences working with dislocated workers within a community college stimulated my interest in this topic. I have been working within the same economic and historical settings as my research participants; thus my own reflections and subjectivities, were incorporated into the findings and analysis sections of the research report.

Another role in which I served was that of facilitator. Establishing a non-judgmental, equitable relationship with participants in which they felt empowered to tell their stories was essential to developing an accurate, trustworthy report of their experiences (Moen, 2006). As Moen offers, an important role of the researcher in narrative inquiry is "to develop a caring situation in which both the researcher and research subjects feel comfortable" (p. 6). Such an environment will not only set the tone for an equitable researcher/participant relationship; it will also reduce the chances of difference between stories told and stories reported (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Data Analysis and Coding. Experts in the field of qualitative research state that just as there are no concrete inquiry procedures, there are likewise no standard data analysis procedures in narrative research (Moen, 2006; Reissman, 1993). However, authors do offer guidelines for coding and analyzing data that can be tailored for individual research projects.

Reissman (1993) and Glesne (2006) suggest approaching data analysis first in the collection stage. Reissman (1993) advises that open-ended questions encourage the telling of stories and facilitate memory recall. This was evident with one participant in particular, who began to recall more details about his story as he told it. Generating narrative is the first step in analysis, and the researcher needs to allow story-telling to happen through conversation in order to generate the rich data desired in narrative research. Since the open-ended, conversational interview was the primary data collection technique I used in the study, all interviews were tape recorded and transcribed into text. Adding to the importance of collecting enough data, Glesne (2006) advises researchers to begin reflecting upon the data and research process early in the study. Early reflections enable the researcher to free the mind for new thoughts and shapes the research as it unfolds. Journaling was my way of collecting thoughts throughout the study in an effort to continuously understand how to focus my own thinking and the stories of dislocated workers for the purposes of informing policy and practice.

Transcription follows collection in Reissman's (1993) suggested data analysis approach. Transcription is a tedious but necessary process, one that I conducted myself as a means for becoming deeply acquainted with data. When researchers transcribe their own data, there is less chance for inaccuracy and omission of asides that can later become important to the story (Reissman, 1993). Additionally, studying transcripts for initial themes and a focus for analysis is useful. Reissman (1993) advises that "studies, like narrative accounts, are jointly produced; as investigators interact with subjects, analytic ideas change" (p. 57). By studying transcribed text early in the process, I identified interpretive categories and clues about how meaning has been made from experience.

Reissman (1993) further explains that transcribing and analysis occur simultaneously, as data can be transcribed in a number of ways to gain different perspectives on the unfolding story. Cautioning against reading a transcribed narrative strictly for content and for evidence for a theory, she encourages narrative researchers to first consider how a story is organized and why the story is told the way it is in a particular conversation with the researcher. Positioning the first phase of analysis inside the conversation to identify meaning represented by talk, and then moving outward to analyze obvious and not-so-obvious themes, privileges the story-teller. Though there is an element of systematic evaluation in this approach, Reissman (1993) reminds researchers that interpretation of data naturally occurs throughout the study, as stories are told within social and cultural contexts.

Thematic coding of transcribed data was my primary means of interpreting stories. Early coding involved organizing data into broad thematic categories that characterized the progression of participant stories from beginning to end. As I continued to interact with data, I subdivided parts of stories into more specific themes in order to understand connections among stories and emerging concepts. As Glesne (2006) advises, coding data is an evolving process, and I was continuously engaged in the consideration and re-consideration of developing a narrative report that accurately serves the purposes of the research.

Ethical Considerations

Generally, ethical issues are large in narrative research, with elements such as researcher/participant relationship, the close engagement of researcher in the process, researcher interpretation of story, and imposing meaning on another's story presenting concerns that must be carefully contemplated, evaluated, and addressed throughout the study

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(Bell, 2002; Conle, 2001; Kramp, 2004). Below, I discuss two ethical dilemmas relevant to this project and how I addressed issues that arose.

Since non-intrusive interviewing was used as a data collection technique, it is important to understand ethical questions that may arise from it. First, non-intrusive interviewing is a double edged sword in narrative research, simultaneously privileging the story-teller and creating ethical analytical challenges for the researcher (Rogan & de Kock, 2005). An example of such a challenge is provided by Reissman (1993) and Rogan and de Kock (2005), who discovered in respective narrative studies that differences in language use, culture, and age between researchers and participants increased the likelihood of researcher misunderstanding of participant stories. Fortunately, none of these differences presented issues of misunderstanding in this study.

A second ethical consideration in writing a narrative report involves the selection of data to be used and the re-storying process, which is defined by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) as "the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, plot, place, and scene), and then rewriting the story to place it within a chronological sequence" (p. 332). Narrative research can generate volumes of data, only some of which may be used in the re-story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Providing readers with an overall data "sketch" in the beginning is useful in setting context and giving a broad picture of how the narrative will unfold. When crafting the body of the narrative, decisions involving the use of data should revolve around the purpose of the study, the contextual framework from which the story will be presented, the audience, the form of the narrative, and the values of the researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Reissman, 1993). In analyzing data, I

frequently revisited the contextual framework and the research question(s) to help me

maintain congruency between the purpose of the study and the re-storying process.

The nature of narrative exploration can also be potentially sensitive and unsettling for

participants. In interview conversations during data collection, participants were informed

that they had the power to choose what to share about themselves (see Appendix A). While

selecting participants, I advised each person of the risks and offered an approved informed

consent document that thoroughly reviewed the potential for sensitive conversation. During

interviews, I reminded participants of their option of stopping, not telling the story, taking a

break, or redirecting the conversation if they wished to do so. Additionally, I maintained

confidentiality at all times, a practice that established trust and eased uncertainty for

participants. The informed consent form I used is included in as Appendix A.

Trustworthiness. Truth in story is a concern in narrative research involving questions

about whether the story told is a factual representation or an interpreted representation

shaped by the researcher. Qualitative research experts posit that a "historical truth of an

individual's account is not the primary issue" (Reissman, 1993, p. 64) – that the notion of

seeking objective truth is not inherent to the purpose of qualitative research (Maxwell, 2005).

Because the construction and telling of stories depends upon the values, interests, and

experiences of the teller (participants and researcher) and are located within social contexts,

validity takes on new meaning in narrative research. Trustworthiness, rather than truth, thus

becomes the primary criteria for evaluating narratives (Reissman, 1993).

Moen (2006) asserts that narrative research is inherently trustworthy due to the extensive

data gathering procedures used. However, he and other scholars point out that criteria for

evaluating narrative research are still developing, proposing that individual researchers must

determine the most appropriate checks for trustworthiness for their studies (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Maxwell (2005) and Moen (2006) both suggest that generally, remaining in the field long enough, listening carefully enough to participants to adequately capture their voices, writing field notes accurately, writing about the research early in the study, and maintaining a candid awareness of subjectivity are all tools that promote quality in a narrative project.

Participant checking is a commonly used check for trustworthiness in qualitative research (Glesne, 2006; Maxwell, 2005; Moen, 2006; Reissman, 1993). Maxwell (2005) believes that asking participants to review their data, the interpretations made and conclusions reached is the best way to avoid misinterpretation of the meaning and perspective given during data collection. Additionally, he points out that participant checking often gives a researcher insight into biases, which should be addressed in an effort to further increase trustworthiness. Other trustworthiness meters are used in narrative research. Some authors suggest plausibility as a measuring stick, explaining that when a narrative "rings true" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) with the reader – when the reader can see it happening in life and the interpretation makes sense – a level of trustworthiness is present within the report (Reissman, 1993). Coherence between the researcher's goals, the way the narrative is presented, and themes within the narrative is also a measure for evaluating trustworthiness (Reissman, 1993). When coherence across these arenas is evident, the level of trustworthiness increases.

I began the trustworthiness evaluation of my research in the early stages of the project by clearly acknowledging my biases and continually relating my research efforts to the purpose of the study. In the data analysis and writing stage of the project, I used participant checking to ensure that my recordings and interpretations of their stories were accurate. Further, in

writing the research report, I presented myself to help readers know whose story is being told when and why the stories are intertwined in a particular fashion.

In summary, the primary research question of this study was, "How do adult learners, displaced from their jobs in traditional manufacturing due to that manufacturing going overseas, who successfully completed a community college degree program and transitioned to a new career field, describe their experiences with accessing the community college using their federal Trade Adjustment Assistance education benefits?" Within the context of increased international trade and resulting economic change, layoffs continue, and many workers need education and training to become employed in emerging industries. Additionally, while the federal government is providing some resources to community colleges for meeting increased education and training needs, North Carolina community colleges are facing state budget shortfalls that can limit their ability to meet student needs in a variety of ways. Thus, to make the best use of available resources and to inform policy, governments and colleges need to better understand the experiences of dislocated workers who have engaged in higher education.

Chapter 4
Discussion of Findings

Introduction and Overview of Research Methods and Findings

This narrative study sought to better understand how North Carolina workers, dislocated from traditional manufacturing jobs due to industry moving overseas, have experienced the transition from job loss to higher education to a new career field utilizing their Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits. The primary question of this study was, "How do adult learners, displaced from their jobs in traditional manufacturing due to that manufacturing moving overseas, who successfully completed a community college degree program and transitioned to a new career field, describe their experiences with accessing the community college using their federal Trade Adjustment Assistance education benefits?" Guiding questions, based upon the perceptions of dislocated workers were:

1. How did the federal Trade Adjustment Assistance program influence decision-making for dislocated workers as they transitioned from work to higher education?

2. In what ways did the community colleges they attended influence workers' adult student experience?

3. What personal and/or professional changes did dislocated workers experience as a result of the student experience?

4. What do dislocated workers' descriptions of their education experiences help us better understand about successfully addressing issues of significant job loss, re-education, and re-employment?

Using narrative research methodology and working within the conceptual frameworks of social constructivism, Merriam's (2005) notion of transitions, and Kasworm's (2008) notion of adult identity formation, six adult learners who successfully completed an associate's degree from a North Carolina community college using Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) benefits were selected for the study and interviewed three times. Each interview was approximately one hour in length and focused on a particular place and time in their life stories related to education and work. Although the individual stories of transition are unique, collectively, their stories represent success. All six participants successfully transitioned from the manufacturing sector to different professional fields through a community college associate's degree program using their TAA benefits. Therefore, data analysis will address the research questions through the conceptual framework and from the perspective of how and why the participants were successful.

When I first began interviewing the participants, I expected to hear stories of struggle and hardship even though participants successfully navigated transition. My own experience as a community college administrator had led me to see the difficulties students face in the transition from work to college and in accessing TAA benefits. Their stories, however, reflected very little hardship. All six stories were primarily about determination and success. At the point of permanent layoff, each participant felt fear and anxiety about the future but was able to lay those feelings aside and see opportunity through the TAA program. All six participants chose to use their benefits to further their education, each completing associate's degrees at the tops of their classes.

The primary research question asks how dislocated workers describe their experience successfully accessing the community college using their TAA benefits. Resoundingly, the

six participants in this study describe their experiences as successful and life-changing. This chapter will introduce participants, present data gathered in the research process, and present a discussion of findings that will illuminate how and why the participants successfully navigated the transition from factory work to college to a new career.

Data analysis involved identifying themes that emerged from participant interviews and my own reflective journaling; results are presented in two sections. The first section describes certain profile characteristics for the group and then individual participants chosen for this study. The second section presents major themes that emerged during data analysis. To protect the identities of participants, their names, places of work, colleges attended, and all other identifying information has been changed.

Participants

Six individuals, three men and three women, were selected through purposeful and convenience sampling to participate in this study. All six participants were laid off from traditional manufacturing jobs after spending most of their working lives in the manufacturing sector. All were over the age of 30 when they entered the community college post-layoff. All six were also first generation college students, with their parents' highest education level ranging from middle school to some college. Three participants attended college immediately following high school, one of whom completed a bachelor's degree. Two participants did not complete high school and thus began their programs of study post-layoff by earning a General Education Diploma (GED). One participant completed high school but did not attend college afterward. Five of the six attended the same community college, and all participants pursued different career fields through their associate's degree programs.

For five of the six participants, the TAA program was explained well and the process for accessing benefits was initiated by their companies. The fact that companies "front-loaded" them with information and next steps smoothed the transition into college. Participants knew what they had to do in order to begin an academic program and knew the criteria they were required to meet to maintain eligibility for benefits. All five participants reported that the colleges they attended were prepared to receive them, and they experienced no challenges in terms of TAA paying their college expenses. The sixth participant began college prior to being laid off and was not initially qualified to receive TAA benefits. He had completed a semester of coursework when his company filed for TAA and learned of his eligibility for benefits by tracking the process online. Once he knew he was eligible, he obtained his benefits and reported no problems in the process. For all six individuals, the primary influence of the TAA program in their decision-making was that it made college possible.

The decision to go to college after a permanent layoff and the process of choosing a new career field were unique to each individual. However, through different means, all six concluded that higher education was their best option for re-employment. While some participants chose their new careers based upon long time personal interests, others made their decisions based upon self-knowledge, job stability, or in one case, happenstance. Post layoff, all participants took some time to evaluate their options and make their decisions rather than immediately pursuing college. Although none described that time as an important factor in their ultimate success, it may have been significant in that it gave the participants a chance to more fully understand their options.

Table I below lists study participants, their years of work in manufacturing, and the associate's degree they earned from a North Carolina community college. Following is an

introduction to each participant. In this introduction, I have summarized their individual

stories in order to provide context for findings and data analysis.

Table I

Participants

Participant Name	Years Worked in Manufacturing	Community College Associate's Degree Earned
Annie	31	Computer Information Technology
Alan	26	Horticulture Technology
Darren	12	Networking Technology
Eleanor	28	Early Childhood Education
Vernon	32	Pharmacy Technology
Tracy	14	Health Information Technology

Annie. Annie was 52 years of age when she was laid off from her manufacturing job of

31 years and entered the Computer Information Technology program at her local community

college. When she was young, her parents highly valued education and were involved in her

schooling. Annie's father had a ninth grade education, and her mother took a few

community college courses to help her in her accounting job. As a child, Annie enjoyed

school, liked to learn, and earned good grades. She always wanted to go to college and did

so after graduating from high school. However, leaving home overwhelmed her, so she left

college, started a family, and went to work in manufacturing. She was laid off after seven

months on the job but quickly became employed in another manufacturing plant where she

worked for 31 years. Annie enjoyed her job and was able to work in a variety of

departments. When the plant closed and she was permanently laid off, she was saddened but

viewed the layoff as a time to rest, as she had worked since the age of 12. She had a

severance package that supported her at the time of the layoff which made her rest period

possible. One day, she decided to use the time she had on her hands to go to school. Annie

had always been interested in computers. She had begun college coursework in the computer field earlier in her life and had used computers often in her manufacturing work. Annie decided she would like to resume her studies in that field, made an appointment at the community college to talk with someone and went the next day to get started. She completed the admission process and began classes in the next available term.

   Alan. Alan was 51 years of age when he was laid off from his manufacturing job of 26 years and returned to college. Although his parents did not go to college, they highly valued education and expected him to go to college after high school. As a child, Alan enjoyed school, liked to learn and wanted to be a history teacher. He began college after graduating from high school at a community college and later transferred to a university to study history. While in college, he married, started a family, and went to work in manufacturing to support his family. He completed his bachelor's degree while working second shift in a manufacturing plant. He enjoyed his job and had excellent benefits, so he decided to stay with the company after he graduated from college. In fact, Alan's brother was a teacher, and Alan discovered that his manufacturing job came with a higher salary than what his brother earned as a teacher. During his years in manufacturing, Alan experienced several temporary layoffs, which he used to rest and do things of personal interest to him – he did not feel threatened by layoffs because he knew those times were temporary. When his manufacturing plant closed and he was permanently laid off, Alan resumed his usual activity during a layoff period by engaging in activities of personal interest. This time, however, he spent some time helping his sons who owned their own landscaping business, and through this experience, he became reacquainted with a field of work in which he had developed some interest during high school, horticulture. His sons suggested that he go back to school in horticulture, and

taking their advice, he decided to use his TAA benefits to study the field at his local community college.

    Darren. The youngest participant in the study, Darren was 36 years of age when he was laid off from a manufacturing job after 12 years in the industry and returned to college. Darren's family did not value education. His mother did not attend college and was not involved in his schooling as he grew up. Throughout his time in secondary education, Darren liked the social aspects of school but was not engaged academically. He earned mostly failing grades during a semester but completed just enough work in the end to pass classes. He worked just hard enough to graduate from high school. Darren did, however, take college courses at a community college while he was in high school and really liked one of the classes – a criminal justice course – and the instructor. The instructor inspired Darren to plan a career path for becoming a state trooper. After graduating from high school, Darren entered the military and tailored his experience to prepare for a law enforcement career. After completing his military service, Darren continued to research the law enforcement field and determined it wasn't for him. He then went to work in manufacturing, which was the only option he believed he had at the time, and remained in the manufacturing sector until his plant permanently closed. Prior to the closing, Darren received a flyer in the mail from his local community college and decided to take a few computer classes mostly for personal interest, as he worked on computers from his home and wanted to learn more about them. Initially he thought he would pursue a certificate in the evenings while he was still working. Shortly after beginning classes, he knew his company was about to close. His experiences in college classes were good, and he decided to continue his studies. He offered himself for layoff because the timing aligned well with the start of the next semester at the community

college. At the time he began his coursework and was laid off, he did not qualify for TAA benefits because his company didn't file for it right away. Through the advice of a classmate, Darren sought the support of the Job Training and Employment Center (JTEC), to help him pay for college. His company eventually filed for Trade Adjustment Assistance, and when Darren learned he would qualify for benefits, he began using them to complete his degree in Networking Technology.

Eleanor. Eleanor was 55 years of age when she was laid off from her manufacturing job of 28 years and went to college. Eleanor's family had traditionally worked in manufacturing, and thus it was assumed she would do the same. Her mother had an eighth grade education, and her father completed the fifth grade. Education was not valued in her family, and her parents were not engaged in her early schooling, but Eleanor enjoyed school and always did well on her own. Her parents wanted her and her siblings to go to school for as long as it was required of them, but once Eleanor and her brothers reached the age where school was no longer required, her parents had no expectations for them to continue. Eleanor would have liked to have gone to college, but no one talked with her about it, and the assumption that she would go to work prevailed. When she was 16, Eleanor quit school so that her mother, who had stayed home to care for Eleanor's younger siblings, could go to work to support the family. Eleanor eventually went to work for the local factory, because that is what her parents and most everyone in her community did. The pay and benefits were good, and people could earn a good living. She married, started a family, and worked in several manufacturing plants before settling into the plant where she worked for 28 years. When the plant closed, Eleanor decided to use her TAA benefits to go to school. Her preference was to find another job, but she quickly decided that school was her only option. She began the

GED program at the local community college and made the decision to pursue a degree in computer technology because she enjoyed working with her hands and thought it would be a hands-on field. When she began her first computer classes, she immediately discovered that the computer field was not for her. She quickly changed her program, and her first classes, to Early Childhood Education. She chose her new program based upon results of a career interest inventory she had taken, her love for her grandchildren, the fact that the work was hands-on, and she could see herself enjoying working with children.

    Vernon. Vernon was 52 years of age when he was laid off from his manufacturing job of 32 years and went to college. He grew up on a farm that his grandparents and parents managed together. Vernon's parents did not complete high school – his mother could read and write but his father could not. However, when he was younger, Vernon's parents pushed him to do well in school, and his mother was involved in his schooling. As Vernon entered high school, their involvement waned. Vernon describes himself as having an attitude of indifference toward education. He had one high school teacher who talked to him about going to college, because his grades and his farm experience were enough preparation to enter a university agriculture program. But he quit school when he was 16 and married. He went to work in manufacturing because that is what people did at the time, and he could make a good living. He worked for several companies, his longest periods of employment being 15 years with one company (that was bought out by another company) and 13 years with his last company, which closed due to the industry moving overseas. After his final layoff, Vernon spent a couple of months looking for a job and noticed that most jobs required at least a high school credential. His daughter encouraged him to go to school for his GED, so he began classes at the local community college. Initially, his education plans only

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included the GED, but a visit from an instructor in the college's pharmacy program sparked his interest in Pharmacy Technology. He learned that pharmacy is a fairly stable field and one that his TAA benefits would support. At the same time, he was also considering pursuing a degree in heating and air conditioning, but chose pharmacy because the work environment would not involve heavy labor, which was a concern. His interest in pharmacy became more solid when he realized that it was indicated as a potential career field for him on a career interest inventory he had taken through the GED program. He talked with faculty in the allied health department and began pursuing his degree in Pharmacy Technology.

Tracy. Tracy was 45 years of age when she was laid off from her manufacturing job of fourteen years and returned to college. Her parents did not attend high school, and their involvement in her schooling was mostly in the form of encouragement to complete homework and earn good grades. Tracy was an average student who didn't like school and could have tried harder to do well. Her parents wanted her to go to college, and Tracy felt that was her only option after high school. Although she didn't understand the value of higher education and perhaps was not ready for college, she attended a university for two semesters before leaving college to marry. Tracy then took a full-time job in a factory and also worked part-time in a restaurant, where she advanced and eventually worked full-time. Later she worked as a manager for another restaurant for several years, where the time demands eventually became more than she wanted to manage. Tracy left the restaurant sector and went back to manufacturing. While she worked in manufacturing, Tracy thought about going back to college and once stopped by the local community college to pick up information. It wasn't until she was permanently laid off that she decided to go to college, primarily because she thought higher education was her only avenue for obtaining a good,

stable job. She made the decision to pursue an associate's degree in Health Information

Technology because the medical field was a stable industry, starting salaries were good, and

she would not have patient contact. Tracy learned that her TAA benefits would support the

Health Information Technology program, so she took the steps to get started. She knew that

she needed stronger computer skills, so she began college by entering a class designed to

refresh basic reading, writing, math, and computer skills. After completing that program, she

began coursework in her chosen program of study.

Major Themes

　　All six participants shared their stories of successful transition using their TAA benefits to

access community college education. The following section presents a discussion of the

major themes that emerged from their stories and from my own reflections and experiences

as a community college administrator. I met with each participant three times for an

interview session. Each semi-structured interview focused on a particular point in the

participants' stories related to education and work. In the first interview, we talked about

their upbringings, how they were raised to think about education, and first experiences with

college, when applicable. The second interview focused on how the participants decided to

work in manufacturing, their work experiences, and the layoff experience. Learning about

TAA, entering college, the adult student experience, and transitioning to a new career field

were the topics for the third interview. Each participant's story was unique; however, three

major themes emerged as significant factors in their successful transitions: predisposition to

learning, opportunity, and competing identities. Sub-themes for each of these also emerged,

as indicated in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Major Themes

Theme	Sub-Themes
Predisposition to Learning *Characteristics and Experiences*	Early Influences • Parents • Teachers Inner Resources • Love of learning • Reading • Work ethic
Opportunity	• Optimism • Warming up
Competing Identities	• Former approach to career decision-making versus a new approach • Physical work versus intellectual work • Worker identity versus professional identity

Predisposition to Learning refers to characteristics or experiences participants had prior to

attending college as adults that facilitated their academic experience later in life. These

characteristics and experiences predominantly grew from the early, positive influences of

parents or school personnel and/or from their own personal inner resources such as love of

learning, affinity for and skill in reading, and strong work ethic. Predisposition to learning

emerged in many places along the continuum of their life stories from childhood to present

day and took the form of academic achievement in early schooling, motivation and

achievement in the workplace, and dedication to their academic programs as adults.

Opportunity represents how the participants viewed their layoff and the primary influence of

the TAA program in their decision-making. Optimistic attitudes and view points allowed

participants to see opportunity in a significant life change. Although all participants

generally viewed TAA as a vehicle for opportunity, some experienced a warming up period

(Alexander, Bozich, & Entwisle, 2008) to the idea of pursuing longer term education programs. Warming up to college and to the belief in their own academic abilities began with small successes that led to setting larger academic goals. Competing Identities (Lucey & Walkerdine, 2003) references participants finding themselves situated for a period of time between a former life and a future life, or a previous identity and a newly forming sense of self. The beliefs and behaviors associated with former and future lives were different enough to produce tension or questions about identity, which appeared in participants' descriptions of how they made career decisions and how they described their views of self after completing college.

Predisposition to Learning. Sometime in their lives, prior to starting college as adults, participants developed characteristics, beliefs, or habits that became helpful to them as they unexpectedly entered academia following permanent job loss. Early influences from parents and teachers emerged as one way in which participants developed a predisposition for learning. All participants described how their families viewed education; some families highly valued formal education, some marginally valued it, and some did not value education. Two participants, Annie and Alan, were raised by their parents to believe that formal education is important and necessary, and both participants adopted and internalized this belief as adults. Annie describes her parents' influence:

> My father had a ninth grade education but he was a very smart person. My mother went to college – she didn't graduate, but she went to college even though she was sick all my life. They really believed in education. Even though it was back then, my momma always – she was a person – she went to every PTA, school board, and stuff like that – she would work in the school and volunteer and stuff like that. Even with

my daddy – he had a ninth grade education – he could sit down and help us with our homework. So education, when you are raised like that, it grows up on you.

Alan describes his parents' influence on his beliefs:

From a very early age, mom and dad never got to go to college, so from a very early age it was their goal to put us all through college. That was still kind of ingrained in us at an early age – after high school, we would go to college. So it was never questioned that we wouldn't continue our education. If it never led to a better job, Mom and Dad always said it would make you a better person – it would make you more rounded. You'd experience things they'd never experienced; you'd be exposed to more people, it builds good character and good personal skills. And education is something nobody can take away. Once you learn it, you can choose to use it.

While Annie and Alan learned to value education and were prepared well by their parents for higher education, families of other participants did not have the same views of formal education. Eleanor's family did not value education and held no expectations for school attendance after she and her siblings turned age sixteen. However, Eleanor developed a love for learning on her own and enjoyed school, saying:

I was just always interested in other things. We lived in a, I don't know, closed in place where all there was was home. We didn't…we never really that much went anywhere, and to school was like you went into a different adventure. It was a whole entirely different environment in school than what it was at home. Different people, different atmosphere, learning about things that you'd never even heard of at home.

Similarly, Darren's family did not value education, and Darren believes that is why he adopted an unenthusiastic view of learning as a child and teen. His mother's family grew up

on a farm, and working there was more important than going to school. Darren's mother completed high school with a GED, but she did not emphasize education to Darren and his brother. Darren believes that his apathy toward formal education was formed because he was not encouraged to believe differently:

Education wasn't a big deal in our household. And I guess…she [mother] never instilled that in me, so that's why I didn't try. I can see it now as an adult. But when you're a kid and you've got nobody pushing you, you're not going to excel or try. Well, I won't say anybody won't, but I didn't…I was lazy, so I didn't. And I was lazy because nobody ever pushed me to do anything. So that's kind of how I viewed education back then. But if something had been different, I would have had my master's degree by now or something.

Although Darren describes himself as student who could have achieved more with some encouragement, he describes a natural predisposition to learning that was evident in his ability to quickly generate passing work at the end of high school semesters:

I would fail all year long and then I would come in at the end of the year and say look, what do I need to do to bring my grade up? They'd [teachers] tell me, and then I would do it. And I'd prove to myself that I could do it.

Darren describes history as one of two subjects he liked in high school, stating, "it was the subject – history – I love history. I love watching the history channel. This was U.S. history – I loved learning about U.S. history. I think I liked the teacher." For Darren, a teacher's ability to get his attention influenced how he used his capacity to learn. While in high school, he took college courses at the local community college, and one particular instructor significantly awakened Darren's desire learn and prepare for a career:

Mr. Instructor, who was a professor out there at the time, actually, I talked to him, and he really inspired me. He was the one - I made a really good grade in his class. And we talked, and that's how I went into the Marine Corps. I wanted to be a highway trooper. But he, I talked to him and I asked him…and he talked about his career during the class…and I kind of thought, well, that's kind of cool. He was an ex-Marine, and he became a state trooper, and he became a professor. And he inspired me because he was an ex-Marine. After that, I went back and actually, to college, and we were having a career day or something, and my path I wanted to follow was, I wanted to be a Marine, then I wanted to be a state trooper, then I wanted to be a private investigator. Those were my career goals.

Conversely, Tracy's parents expected her to do well in school and expected her to go to college, but they were uninvolved in her early schooling. Their formal educations ended in seventh and eighth grades, and as Tracy explains, "as far my homework and what not, they were no help. I don't hold it against them, because they just don't have the knowledge about things." Tracy describes herself as a marginal student who didn't like school, despite the push from her parents to excel and eventually go to college.

Education was not emphasized as important in families of Darren, Eleanor, Vernon, and it was unimportant to Tracy despite her family's desire for it to be important to her. For these participants, predisposition to learning evolved from one or more internal resources they developed through work or participating in activities of personal interest.

Inner resources emerged as being a significant aspect of predisposition to learning for the participants. Regardless of their early schooling experiences and parental influence on their views of education, each participant described one or more naturally developed qualities that

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ultimately helped them successfully complete college later in life and begin a new career. Particularly, three inner resources were common among participants: love of learning, reading and work ethic.

For Eleanor, love of learning was a significant inner resource she drew upon as a child and later as an adult student. Education was not important in her family, but Eleanor liked school and loved to learn despite this. To her, school and learning were adventures. She explained:

> I was fascinated with a lot of the words because my momma and daddy had limited education, so you'd hear words – I can remember hearing words that you'd want to look up or you would want to know what the meaning was because you'd never heard that word before – you'd never heard that word at home.

Similarly, Eleanor's appreciation for learning and variety emerged in the workplace:

> And I worked there for 24 years – I worked there in the sanding room. And eventually I could tear down and set up just about any of the machines down there. And I really enjoyed it. But you did different things – you didn't do the same thing every day. There were different jobs, different machines, working with different people…to me, it was a good experience. And I worked my way to where I was supervisor - I got to be supervisor on second shift. It was really nice.

Love of learning was also a significant inner resource for Alan, who described learning for the sake of learning, not only in school but also on the job. He enjoyed his manufacturing work for several reasons, particularly because he had opportunities to learn within the workplace. He worked in several areas within their plants and valued learning different aspects of the manufacturing process. Alan describes his experience in his plant:

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I was always learning something. Because I wanted to learn. And I stayed there for

26 years. I pretty much worked every job in the whole shop. And I really enjoyed it.

I was always fascinated with learning something new. I realized during that time that

people, whether they were educated or not, if they had the ambition to learn things on

their own, they could self-educate themselves to be knowledgeable in a lot of

different areas.

In a later interview when talking about his first horticulture job in a retail environment, Alan

described the role of learning in his work:

I gathered as much knowledge as I can and shared it with everybody. Selling the

product – fertilizer, or plants or trees – I throw out a bunch of knowledge about a

particular product. Because I guess I just realized that the more you know about

something, well, knowledge is power.

Reading emerged as another inner resource that participants cited as being helpful to them as

adult students. Vernon, Alan, and Eleanor all like to read and felt that their skills and affinity

for reading made it easier for them to begin and progress through college. Regardless of

their early school experiences, all three participants believed that reading was a significant

factor in their transition into college. This was particularly true for Vernon and Eleanor who

began their education by earning a GED, where they discovered reading to be an important

skill in academia. When I asked Eleanor whether she missed school when she left it and

went to work, reading emerged in her response: "Yeah, I missed it. I missed learning, you

know, learning different things and all. Then after that…which I loved to read, so I read a

lot. Still do when I get a chance. I loved to read, so I read a lot of books and stuff." In part,

Vernon attributes completing his degree in the time frame prescribed by TAA to the fact that

he had solid reading skills at the time he entered the GED program. He describes the reading portion of the GED program this way:

> So like I said, that's all I ever planned to do, was get my GED. And so I went out there [community college]. It went better than I thought it would. For me, which I like to read…but I didn't have any trouble with the reading class, went through that pretty good. They didn't keep me in the reading class but a couple of weeks.

Vernon believes that some dislocated workers were unable to progress through college because of poor reading skills. He empathetically pondered how dislocated workers who had less developed reading skills fared in the higher education process:

> But you have people who are trying to learn to read. I mean, you know, so some people who have been out there a long time, they were just starting way behind me. It wasn't because they weren't trying; just because there are people who can't read. If you're having to start from that far back, that you can't read or write hardly anything but your name, you've got a long ways to go. They were probably lucky to get out before the Trade Act ended for them and just get their GED. So not everybody is on the same field.

Annie did not talk about her own reading skills, but like Vernon, she noticed how difficult it was for her manufacturing coworkers to adapt to more advance technology on the job because they were unable to read operation manuals. In thinking about what it would be like for non-readers to go to school, she mused:

> A lot of them at the Plant had been there all their lives, were good workers, but they could not read. It was just so much harder on them. So for somebody who gets laid

off in that situation, and they don't have education, it would be really hard for you to

go to school on the Trade Act if you don't have a high school education.

As I listened to Vernon and Annie compare themselves to their peers who could not read, I

thought to myself – non-readers are the students with whom I am most familiar – unlike the

participants who have well-developed internal resources to help them through college. These

are the students who, because they may have fewer internal resources or may have not

recognized them, become known to me and other college staff. These students are less able

to navigate such a significant life transition, at least in the beginning, and need more directed

support. When they seek help, it is with a sense of desperation, frustration, and resentment

because they are extremely unprepared, both emotionally and academically to consider

college or accept it as a next step. This is why I expected to hear about frustration and

hardship at least to some degree – I assumed that most people experienced this transition in

this way. Vernon and the other participants have helped me see that this is not so. It is likely

that I never came in contact with the dislocated workers possessing adequate inner resources

for handling college.

   Work ethic was an inner resource that participants mostly described in relationship to their

manufacturing work and their post-layoff college experiences. Producing quality work was

important to them, as quality signified personal competence on the job and led to job

satisfaction. Tracy first talked about her work ethic during her employment in

manufacturing. She explained the importance of quality in her manufacturing work:

I always did try to take pride in the jobs that I was doing, as far as my work. I wanted

to produce a quality product. For one, I didn't like going back and fixing things. But

I wanted to do what I did and do it well. So I guess maybe that helped give them the idea that I was smart. But whatever I was doing, I tried to do the best I could do.

Work ethic and quality were important to Eleanor also:

It was good that when you saw a load of work go out, and you know that it was going to make a piece of furniture, and you knew it wasn't going to come back, because I hated if they sent anything back. It was important to send it out right the first time. I wouldn't want to put a piece of furniture in my house that whoever made it didn't care what it looked like.

Darren tells a story from his workplace that primarily highlights work ethic as a significant inner resource but also incorporates desire to learn as an inner resource:

And so I was hired for the position – they liked me because I was an ex-marine, and I was still young at the time, in fact I still wasn't but 23, 24 years old. I got the job as supervisor, and I did well at the job. I increased production and all that. At the time…there was a guy that worked part-time – he made molds for the company. We manufactured widgets and things like that, made from polyester resin, and he made molds. Well this type of mold making is not taught – it's kind of handed down or taught like a craftsman. And I thought it was fascinating. I would come in…and it was very secretive…he kept his shop locked up and wouldn't tell anybody his secrets. So I went to the owner of the company and told him that, "we're not getting molds fast enough," because this guy was only coming in a certain amount of time, and our molds are getting burned up, and I can't produce the product in a fast enough time. And I told him I'd be willing to work off the clock, my own hours, if he would train me so I could get some work done. So he liked the idea, but of course he didn't do it

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off the clock. But he made the guy start training me. And he did. And then, well, I

know I had about three weeks training, and he fired that guy – made me the full-time

mold shop guy. Had three weeks experience making molds. I barely knew my head

from a hole in the ground, you know. And we were going to market. And we had all

this new product that needed to be molded. I stayed there and worked by myself at

night time – I mean I worked through the night just to get through market.

Learned…and I didn't know what I was doing. It's a very…one, you've got to be

very creative…you've got to be able to look at a piece and tell how it's got to be

molded, how, when you pour this resin in there, how you're going to take this mold

apart so the piece just doesn't collapse on you. There are a lot of things you've got to

do, plus you've got to know…you've just got to be able to imagine the finished

product and how that mold's going to come apart. So I took all that, and I got very

good at it.

This story demonstrates Darren's commitment to his job, work ethic, and desire to learn, all

inner resources that surfaced for him once he completed high school, entered the military and

began work. He describes the change in himself as he began college:

I sat in the front of the class, which was amazing – I never did that before. I always

got in the front. It was a big difference – big, big difference between high school and

here. I wanted to be there, wanted to be noticed. I wanted to learn. So when I was in

class, I took a lot of notes. I ended up getting me a lap top – I was probably one of

the few students at that point that carried a laptop to class. I breathed and lived

everything with my studies.

When describing how they approached college as adults, all six participants talked about treating college like a job. Studying long hours, using learning materials beyond class requirements, regularly attending class, completing assignments on time, and using the college's resources were strategies they used to be successful. These strategies exemplify a strong work ethic and sense of commitment each participant embodied that enabled them to complete their coursework within the TAA time frame. Annie compares being a college student to being a worker:

> But as a worker, I always tried to do my best. And as a student – but it's different. You know you have to do a job, and you get paid for it. But when you're a student, you're not getting paid, but you really are. It's affecting the rest of your life. So to me, they were really kind of the same, even though I wasn't getting a pay check for this, it set me for the rest of my life. So I knew I had to do my best. And that's the way I felt about my job – I knew I had to do my best. So it was different, but the same.

Tracy's approach was very similar to Annie's in that she was committed to doing her best work in college, just as she did on the job. As she explained the study schedule she set for herself, she said, "I looked at school as my job. It was very consuming. I get to want to do it and do it well – do it right. It has to be. It has to consume your life. And hopefully it was going to pay off, and it did. It has." Alan's quest for learning was a large part of his work ethic. He wanted to know as much as possible about his new career field and took extra measures to ensure his knowledge was comprehensive:

> So we had a fantastic library. And I spent a lot of time in the library. During the spring semester, we were just in class Monday – Thursday, but I still went up on

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Fridays, and I spent pretty much about all the day on Friday in the library. It was

books, and magazines and videos – any kind of subject about horticulture – was

accessible to us if we would just take advantage of it.

Vernon did not have computer access at home, so he stayed on campus until late at night to

complete his homework, which he says, "probably helped me stay on top of things." He also

took advantage of academic resources on campus, especially to help with subjects in which

he struggled, like math. Vernon attributes his success in math and in writing for English and

other courses to the campus tutoring program, stating that, "there's a lot of people here that

are very helpful."

In one or more ways, and at one time or all the time, Annie, Alan, Eleanor, Vernon,

Darren, and Tracy drew upon characteristics, beliefs, or habits that had been useful to them

during other times in their lives and used them to successfully complete college as adults. In

telling their own stories, each of them compared themselves to former co-workers, friends or

classmates in terms of success. Across all six stories and in their own words, participants

cited some form of a predisposition to learning as differentiating themselves from their peers

who were unsuccessful in higher education. As mentioned earlier, being unable to read or

having little education was one reason some participants believed their peers were

unsuccessful in college. Several participants ashamedly shared that some of their

manufacturing peers had no intention of pursuing formal education but were in classes at the

community college through TAA just to buy time, as Alan pointedly describes:

I had a lot of classmates my age who were there just to take advantage of the Trade

Agreement. And they didn't do so well because they were just there because it was

an opportunity to stay out of work. Several of my fellow students started when I did,

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didn't take advantage of the math lab, so they had to stay back another semester to finish up.

Likewise, Vernon described some of his peers in the GED class as not caring about being in school:

> I mean the rule says you have to be in school, so they never studied or tried to do anything. They would just go up there every day and sit there for the four hours and go back home, because this is what I've got to do to keep my money coming. They were just going to, in their words, milk the government until there was nothing left to get and then go out and take whatever job they can find wherever they can find it. I was just disappointed at how many people were out there that weren't even trying. That could do it but weren't even trying. I hated that. Yea, and in our case, it was here free. I mean all you had to do is try. The only thing I had to bring out here was effort. And the desire to do it.

Annie's observation of her peers was similar. Late in her academic program, she dropped a course due to an extenuating family situation that made it impossible for her to carry a full-time course load that semester. Unfortunately, her TAA funding ended before she was able to re-enroll in the class, but because she was committed to completing her program, she found another funding source to support her last bit of coursework. She compares herself to her less committed peers: "But I was determined – no money or what, I was going to take that class. And a lot of them – when their money ran out, they didn't look for other sources – they just quit."

Valuing education, loving to learn, reading, and work ethic were elements of a predisposition for learning that empowered each participant to successfully complete an

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associate's degree program following a permanent layoff from long-time manufacturing work. Being inclined to learn was just one reason for their success. Viewing their life transitions as an opportunity is another reason for their success and the second major theme that emerged from their stories.

Opportunity. It is very hard to imagine being laid off from a job you have worked most of your life. In my work as a community college administrator, I have talked with many adult students who are returning to college after permanent layoff. More often than not, I have observed dislocated workers viewing school as an only option they are forced to pursue. When I interviewed the participants of this study, I expected to hear stories similar to those of the dislocated workers I have helped in my job, even though participants successfully navigated transition. I have encountered few students who saw opportunity in job loss as did the six participants in this study. Perhaps students who approach life change with hope and optimism do not seek the same type of support as students who experience change as a hardship. Also, the fact that "good" students were recommended as participants for this study could perhaps account for the presence of positive views of life change. The participants all described feeling fear and anxiety when they lost their jobs and for a time, seriously wondered what they would do next. But these feelings were fleeting. Rather quickly, thoughts of opportunity and feelings of optimism emerged, became the driving emotions in their transitions, and helped them succeed as adult college students. As I listened to each participant talk about how TAA made a new life possible for them, I wondered how helpful it may be for agencies to use messages of opportunity when working with people making such a life transition.

For all participants, going to college after being permanently laid off from a manufacturing job was an opportunity; the TAA program was the vehicle that provided the opportunity. All participants indicated that TAA made college possible during a time when going to school would have otherwise been unthinkable. For several participants, their employers prepared them well for understanding and using TAA benefits for higher education. Others learned about TAA through Employment Security Commission counselors who were knowledgeable and thorough in explaining benefits. This "front loading" of information about TAA helped participants see higher education as an opportunity and made it easier for them to get started.

In interviews, each participant described the layoff experience and the experience learning about and accessing TAA benefits. All participants described the TAA program as an opportunity that was easy to navigate, especially when their companies prepared them to use their benefits. During the layoff process, Alan recalled feeling optimistic from the outset and explained, "I was kind of saddened. But I knew that I could find another job. I can learn new job skills. I had no doubt that I could…because I knew I could learn to do something else because I always enjoyed learning stuff." Vernon also believed TAA provided an opportunity, saying, "I sort of looked at it like it was an opportunity for me to try to do something – get into something. It was like this is my one shot to try to get into something else and learn something." In Darren's situation, the employer cancelled employee insurance before the layoff, which created difficulties for many employees. Fortunately, Darren was not as greatly affected by this as some of his peers, and in describing that particular circumstance in conjunction with the layoff, Darren said,

…so I wasn't too upset because I thought well, I lost $150, but I got my school paid

for and I can go to college for two years, so I'm actually the winner. I actually felt

like I had won out of that. I know a lot of people didn't feel that way. Mine was not

a sob story like some of them, you know, that didn't have any alternatives.

At first, Darren was not sure his company would file for TAA but had already begun college

courses out of personal interest in learning something new. When he discovered that the

company filed and he would qualify for benefits, Darren saw opportunity, describing it this

way: "And I finally saw where we had gotten approved, and I was like, alright! I can go to

school full-time, during the day, and not have to work and still have income and get my

education. And that was the happiest day." Similarly, in developing post-layoff plans with

the encouragement of close friends, Tracy describes seeing opportunity:

It was like a major cross-roads in my life. I wanted to go back to school, but I'm like,

I'm 45 years old – almost 46 – you know. I'm like, I can get a job somewhere else,

probably not make that much money, six months down the road be laid off again, and

not have this opportunity.

Participants learned about their TAA benefits in different ways – some learned from their

employers prior to their last day of work, and some learned mostly from their local

Employment Security Commission office. For several participants, knowing that TAA

provided income and mileage compensation in addition to education benefits made the

decision to return to school even easier. Annie's company was particularly helpful to

employees and describes her experience learning about TAA:

When they told us we were losing our jobs, they told us they would file, because the

company has to file for the Trade Act. And like I say, they did everything they could

to help us. So we went to the unemployment office and had classes on the Trade Act.

They told us about the Trade Act right away.

Tracy's company also prepared employees to use their TAA benefits. She describes first hearing about the Trade Act from those who were laid off before her, but her company also gave information: "And one of the meetings I went to at work - I guess about the time I found out I was going to be on the limbo list – they gave us a packet of information. And there was information in there about Trade – I mean like a whole booklet on the Trade Act stuff." Eleanor learned about TAA from her company and from her peers who had been laid off prior to her last day of work. The company signed them up for TAA benefits, and employees went to the Employment Security Commission to learn more. She describes hearing about it but being a bit skeptical of the assurances workers were given about TAA being the window to a new future:

> They told us in meetings. Well, you'd heard it from all the other plants that had
>
> closed down. The ones that had already been laid off talked about it, Trade and
>
> everything. But until you really…you didn't understand it – understand how it was
>
> going to work and everything until the people came in and actually explained it to
>
> you and all. But you still didn't actually believe it – it sounded too good to believe.
>
> They made it sound so wonderful and…you were going to go back to school, and as
>
> soon as you graduated there were mountains of jobs out there.

Since both took some time to make plans post-layoff, Alan and Vernon learned about their TAA benefits primarily from the Employment Security Commission rather than from their companies. When Alan decided to go back to school, he went to the Employment Security Commission office and met with a counselor to talk about benefits that were available to him.

The counselor told him about TAA, and Alan recalls her explanation of TAA this way:

"They said this is set up just for people who have lost their jobs to the North American Trade Agreement – they can be retrained to start a new career. So they said all you've got to do is apply for it." Alan described his counselor as being very supportive of his desire to return to school, saying:

> she was excited about my process of applying and getting accepted. Applying to
> school and getting the process started. She was almost as excited about it as I was.
> And I was excited about it. So when they told me I could go to school, then they told
> me we'll pay unemployment while you're in school, and we'll buy your books, pay
> your tuition, school supplies – I was real excited about it. Because here I had a
> chance to do something that I think I could really enjoy.

Vernon talked about how accessing the Employment Security Commission was difficult at first due to the large numbers of people who needed their services at the time. He met with two or three people in the beginning before he connected with a counselor who worked primarily with employees from his company. He described the counselor as "being more help than anybody else. Seemed like she was really up on the Trade Act and how it worked. She told me what I needed to get from the school and bring them to her, and then she took care of the rest." In addition to being well-prepared by her company, Tracy also described how working with a knowledgeable, supportive Employment Security Commission counselor helped her see opportunity in her returning to college: "And the lady I met with my very first time – oh, if I would have met with anybody else up there, I think I would have probably walked out. Because I was scared to death. But Judy – she was so nice. She said, it's ok, we'll make it all better."

All participants viewed their transition into college through the TAA program as a positive experience. When I asked her to describe her experience accessing and using her TAA benefits, Annie immediately said, "I didn't have any problems. It was not a hard process. Not hard to go through it all, it wasn't. Except that you had to keep up. It wasn't a very complicated process." Similarly, Alan saw it as an easy process, saying, "I applied to learn a new career and go back to school – to get an education for a new career. They approved it with no problem at all. It was an easy process – a very easy process." Darren said, "It was actually as pleasant an experience as it can be, being laid off and having to go to the unemployment office every month and sitting there for hours. You know, and show my transcript every once in a while. For me, it wasn't that bad."

Linking back to their predisposition to learning, particularly in the realm of work ethic, all of the participants not only attributed their positive experiences with accessing TAA benefits to the preparation they received from their companies and counselors, but they also attributed it to their own diligence in meeting the program's requirements. Requirements for maintaining eligibility for the program included providing their counselors with paperwork confirming their continued enrollment in an education program, an in-person meeting with their counselors once per month, and calling in to the Employment Security Commission once per week to answer automated questions about their participation in TAA. Eleanor said, "I always went to all my things, all my meetings. I always made sure I had all the papers they wanted and everything. I always made sure I called in." Vernon explained that he treated his responsibility for confirming his TAA eligibility as a job: "Well I looked at it, and I think the way you have to look at it – you had to look at it like it was a job. Because if you didn't attend, they cut the money off." Annie also ensured that her responsibility was

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met, which made her enrollment in classes smooth: "I tried to do everything so when I got to that point it [money] would be ready, and it was."

Although all six participants described TAA as an opportunity and had positive experiences obtaining and using their benefits, several participants commented on problems with the process. Consistent with the literature about TAA, participants cited waiting for long periods of time to meet with their counselors once per month as problematic. Darren and Eleanor were particularly displeased with the face-to-face meeting requirement and pointedly criticized the process. Darren described it as frustrating and pointless:

> I don't understand…I guess they have to follow through because some people cheat and lie and don't do what they say they're going to do – but I was in school every semester. I don't see why it wouldn't be sufficient for them to just receive a transcript, and I'm passing, instead of having to report to them every month. It's like, if they get a transcript, and I'm passing, I can't be not going to college. So I don't understand why, but I had to show up anyway. And I hated it – having to sit in that line, you know, having to schedule it around – or not schedule it – you couldn't schedule it – you just had to show up. So I'd do it based on my class schedule, and I'd sit in the lobby with 30 other people waiting for them to call my name back there. And I went in there, and I just gave them my – I guess I told them what was going on – that I had such and such classes and gave – you had to have so many classes per semester, and you did have to keep your grade point average at a certain average – and I just proved to them that I was doing that every time I sat down with them. That's all we talked about. Didn't talk about looking for jobs, didn't talk about anything other than what they pulled up on the computer. So I wouldn't get a check

unless I came down and did that. I think the face-to-face meetings were a waste of

time. Honestly, because nothing came of the face-to-face meeting. They could have

better served the public helping the people that was looking for jobs, than to mess

around with the ones that were actually going to school and weren't looking for jobs.

So I think it was a waste of resources and time to do that.

Eleanor's experience attending meetings at the Employment Security Commission was

frustrating to her as well. She likened the process to welfare and believed dislocated workers

were not treated with dignity and respect:

When you went to the unemployment office, you felt like you were begging for it

[money]. I mean, it was like, the people made you feel like you were begging for it.

You had to do this, you had to do that, you had to fill out this paper, you had to fill

out that paper. And you had to sit and wait, and it was like, I don't know, it made you

feel like you were having to beg for it. And at times, it would almost seem like you

were at the welfare office. And you go back, and you turn in your papers, and they

asked you all these questions – it was always the same questions – are you still in

school, you know – just routine questions that they'd always ask you. They kept

telling you you were entitled to it, but you had to beg for it.

Eleanor described the required meetings she had to attend this way:

Well, you had to turn in your paper – you had to get all of your teachers to sign it

every week saying that you were there, and a lot of the older people, they said it had

been a long time since they were in school, and they felt they were being…like they

were not trusted. Like they didn't trust them, you know. And if you forgot to get one

signed, it was a big mess. Forgetting one signature. It was just what you had to do in

order – that's all it was. Like having another job – a job you had to go to every four

weeks. Most people felt like they lost their dignity.

Eleanor's and Darren's descriptions of their experiences with the Employment Security

Commission reminded me of how one community college used grant funding and community

partnerships to create a career center especially for dislocated workers. The premise behind

the center is to orient the navigation of job loss and life transition to the whole person and

preserve the dignity of clients. In fact, the concept for the center arose from an observed

need to provide dislocated workers with individualized attention around academic and career

decision-making, a service that had become close to impossible for over-taxed government

agencies tasked with managing unemployment programs. The center has successfully met its

mission and continues to serve unemployed individuals from a truly guidance-based

perspective. I learned about the center through a workshop I attended and remember

thinking about how great it would be if all of the well-intentioned agencies had the resources

to adopt and sustain such an approach.

One participant cited inconsistency in counseling related to the field she chose to pursue

at the community college. Tracy was approved to use TAA benefits for her program, but a

few of her classmates in the Basic Skills program were not approved for that same program.

Tracy believes she was approved because of the difference in the way her counselor

approached her application as compared to how other counselors viewed that particular

academic program:

But there were two other girls in my class that were going into HIT also. And one of

the workers at the employment office basically told them that Raleigh's not going to

approve this – you cannot do this program in two years, and Raleigh's not going to

approve it. Well, luckily, when I went in, I didn't get him. I got Judy. And she's like

maybe, maybe not. You know, will Raleigh approve this program, and she's like

maybe, maybe not. Sent it off, no problem. They approved it. It's nothing against

the people that work in the employment agency, because I know their hands are tied a

whole lot by Raleigh. I would not do that job – I feel for them.

Several participants talked about their income benefit checks being periodically delayed

or not sent on time, which was a nuisance but not a deal-breaker for them. Darren said, "you

know there were times I was frustrated, when things would change or something, or because

the worst part, after so long you had to do this waiting week, where you'd have to wait a

week and you wouldn't get a pay check." Vernon recalled a similar experience with

fluctuation in pay, saying, "now they do adjust your paycheck some, or your unemployment

check – they end up cutting it back, which makes it pretty tough sometimes." Tracy also was

not paid for a period of time and believed that was a mistake that came from state

government rather than from the Employment Security Commission: "But the biggest issues

I had came from Raleigh. There was a glitch one time, and a bunch of us didn't get paid for

several weeks. But the people up here, it wasn't their fault." Eleanor described being

volleyed between TAA benefits and standard unemployment benefits:

And they would go from Trade to unemployment or unemployment back to Trade

and on Trade, you always drew more than what you did on unemployment. But

they'd tell you that you had so many weeks of this, and the next thing you know you

were out, and you knew you hadn't used it all this week, and then you'd go in and

argue with them. I haven't used up these weeks – well, according to the computer

you have.

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The ends of their academic programs proved to be stressful times for the participants in terms of TAA. TAA benefits were plentiful enough and lasted long enough to see all participants through to graduation with one exception – Annie. Due to an extenuating family circumstance, Annie had to drop a class toward the end of her program, and by the time she was able to re-enroll, her TAA benefits had expired. She sought another form of assistance and completed her classes. Eleanor's TAA benefits covered all of her education expenses through the end of her program, but her unemployment benefits expired when she had four months left until graduation. She had maintained a part-time job while she was attending college and saved enough money to cover her expenses when unemployment benefits ended. The other participants had just the right amount of income from TAA and unemployment to support them while they attended college. However, Darren pointed out that the most significant issue he faced with TAA benefits came at the time of graduation. His benefits ended immediately, and because he did not yet have a job, he suddenly had no income:

> The worst thing, I think, about the Trade Act is that when your classes stop, the money stops. And I think…I wish they would give people a little bit of time. You're graduating, you've got exams, you're looking for jobs…I mean it's hard. I know you're starting to, but with the economy the way it is, and job market the way it is, it's going to take months to find a job. And I know towards the end, I was looking toward graduating – I wasn't thinking about work again, because I had a lot of pressures on me at the end. But I just…I wish they would extend it past when you graduate – just a little bit longer – so once you graduate, you can have a least a month or so to figure out what you're going to do and still draw an income where you're not

worried about going to school, graduating, getting exams – you can actually focus

towards getting a job.

For others, the pressure of completing their degree programs before their TAA benefits expired became more prominent. Vernon described the pressure he felt:

To start with I, when I first went and got the GED thing and all that, it was sort of fun

to start with. But then later, as you get closer to finishing, you start feeling more

pressure because…well you know, most things you can take again if you flunk. With

the Trade Act, they would let you take some twice – if you flunk it once, you can take

it again. But you still had to finish your main thing in a time period. You could

repeat something again – like I said, if I'd a flunked algebra, there was times I could

have taken algebra again. But once you get toward the end of your Trade time, you

know there's no time to take anything again. So you've got to pass it from the first

try. Because they're not going to pay you past a certain point. I worried about it, but

I made it. Passed everything on the first try – didn't have to take anything again.

Despite the problems identified with obtaining and using benefits, participants successfully navigated the transition because they saw opportunity in the TAA program and approached the process with optimism. They did not allow nuisances to drive their transition into college. Their optimism continued as they began their associate's degree programs with their community colleges.

All participants saw the TAA program as a vehicle for earning an associate's degree and believed that higher education was the path to re-employment. However, for Darren, Eleanor, and Vernon, pursuing a long-term degree program was not in their initial plans. Rather, each committed first to a short term education plan that they deemed necessary,

attainable or just interesting. After experiencing academic success in their short-term

programs, Darren, Eleanor, and Vernon began to "warm up" to the idea that a college degree

was attainable (Alexander, Bozick, & Entwislem, 2008) and made longer term education

plans. As Alexander, Bozick, & Entwislem (2008) found in their study of high school

students and college, just trying college was a significant factor in the three participants'

believing they could complete a degree program. In reading about the concept of warming

up to college, I began thinking about students in a new course for dislocated workers I taught.

The non-credit course, created by a colleague of mine in part from this research, is designed

to address the emotional, academic, and career development needs of the unemployed who

are determining their next steps in life. In both semesters I assisted with teaching the class,

the transformation in the students' thinking was remarkable. Through the class, which was

intentionally designed to be somewhat therapeutic and low-pressure, students who believed

they could not go to college clearly warmed up to the idea by the end of the course. In fact,

the students who were not re-employed at the end of the class chose to progress to the next

step in college enrollment because they began to see themselves a learners.

  After her final layoff, Eleanor's preference was to find another job, but she thought

education was really her only option in an unstable economy. She knew she needed her GED

and began the program to see where it would lead her. Vernon looked for a job, discovering

that most jobs required at least a high school credential. He thus decided to earn his GED,

which was the only education goal he set in the beginning. Darren began college courses

before his layoff, primarily to learn for personal reasons and perhaps earn a certificate.

Through their initial exposure to being on a community college campus and progressing

easily through their first classes, Eleanor, Vernon, and Darren developed the belief that they could do more. Eleanor surprised herself in the GED program:

> I started – I came out here and took the test, and they put me in the prep classes. And I started in January, and I got my GED in May. I was really surprised at how…but I guess you know, just through the life experiences and stuff…because I had quit school in the tenth grade, and so I was really surprised at how easy that part came back. I thought well, I'll do this as long as the money lasts and all. Because I thought there's no way that I'll ever be able to graduate, because I just didn't really think that I had it anymore – that I wouldn't be able to learn that much. But then, once I got into it, it was like you wanted to learn more, and you wanted to do this, and getting good grades became important. I thought, you know, as long as I make grades good enough to stay in there…then once I got into it, I really wanted the higher grades.

After quickly earning her GED, Eleanor joined one of her classmates and entered a computer technology degree program. She chose the program because she liked to work with her hands and thought it would work well for her in that regard. Three weeks into her first semester as a degree-seeking student, she determined that computer technology was not a good fit for her: "I said, this is not for me. I don't know enough about computers, and the math was just astronomical for me to take. I said no." Eleanor relied on a career interest assessment she had previously completed to choose Early Childhood Education as her college major, a professional field that was rated highly on her inventory. She explains: "I thought, well, you've got to use your hands on the kids, so that was…this was my second choice. I'm glad I went that path. I like kids too. I like working with kids. And too – the

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instructors – all of them in the Early Childhood program – they made it so easy. They knew how hard it was on us." Vernon warmed up to college in a similar manner:

> So I figured – I never intended to do anything but just get the GED. That was my plan. I thought, you know, if I could do that, that would be a pretty good accomplishment for somebody over fifty. And so I went out there. It went better than I thought it would. And he [instructor] was giving a career readiness class after – you could stay for that – it was like an hour after the regular GED thing was over – they had a career readiness class, so I went ahead and agreed to stay for that. So it just went pretty good – I ended up getting a gold in that, which surprised me.

While in the GED program, Vernon became acquainted with the Pharmacy Technology program when the program instructor came to speak to his class. After comparing that program to the heating and air conditioning program he was also considering, and after learning that his TAA benefits would support the Pharmacy Tech program, Vernon decided to continue his education. His success in the GED program along with encouragement from faculty helped him see himself as a degree-seeking student:

> And then, you know after you get started – which I think the GED thing – I really did well at the GED class, and that sort of built up my confidence. And they were encouraging to me – the people out there were very encouraging as far as going on to college, and you can do it and that sort of thing. But you know, when you get here, and you know you make a decent grade on your first couple of tests, and you start to feel better – gain a little more – maybe I can do this.

Darren began taking evening college courses before his job ended to fulfill his interest in learning about computers. His job became unstable as his first semester drew to a close, and

college suddenly became a career decision for him. He describes his beginnings in college and how he warmed up to the notion of attending for career purposes:

Like I said, I was a very poor student when I was in high school. I didn't really care much about it. So when I went to college – when I went there at night time, it was, if felt like I was a different person. I was way more mature, and I actually wanted to sit there and listen for once. Actually, when I started back at night, it really wasn't – I didn't know so much about getting a degree, it was pretty much learning more. And maybe getting a certificate or something. First semester, I got into it, I liked it, then I decided I wanted to go for my degree. So I strived to do the best I could do in the class. Did very well in the class. So that was…that class I just kind of breezed through it, but the next class, the one that really…that was the class, that was the teacher that sparked me into wanting to go further. It takes, I guess just one person who really…you know, to say the right thing and be the right person to really make you want to do more.

In addition to experiencing success in their first education endeavors, encouragement from faculty was a significant factor in the warming-up period for Darren, Eleanor, and Vernon. Academically, each of the three participants proved to themselves that they could learn and earn high grades in spite of their lengthy hiatus from school, but support from instructors provided the extra confidence boost they needed to enter a degree program. This proved to be especially important for Tracy, who went through a warming-up period after she decided to pursue a degree. Tracy began college by entering skill refresher courses in her college's Basic Skills program. These courses are designed to expose students whose skills may be rusty to the fundamentals of reading, writing, mathematics, and computer

applications. Tracy knew that she needed to hone her computer skills and thus decided to

begin in refresher classes. She describes her experience getting started:

> And actually I called – about my computer skills – because I wanted to do the little
>
> classes. I knew they didn't count for credit or anything, but I felt like I needed to do
>
> something. And it was just like doors started opening up – everybody was so nice
>
> and so friendly. But still, I was scared to death! I had worked in manufacturing for
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> fourteen years, and here I am thinking about going back to school at 45 years old.
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> But I met some really helpful people, especially teachers. Marjorie is great – she
>
> really is. She encouraged me a lot. I asked her – it was right before I was getting
>
> ready to start real school – I was like, Marjorie, can I do this? Do you think I've got
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> what it takes to do this? She was like, Tracy, you had what it takes before you
>
> walked in that door. I was like, ok…

When Tracy entered the refresher class in April, she performed well on the entrance exam

given to students to determine where to begin study. The instructor believed that Tracy

would be ready to begin her degree program in the summer semester, which started in June.

Tracy remembers feeling that summer was too early:

> The first time I met Marjorie, she looked at my scores I made on the little test you
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> take when you go in, and she's like, oh, you'll be ready to go in for summer session!
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> And I was like, no I won't either! And probably I may have been in some aspects,
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> but mentally I was not ready for that. I had just gone through this major turnover in
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> my life, and I wasn't ready to just jump right into college classes. And I'm glad I
>
> didn't, because I probably would have been like a deer in the headlights.

Tracy needed time to accept the change that had occurred in her life and acclimate to the college environment. She remained in the refresher class until August when she transitioned into her degree program in the fall semester. She did so well in the refresher class that she placed directly into her program of study. Tracy's refresher class instructor, Marjorie, supported her through the admission process: "Marjorie kind of helped guide us through the process. Actually being admitted and everything. So that was good – that was really good. I don't like change, so going through that over there [Basic Skills], that really helped me prepare for curriculum classes."

Darren, Eleanor, Vernon, and Tracy all knew they wanted to go to college post-layoff but needed to test the waters in order to gain confidence in their academic abilities. Once they knew they could be successful academically, it was no holds barred for each of them. All four participants completed their programs with very high grade point averages.

All six participants viewed college as an opportunity made possible through the TAA program. Each transitioned well into student life and made the most of the college experience by becoming involved on campus, making new friends, and taking advantage of learning resources and support systems. All participants drew upon their naturally developed learning skills and approached college with the same solid work ethic they employed in their manufacturing jobs, which enabled them to do A-level work and graduate with honors.

Competing Identities. In the last interview with each participant, we talked about transitioning into new jobs after graduating from college. In the context of this transition, competing identities emerged as a theme. Lucey and Walkerdine (2003) define this sense of hybridity as state of "multilayered identities," or in other words, "exist[ing] between competing identities" (p. 287). Some participants experienced a distinct change in their

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views of self as a result of transitioning from college to a new professional field and were able to easily articulate the change. For others, change occurred but seemed to be less pronounced and more difficult for them to identify. However, each participant either directly or indirectly expressed negotiating views of work or self along three continuums: former versus new approach to career choice, intellectual versus manual labor, and worker versus professional identity. Examining competing identities in former and recent decision-making processes about work establishes context for how the participants describe changes in their work and career identity.

All six participants began manufacturing work because they needed jobs, and employment was easy to obtain, stable, and provided acceptable pay and benefits. Decisions to work in manufacturing were based upon convenience rather than upon fulfilling personal needs such as enjoyment, life satisfaction, or upward mobility. Although they had chosen manufacturing work, Darren and Alan experienced moments of identity hybridity in their manufacturing environments, characterized by tension between the jobs they were performing and their aptitude, or preparation for professional or more complex work. In contrast to other participants, Darren viewed his time in manufacturing as temporary and described himself as being "stuck in the factory." He began work in the field out of necessity but never saw himself as a career manufacturing employee. Thus, he may have begun negotiating a state of hybridity, illustrated by the difference between what he was doing in his job and his perceived aptitude for more complex work. Referencing one of his manufacturing jobs, he describes the tension this way: "I did one where all I did was sand the panels…and that was…all day long, they'd just bring me panels, and I would take a sander and sand the panels. I'm way smarter…a lot smarter than to stand there and sand panels." Darren's

inkling of negotiating a state of competing identities was also apparent as he compared

himself to his co-workers at one manufacturing plant:

> Well, some of the people were content, and that was the only thing they ever wanted
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> to do. And that was how they were going to retire. Because there were a lot of non-
>
> educated – which I was not educated as far as college goes, but I had a little more
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> common sense that they acknowledged than some of the older generation, you know.
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> They pretty much, I guess, grew up and didn't finish high school, and worked on the
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> farm or whatever, and they ended up at the factory at a young age, so it's all they
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> knew. I'd at least been in the Marine Corps and done things and seen there was more
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> out there than sanding in the furniture factory all day long. I knew I didn't want to be
>
> there…

Although Alan prepared for a teaching career in college, he decided to remain in

manufacturing because it was more lucrative than teaching. He eventually came to view

himself as a professional in manufacturing but described some tension he experienced in his

early days related to the fact he had completed a bachelor's degree:

> I had an aunt who worked there – I didn't realize until I started working there – I
>
> made a statement one day…I was young and immature, and I made a statement one
>
> day that I had too much education to work in the factory. She let me know right away
>
> that I had a bad attitude, and she was right.

Alan enjoyed his work, and his affinity for learning helped him advance within the plant and

become knowledgeable about most of the company's operations. However, Alan describes

how his co-workers viewed his level of education as contrary to his manufacturing work:

I worked there a couple of years, I learned all the furnaces, all the processes. People

always kept saying, well Alan, you've got a college education. Why don't you go

somewhere else? Well, you know, I liked what I did, I enjoyed working with my

hands, and I was good at working with my hands.

Rather than viewing the tension between the perception of being educationally over-qualified

for manufacturing work and perhaps a misfit in the environment as a tumultuous force in his

life, Alan internalized it as a positive force that served him well:

I think no matter what you do, college helps out a lot. Some people have this idea

that if you go to college, you don't have to work for a living. Yea, they think that if

you have a college degree, you shouldn't be working at the manual jobs or in a

physical job. Yea, I think that since I had a college education, maybe it taught me

some discipline and study. I think it helped out a lot. Because I was very successful

in my manufacturing career.

Other participants seemed to experience competing identities, perhaps more indirectly,

when they decided to go to college and needed to choose a program of study. For most, early

decisions to work in manufacturing were made out of convenience or default; after

significant economic shift and permanent layoff, career decisions had to be made more

consciously. Thus, in terms of decision-making, participants found themselves in flux

between using former and new thought processes. Alan and Darren, using their preparation,

aptitude, and views of opportunity experienced less flux, nimbly transitioning into a new

thought pattern where career decisions were based upon broader criteria such as personal

interest and life satisfaction rather than on more objective criteria formerly used, such as pay

and benefits. Both participants had clear interests and immediately chose to pursue those

with less regard to concrete considerations of the past. Alan recalled his decision-making:

> And I helped my sons with landscaping. And I really enjoyed it, too. They said, well
>
> Dad, why don't you check into going back to school and getting a degree in
>
> horticulture? I thought, you know, that's a good idea. I always loved going to
>
> Lowe's and Home Depot, always just admired the guys working in the garden center.

Similarly, Darren had a clear personal interest in computers and began pursuing his interest

academically before he faced a career decision:

> Life satisfaction, number one. I just wanted to know more about computers because I
>
> enjoyed playing with them. It was basically like a personal choice. When my job
>
> was going downhill and I knew it was leaving, that's when I made a decision it was
>
> career.

Although Darren's career decision stemmed initially from personal interest, he ultimately

drew upon a mixture of past objective criteria and new broader criteria such as career

advancement:

> But it's what it grows too, though. And that's what I was looking at. I was looking at
>
> that when I went back to school – was what kind of job can I get into where I can
>
> make the same kind of income that I was making before. And I already loved
>
> computers, so I kind of applied those two together, that alright, the starting salary is
>
> $32,000 – that's what they say…which I make way more than that now. So I found
>
> something that I love that pays well. There's a lot of room for growth. Because I can
>
> go from here – like I said, if I get my business degree, I can go stay in computers or I

can go outside of computers. Even if I don't get a business degree, the longer I stay

in this field, I can still continue to grow.

Darren's hybrid thought process is further illustrated by a story he shared regarding one of

his former manufacturing co-workers who chose a program of study at the community

college that in Darren's mind, was not lucrative:

> She wanted to be a paralegal. She was forty-something years old, and was pretty
>
> much dirt poor as it was anyway. And I know someone who's worked in the
>
> paralegal field, and they work for a high-dollar lawyer and made like $6.00 an hour at
>
> that time. I don't know…there's some courses I just don't understand. I guess there
>
> are people that want to do them. There's some courses that just don't pay very
>
> well…I don't want to spend two years of my life learning something that I'm not
>
> going to get paid and make a good living at.

Annie also based her decision to pursue a computer technology field on personal interests,

her former college experience, and aptitude for technology. She had attended college earlier

in her life to study computers, had used computers often in her manufacturing work, and felt

that choosing the field post-layoff was an extension of her natural interests: "I worked on

computers a lot at my plant. And over the years, they got automated where most of our work

was done with machines. So I was really comfortable with computers."

While Alan, Annie, and Darren easily chose new career fields primarily through a

different thought process than what they used to enter manufacturing, Eleanor, Vernon, and

Tracy relied more on familiar ways of thinking to make the decision. Eleanor initially relied

on her view of work in manufacturing to choose a new career. After many years of working

with her hands, she chose a computer technology degree because she believed it to be a

hands-on program, which was her primary criterion at the time for selecting a college major. When the program began, she didn't have much understanding of what she would be doing and quickly discovered that there was more to it than working with her hands, in both initial level of skill in using computers and the math requirements. She was able to change her program of study easily but made her next choice based upon a new criterion – what she might enjoy. Thus, Eleanor discovered that a somewhat arbitrary decision-making process that had worked for her before was no longer as useful:

> So I figured, if you're going to do something, you might as well do something that at least you can enjoy. Because you go into a certain profession – you do it because you just want to do that job. But the Early Childhood is something that at least you can enjoy while you are doing it – that was another reason that I chose Early Childhood.

Once she began work in her new field, Eleanor was surprised with how her work became more than just a job. Suddenly, her work had meaning, which was a new experience for her:

> Yeah well when you go into it, you feel it's just going to be another job, you know. It's just working in a childcare center or something like that. It's just going to be another job. You go in there, you change diapers, you feed them, you send them home, you go back the next day, you feed them, you change their diaper, you send them home, you know even if it's not with the ones that young – whatever it is you have to do you do it and you send them home, and you don't think about it. But when you're involved in their life for eight hours a day, you really look at Michael more as a child…it's not as much a job now – you don't really look at it that much as a job. You know you thought when the furniture – you just pass it on to the next person, and you never see that piece again. And you know, you wonder where all the furniture

went to and all this and that. But you don't really realize that you made a difference

in it to where now you feel that with this, you can actually make a difference. Even if

you never know about it. But even kids this young, you can make a difference to

them. You get more of a satisfying feeling. And like I said, more of a can-do feeling.

Tracy and Vernon both approached their decision-making in a similar manner. They used

job stability, working conditions, and salary as their objective criteria to choose Health

Information Technology and Pharmacy Technology, respectively; life satisfaction or personal

interest were factors not considered. This was the same approach Tracy used when she left

the restaurant industry for manufacturing – she wanted a job with better hours and less stress.

For Vernon, working conditions was a significant criterion, as he had worked for many years

in a warehouse performing highly physical tasks in adverse weather conditions. At the time

he completed his GED, he was considering both heating and air conditioning and pharmacy

as programs of study. He chose pharmacy because TAA would support it, it didn't involve

physical labor, and the instructor who spoke with his class demonstrated that the field fit

Vernon's needs:

> I remember the main thing she said that stuck with me the most – she said, you're not
>
> going to go home tonight and turn on the television and see where a hospital or a drug
>
> store is going out of business. And I remember that stuck with me more than
>
> anything she said. Because having worked for two companies that went out of
>
> business, I sort of felt doomed, like everywhere I worked was going out of business.

Tracy's primary selection criteria were stability and salary:

> My main concern was first I wanted something with job stability. I wanted
>
> something I could make a decent salary at. So those were my two things. So I was

thinking, ok, you've got the medical field, and you've got education. And I was

looking at what teacher assistants make, and was like you know, I could have made

that much in a factory somewhere. So I said ok, medical field. And finally I decided

on the HIT, mainly because of looking at starting salaries for some of these positions

and knowing I wouldn't have to touch people.

Eleanor, Vernon, and Tracy are more similar to the students I have been accustomed to

helping through the college admission process. Most of the dislocated workers I have talked

with were interested in any career field with acceptable starting pay and for which they could

quickly prepare; choosing something of personal interest was less important. This made

admission and career conversations more challenging, as most any community college

program could meet those criteria. In my conversations with them, I wondered what made

Eleanor, Vernon, and Tracy different from many other manufacturing workers I had met.

They essentially used the similar reasoning others had used, but unlike many students in the

same situation, successfully selected programs that fit them well. After some reflection, I

began to see that the differentiating factor was their view of college as an opportunity and

their solid sense of commitment to learning something new. Perhaps for their less successful

peers, commitment to college and learning needed to come first. If that is truly the case,

human resource offices, the Employment Security Commission, community colleges, and

other agencies assisting dislocated workers could introduce the importance of thinking

through a plan and committing to it as part of their initial guidance period for newly

unemployed individuals.

   All six participants became employed in their new fields through internships embedded

within their college programs of study. In our conversations about transitioning from college

to employment, we discussed the differences between their former manufacturing jobs and their new jobs. Primary positive differences cited by all participants included being trusted (as opposed to being closely observed), being viewed by supervisors as competent rather than a cog in the wheel, using their minds rather than their hands, and knowing that their work has humanistic value. These differences were presented as satisfiers and aspects of their jobs participants appreciate. However, a less positive difference was stress. Darren and Vernon particularly indicated experiencing more stress in their new environments, primarily related to using their minds more and to the humanistic aspects of their work, than they ever did in manufacturing. In comparing stress levels between their different work environments, Darren and Vernon indicated feeling torn between wanting a life of less meaningful, less cognitive work with lower stress and a life of more meaningful, intellectual work with more stress. Although they appreciated many things about their new jobs, Darren and Vernon also appreciated some aspects of their former jobs, which placed them in a state of hybridity in which they vacillate between desirable aspects of intellectual and manual labor worlds to find their place. Darren framed it in terms of the purpose of his new work in computer technology:

> So…but I'm going to tell you – there's a trade-off between working with your hands and working with your mind. You get a lot more stress and anxiety with your mind than you do with your hands. I'm more tired coming home from this job than I ever was working…when I worked with my hands, I'd come home and I could go do things. Now sometimes I go home and I'm spent. All I want to do is sit on the couch and sleep or something, you know. Being in customer service, everybody's need is before mine. I support probably about 700 computers and 500 printers and I don't

know how many hand-held devices. But you figure 700 computers, every little problem, their problem is more important than the next person's. And then you've got the politics of meetings, and you know, everything. Sometimes it's very draining. It really, really, really is. I've noticed that through this type of work, I have high anxiety where I didn't have when I was working with my hands. Yeah, I hated the job when I was doing it because it was repetitious – it was boring, and you know I hated that and wished I could be doing something else. Now would I trade my job for that job – I would not. However, I might would trade it to do something similar but in a less stressful situation. Because working in health care probably brings more stress than working for a company whose bottom line is not to save lives. So…yeah, I think there is better, but I chose this field because I've been laid off, and I didn't want to get laid off again. That's the nature of the beast, unfortunately. But as far as working with my hands – there is times when I wish, sitting there at my desk stressed out – that I was back working with my hands, to be honest with you. I make five or six dollars more an hour now than I did working with my hands…but I made good money working with my hands.

Vernon also described feeling torn between his former and present work lives, particularly in relationship to stress and the work environment. In his last manufacturing job, he was engaged in a variety of work, including traveling for the company. In his current pharmacy work, his job duties are more critical but fairly predictable, although each day is different in terms of workload, and there is no travel. I asked him if he would rather continue in his current job or return to manufacturing. Vernon replied:

Well, most of the times I would probably choose what I'm doing now. But sometimes you have some really bad days! I've had some days where I wished I was back at the furniture place, where you can just not have to care so much, I guess. And you know, you were off every weekend. But sometimes I miss the travel more than anything. This is a little more stressful job. That's probably the biggest thing, because like I said, sometimes there's a lot of people needing meds at the same time, and you've got to do it. You've got to take enough time to do it right, but you've still got to be pretty quick about it. You can't just take your time and get it ready when you want it ready – it has to be ready now. Well of course, what we do now is more critical. If you saw a table leg off too short, you just throw it away and make another one. Sometimes it's overwhelming. Both jobs had some good things. Like if I was still at the Plant, unless they had me on the road somewhere, I had to work in the warehouse, and right now I'd be all bundled up, no heat, freezing to death. I know now there's going to be heat when I get there.

Identity change, in the form of worker versus professional, was another continuum participants negotiated as they transitioned into new jobs. Along the range of no change (maintaining worker identity) to significant change (view self as a professional), four participants landed toward the poles while the others fell somewhere in the middle. For Tracy, the transition to re-employment through higher education was a process that had little effect on her views of work and herself as a worker. During her transition between college and re-employment, she briefly negotiated the prospect of adopting a new work identity. This prospect was introduced to her by a friend, who suggested that earning a college degree automatically transforms a worker into a professional. Tracy tells the story:

I was instant-messaging with a friend online, something about a position. I was like, I don't want a position, I want a job. I don't know. The job I have now is one you'd have a resume. I never had to have a resume before. I had no clue how to do a resume. I'm like, I've always had jobs. You go in, you fill out the application. If they wanted to talk to you, they did; if they didn't, they didn't. It's just so different now. Position. Which I guess it's a position, but you know. I don't view it that way. I'm a simple person. And like I said, I just wanted a job – position – where I could make a decent living. When you're a little country girl, it's a job. When you're from the city, it's a position.

Tracy's friend prompted her to consider the notion that education implied identity change. Tracy momentarily pondered the question and concluded that her transition did not produce any change in her identity. When I asked her if she saw herself differently after graduating from college, she replied,

No. I don't view myself any differently. I really don't. It's great to look at that thing on the wall with those little gold stickers that say high honors, but I don't. I mean, I feel very honored in some ways. I feel blessed. But I don't view myself any differently. I'm glad that I did succeed. It hasn't changed who I am as a person. It's like I've told several people, I don't want a career. I want a job that I can make a decent salary, and that's it. I'm satisfied with that.

Likewise, Annie's identity was affected very little by her transition. She stated early in the interview process that at her age, her identity had been well established. When we talked about identity toward the end of our time together she reiterated that point: "When I got my degree, I said I did it. When I started school, I was determined to get it. So I think I'm proud

of myself for getting it, but I think I'm still the same person." Conversely, when asked if education influenced a change in his identity, Darren described profound change as a result of earning a college degree:

I feel like I came from a family who never…no one's ever graduated from college. So I feel like I came from a low middle class – I'm still middle class and probably low, but more towards – I don't know – up to kind of the professional type career. And I've grown, and I've matured. My identity's changed. As far as the clothes I wear now, I would have dressed – I mean, I like wearing slacks, and I like wearing a button-down shirt and belt. That's the way I liked to dress before but I never had the opportunity because I was always in a factory. But who I am – yeah, it's changed. I have different goals. I wanted more of a hands-on type labor-type position growing up, and I did for a long time. Now I want to work with my mind more than my hands. So I've kind of changed my whole life. I never in a million years would have dreamed I would be 40 years old working in a in computers. I thought I'd be in law enforcement or something. So you never know what road you're going to take. So yeah, my identity's changed a lot.

For Darren, identity negotiation noticeably occurred within his new workplace. He found himself learning to communicate differently with his new co-workers:

I walked into here [new job], and they're talking all kinds of, you know language that I did not understand. So I was kind of like, doubting myself when I was first sitting in here for our first meeting, and they were talking back and forth. And I went from factory work into an actual profession that's really a career. And it's a professional profession, you know. So I had to really be able to articulate well and be able to

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communicate well – effectively – with everyone, especially at the level with their

knowledge.

Eleanor also described a pronounced change in view of self as a result of her transition. Rather than framing in terms of social mobility, for her it was more about discovering her capacity to accomplish important goals:

Well, it was really life changing. I mean, it was like going from being what you

would call an ordinary factory worker - because that's about what you were - a

factory worker, to being an educated person. But it's satisfying. It's really satisfying

to know that now I can accomplish something other than just making a piece of

furniture. Because a piece of furniture can't change the world, to where a child

maybe someday could change the world. It's satisfying to know that I can help

somebody else, that I can be a positive influence on somebody else who didn't think

they could do it. I can do that now to where when I worked in the factory, all I could

say was you CAN sand this piece of furniture. But now I can say, you CAN go back

to school. You CAN learn. And you CAN make a difference.

Vernon and Alan expressed the changes they experienced more in terms of their own personal growth and sense of personal fulfillment rather than as an identity change. When I asked them about their post-educational identities, both participants indicated feeling smart and gaining confidence but did not articulate a precise change in self, which perhaps placed them somewhere in the middle of the continuum between viewing themselves as workers or as professionals. Alan responded to the question this way: "I feel confident in myself now. Yea, because…well, I had a good job where I was at, and I trained operators for machines. Seems like what I'm doing now is more fulfilling. I'm more satisfied with…seems like now

I'm teaching people life skills." After graduating from college, Vernon had a newly found sense of accomplishment, but firm identity change was more difficult for him to pinpoint, perhaps suggesting that perhaps he was wrestling with competing identities to an extent:

Well, some I think. I'm not sure exactly what you mean, but I think it has some. I'm a different person probably from what I was when I worked in the furniture factory. Well, just a little more confident, and probably taking care of myself a little better. But I guess at the base, though, you're always still the same person, pretty much. I mean, I still enjoy the same things when I'm not working as I did before. So I don't know if you change your base. I don't know. Being able to do it was a confidence builder. And that don't mean I'm bragging in any way, but it gave me a sense of accomplishment, and being able to prove to a lot of people who didn't think…like I said, a lot of people think I'm dumber than I am…so I think I proved to some people that I could do it. And success, I guess. I'm back working, and while I know the organization has to cut back every once in a while, I feel more secure about the future than I have in a long time, as far as the work environment. I don't worry as much about going in today and getting laid off, what will I do next. And should something happen, there's many hospitals and drug stores. So I feel there's a need for people do this [pharmacy]. But I don't know how to summarize it all up. It was a big change – dramatic change for me, and I accomplished some things that I really didn't think I could do. Or wasn't sure I could do. So I was glad to see that I could. But there's a pretty big difference, if you think about it, from what I had done before to what I do now.

In varying ways and in differing degrees, all six participants described positive personal and professional changes through their transitions from manufacturing to college to re-employment.

Addressing the Research Questions

This study sought to understand how permanent job loss, the Trade Adjustment Assistance program, and community college education serve to inform decision-making experiences of dislocated workers experiencing significant life transition. Knowing how these elements merge to help students transition from work to college into a new career field may be helpful to government and college administrators charged with setting policy, designing programs, and managing resources. As the United States economy continues to change and the demand for high-skilled, high-tech jobs increases, higher education will continue to serve as a primary means for achieving economic stability. Emphasizing the importance of higher education, the current presidential administration has established a national goal for increasing the number of community college graduates by five million in the next ten years (Building America's Skills, 2010). Within the context of this focus on community college education, leaders need to more deeply understand how programs, policies, and practice must be planned and managed to achieve such vast results. Historically, research on the changing economy and the effects of the Trade Adjustment Assistance has been mostly quantitative and has not included the narratives of manufacturing employees most affected by change. Thus, this study was designed to add the narratives of dislocated workers to the knowledge base in an effort to broaden and enrich understanding of how TAA and higher education have affected lives.

The primary question of this study was, "How do adult learners, displaced from their jobs in traditional manufacturing due to that manufacturing moving overseas, who successfully completed a community college degree program and transitioned to a new career field, describe their experiences with accessing the community college using their federal Trade Adjustment Assistance education benefits?" Guiding questions, based upon the perceptions of dislocated workers were:

1. How did the federal Trade Adjustment Assistance program influence decision-making for dislocated workers as they transitioned from work to higher education?

2. In what ways did the community colleges they attended influence workers' adult student experience?

3. What personal and/or professional changes did dislocated workers experience as a result of the student experience?

4. What do dislocated workers' descriptions of their education experiences help us better understand about successfully addressing issues of significant job loss, re-education, and re-employment?

Following is a discussion of how the three major themes that emerged from participant narratives, predisposition to learning, opportunity, and competing identities, serve to answer to the research questions.

Participants in this study were successful in navigating significant life transition through the use of TAA benefits. They were successful primarily because they brought some predispositions to learning with them to college, and they saw college as an opportunity for learning something new. Predisposal to learning came primarily from the influences of

families that valued formal education, influences from school teachers who inspired students, and inner resources such as a love for learning, skill in reading, and strong work ethic. Because participants had been attracted to learning throughout their lives and/or had developed pride in working hard to achieve quality outcomes on the job, entering college through the TAA program proved to be an achievable task. In addition to their inclinations to learn, participants felt that TAA gave them an opportunity to go to college when they otherwise could not have taken that path. In summarizing her experience, Tracy very eloquently joins the notion of opportunity with the inner resource of hard work to advise others who may consider using TAA to go to college:

> If people say hey, I can go back to school. But it takes a lot of dedication to be able to do that and make it work. It's not the easiest, like, oh, I can go back to school and they're going to pay for it – pay for my books. Well…ok, but you've got to do your part to make it work, and that's tough.

As a result of being committed to learning and believing that education is important, overwhelmingly, all participants described their experiences with accessing the community college using their federal TAA education benefits as a life changing opportunity. Tracy grippingly answers the question this way:

> Wow. It's meant my life in some ways. Where I was at before, even if I would have stayed or not been laid off, there was no future. Where now I'm in something where I have the opportunity to make a decent living for myself and plan for my future. And it took going through school and working hard to get to that point.

Eleanor also describes her experience as life changing, saying "going from not even having a high school diploma to having an associate's degree in college was like…it was just life

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changing." Others described feeling more confident, competent, and capable as a result of transitioning into college and becoming re-employed. Four guiding questions related to the primary research question serve to highlight the specific reasons why the transition was life changing.

   Influence of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program. The primary influence of the TAA program in decision-making for the participants as they transitioned from work to higher education was the opportunity it offered them to earn a college degree. Most of the participants would have remained employed with their original manufacturing companies had they not been laid off, and after layoff, some preferred to immediately return to work. However, at the point the participants decided to pursue college, TAA was viewed as the mechanism through which they could attend. Unlike many of the dislocated workers I have helped in my role as a community college administrator, participants in this study relied very little on the list of academic programs TAA would support to make their career decisions. In fact, they either chose a field of personal interest to them or used tools like career interest assessments and conversation with college faculty and staff to make their decisions. Of all participants, Vernon considered TAA the most; even then, his dependence on the support of TAA in his decision-making was less than that of other workers I have encountered. In other words, for this group, TAA did not drive decisions about choice of college major.

   Across all stories, participants reported accessing TAA benefits with ease. In most situations, their companies provided them with sound information about the program at the time of layoff, which informed their next steps in activating support for education, insurance, unemployment pay, and travel. However, participants also reported that maintaining eligibility for benefits proved to be more difficult. Eligibility requirements included calling

in to the Employment Security Commission (ESC) periodically, meeting monthly with an ESC counselor, and submitting precise paperwork according to deadlines. Although these requirements were relatively easy to follow and meet, participants noticed incongruency between being entitled to their benefits and being made to work very hard to keep them, or in Eleanor's words, "beg for them." The hard work component was not related to maintaining satisfactory progress in college; rather it was associated with keeping the schedule for calls, meetings and paperwork, which often appeared to be arbitrary and useless. Darren and Eleanor wondered why they were required to meet with a counselor every month when the meetings lasted only minutes and were focused solely on the exchange of paperwork. Darren believed that taxpayer dollars could be better spent helping people who truly needed assistance finding jobs. In addition to being cumbersome and perhaps less than worthwhile, participants feared making a mistake in their paperwork. Mistakes were quite threatening to their eligibility; thus all participants diligently attended to their requirements. Additionally, while all participants except Annie had enough TAA funding to support them through the ends of their programs, graduation proved to be a stressful time, as TAA benefits promptly ended as participants crossed the stage. Darren and Eleanor both reflected that extending support beyond gradation to assist with job searching is a needed improvement to the program. Among other issues were periodic lapses in their benefit payments, inconsistent interpretation of TAA regulations, and pressure to complete degree programs within the time specified.

Participants did not allow these issues to influence their use of benefits or persistence in college. All six individuals were optimistic about the benefits of higher education from the outset and were determined to complete their programs, regardless of challenges presented

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by the TAA program. Their optimistic outlook somewhat contradicts prior research findings about adult learners entering higher education, indicating that often, adults are skeptical about the value and utility of education (Bamber & Tett, 2000). While they were unequivocally optimistic about what they would gain from education, some participants needed to "warm up" (Alexander, Bozick, & Entwisle, 2008) to the idea of going to college. Eleanor, Vernon, and Darren all initially set short-term academic goals. For Eleanor and Vernon, earning a GED was the only goal they wanted to achieve in the beginning. Darren set out to take a few classes for personal interest. After all three experienced academic success and received support and encouragement from faculty members, they decided to pursue associate's degree programs. Tracy's warming-up experience was a bit different. She planned to pursue an associate's degree but wanted to thoroughly prepare herself academically first. She thus remained enrolled in an academic skills preparatory class longer than required because she needed time to adjust to college. For these participants, proving to themselves that they could learn was an important step in their progression toward degree completion.

Influence of the Community College. The community colleges participants attended were influential in their entry and progression into higher education primarily through the support and encouragement given by faculty and staff. When asked about their enrollment experiences, participants could not recall anything memorable. Alan's description of the enrollment process echoes descriptions given by others: "School, I guess, like most schools, was set up to handle it really well. You weren't made to feel uncomfortable because you were on Trade. It was a good process." Vernon's experience was similar: "Seems like it went by pretty quick. It was fairly easy getting enrolled. It wasn't something that really

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stressed me out trying to get it done." Darren described his enrollment experience a bit differently. He was quickly routed to an advisor who offered minimal guidance about the program he chose, and in reflecting upon that encounter, Darren suggested that colleges establish solid counseling practice early in the enrollment process. Consistent with prior research about adult students, faculty played significant roles in supporting the participants (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Kasworm, 2008; MacKinnin-Slaney, 1994; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Sorey & Duggan, 2008). All six participants shared stories about how faculty taught them study skills, inspired them to love their disciplines, and gave them opportunities for employment. Annie recalled her experience this way: "I think my instructors were great instructors. They were all good to me. Supported me – well, the community college did."

Additionally, all participants became re-employed through internship experiences in which they were engaged during coursework. In that way, colleges were extremely influential in not only preparing students academically but also giving them exposure to and practical experience with their new career fields.

Personal and Professional Change. As a result of being college students and completing associate's degrees, participants experienced personal and professional identity changes. Four of the six participants describe change, either directly or indirectly, along three continuums: former versus new approach to career choice, intellectual versus manual labor, and worker versus professional identity. Two participants, Annie and Tracy, reported no identity change as a result of going to college and beginning new work but did associate their experience with a sense of accomplishment. Both were proud of themselves for completing degrees, as Annie described: "I'm better now that I have a degree, but I'm not

going to stop learning. I know whatever job I get I'll be able to do it. I have confidence in myself. And if I can't, I'll learn it!"

Identity change occurred along the continuums for all other participants, leaving some with a sense of competing identities (Lucey & Walkerdine, 2008) as they transitioned from past to present. In terms of making career decisions as they began college, Eleanor, Vernon, and Tracy made decisions based upon former ways of thinking about work. They used familiar objective criteria, such as salary and benefits, predictable working conditions, and job stability as the foundation for considering academic programs in college. These criteria were very similar to those used when the three participants first decided to work in manufacturing many years ago; manufacturing work was stable and offered acceptable compensation. This thought process worked for Vernon and Tracy but not for Eleanor, who, in a state of flux between past and present, discovered that enjoying work is just as worthy of consideration as other criteria. At the other end of the continuum, Annie, Alan, and Darren based their career decisions on factors such as life satisfaction and personal fulfillment. Rather than chose a field of work for the sake of convenience, they decided to pursue areas of personal interest to them. This shift represented a significant change in views of work and its relationship to quality of life.

Competing identities emerged more prominently for some participants once they began their new jobs. Along the continuum of intellectual versus manual labor, Vernon and Darren felt torn between a former worker identity associated with repetitive, manual work that was less stressful and their new identities associated with greater intellectual work and more stress. Both participants iterated that although they appreciated some aspects of their new intellectual roles, compared to manual work, their current jobs were more stressful. Vernon

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and Darren admitted to wishing they were back in manufacturing just to escape their current stress.

The worker versus professional identity continuum was the area of most defined change for Darren and Eleanor. When Eleanor first began her new job working in childcare, she believed it would be similar to her manufacturing work; she thought there would be a defined routine that she would perform repetitively every day. She quickly found that the manufacturing model does not apply in working with children; thus her identity shifted from being a worker of rote activities to a professional who influences human life. Prior to college, she described herself as "an ordinary factory worker." Eleanor now sees herself as someone who is capable of doing significant things with her life. In talking about her identity change, she described it in terms of attitude: "It's changing your attitude from a have-to-do to a can-do-it." For Darren, the shift from worker to professional was substantial; he believes he has entered a new social class as a result of higher education:

> It's been a change. I went from factory work to student, and that was a big change, and from student to a whole new career. The anxiety was so high on me leaving college – one, stepping into the world and trying to find a job, much less one in a career field where you walk in the door and say I have no experience, hire me. That was a scary moment – big. Probably THE biggest. So I went from a factory job where I was kind of down here, and I was scared to death going into a career that I'd never been into – never had been exposed to – which is a business field, where you're meeting very intelligent people, and you're dealing with CEOs of 30,000 people. So I feel like, no, I'm not at their level, but I'm closer after going to college as far as being able to communicate effectively with them versus how I was before. So

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college has improved my life as far as improved who I am. I just feel more educated

and can make better choices now.

Along this continuum, Alan and Vernon were perhaps positioned in the middle, unsure about

whether their identities have changed but aware of some personal change. In discussing

identity in relationship to his new career, Alan said, "I feel like I'm a teacher." Vernon

described discovering his inner academic: "I found out that I can still learn. I just see myself

not maybe as much of a dummy."

    Understanding Gained. Dislocated workers' descriptions of their education experiences

help us better understand several things about successfully addressing issues of significant

job loss, re-education, and re-employment. Table 3 below summarizes how the success

stories of the six study participants contribute to understanding of job dislocation and life

transition through higher education.

Table 3

Understanding Gained

Point of Learning	Description
Motivation and experience produce sustained ambition	A space between layoff and first decision where a "warming up" experience to college could help workers adjust to life change
Transition from job dislocation to re-employment through higher education results in identity change	• Developing student identity • Changing views of work and self • Developing a professional identity
Support and encouragement from faculty, staff and counselors are substantial factors in navigating transition.	• Empathy • Enthusiasm for work • Study skills and additional assistance • Early career counseling and advice • Recommendations for employment • Relevant program requirements • Flexibility in program administration

First, as research by Alexander, Bozick, and Entwisle (2008) and the findings of this study indicate, motivation coupled with experience produces sustained ambition. Dislocated workers enter higher education as a result of crisis and life transition. Upon becoming permanently laid off, workers are suddenly faced with making significant life decisions rather quickly. Between the point of layoff and the first decision point, there is a space that can be filled with intentional guidance designed to bolster motivation for learning by addressing emotional issues associated with transition. Narratives of the six successful dislocated workers who participated in this study have demonstrated that the concept of warming up to college by actually trying it creates both the experience and motivation parts of the equation. Before workers wrestle with the decision to go to college or seek immediate re-employment, providing opportunities for them to identify predispositions for learning, view change as an opportunity, and see themselves as learners is vital to attracting

individuals to the TAA program and ultimately to college. Offering exposure to academia in safe, low-stake ways may help some dislocated workers who are considering college as an option gain experience with college, motivation, and adapt to change at the beginning of their transition when it is vitally important. It may also increase usage of the TAA program, which could in turn positively influence the rate of economic shift. If states strive to achieve President Obama's goal to increase community college graduation rates (Building America's Skills, 2010), doing more to ease transition for dislocated workers by facilitating a warm-up to college would address a gap in the process of transition. This could be more successfully achieved through coordination among employers, workforce development agencies, and colleges in designing and implementing such an intervention. Some adjustments to TAA may also be helpful in facilitating transition into college for dislocated workers who choose an academic path for re-employment. Time limits for benefits could be periodically examined to determine how to accommodate college and employment exploration. Exploring flexible definitions of what it means to engage in academic exploration could also be a useful in helping dislocated workers consider and ease into college. Additionally, the academic programs TAA supports could be re-examined periodically to ensure flexibility and relevance within a changing economy. Such a consideration may, in turn, give TAA the look and feel of a 21st century worker assistance program that begins to emphasize the personal development of individuals in addition to quantifiable outcomes, as Sumner (2008) believes may be more fitting for current economic times. Changes like these may be most beneficial to dislocated worker who, like the six participants in this study, are predisposed to learning and view TAA as an opportunity. Whether such amenities would draw more interest in the education benefit of TAA could be a question for future research.

Secondly, the transition from manufacturing work to college to a new career field can elicit individual identity transformation. As several participants discovered, seeing themselves as capable learners and adopting a student identity proved to be an important step in deciding to seek associate's degrees. Upon degree completion, earning a credential changed their views of work and self to varying degrees. Some allowed change to happen, creating and accepting an identity makeover, while others resisted change or were mostly unaffected in terms of overall identity. Often, earning a college degree is associated with assuming a professional identity. Adapting to being professional can be challenging, particularly for those who have little experience socializing or working in professional environments. As Darren discussed, he felt great anxiety after beginning his new job because he had no previous exposure to a professional work environment. As the narratives of study participants demonstrate, the paths dislocated workers travel from education to re-employment are filled with complexities; there is more to the transition than becoming re-employed in a short period of time. Thus, in order to fully create a modern, sustainable, technological and service-oriented workforce, identity shift resulting from the transition could be considered in the design and implementation of worker assistance programs. Overall, institutions provide assistance with career skills such as interviewing and resume writing, but coaching adult students on the possibility of identity transformation is somewhat lacking in practice. The traditional approach to transitioning students of all ages from college to the workforce involves teaching skills that have a direct relationship to obtaining a job. In other words, if students know how to construct a resume, write a cover letter, and present themselves well in an interview, job offers should be forthcoming. However, successfully adapting to an unfamiliar work environment and negotiating a new identity may

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be just as important to achieving a successful transition and feeling satisfied with a new career field. Findings of this study suggest that intentionally addressing how the view of self might change for dislocated workers as they transition through college into a different career fields could be a fruitful area for further research.

Lastly, the narratives of this study confirm the well-established fact that support and encouragement are substantial factors in helping dislocated workers succeed in times of transition. Across all six stories, participants frequently described the invaluableness of the support received from counselors, faculty, and staff. Support came in the form of empathy, which was particularly appreciated when delivered by employers and Employment Security Commission counselors, enthusiastic help, teaching study skills, pats on the back, career conversations, recommendations for awards and employment, and extra academic assistance in areas like math and writing. As with all students, but especially with the more fragile dislocated worker population, support could mean the difference between abandoning or completing a college degree. Thus, it is incumbent upon colleges, workforce agencies, and policy-makers to ensure that support is not restricted by overly-burdensome or irrelevant program requirements. An example of allowing for such reflexivity would be giving Employment Security Commission counselors the full authority to forgive mistakes in TAA paperwork if forgiveness will allow the student to continue to benefit from the program without jeopardizing credibility of TAA. Another example might be to allow local ESC agencies to extend TAA time limits if students find themselves in unforeseen situations beyond their control that require a temporary leave of absence from college. Annie had this very experience and was informed that her benefits ended, even though she only had one class left to complete her degree. In a climate where degree completion has been named a

national priority, it appears that ending benefits for a student who has completed all but one class in an associate's degree program and needs a short time extension due to unforeseen circumstances sabotages the very goal of the TAA program. In conclusion, support in the form of encouragement and teaching alone is inadequate; support must also be made possible through flexibility in policy and practice if adult students are to comprehensively reap the benefits.

Summary

Three major themes were present and interwoven into each participant's construction of their life transition experience. The following chapter presents a discussion of the themes in relationship to literature on TAA, adult life transition and adult student identity formation. Suggestions for federal worker assistance and community college policy and practice are also discussed with implications for future economic development.

Chapter 5
Analysis and Conclusion

Introduction

Through exploration of life stories related to work and education, the purpose of this study was to determine how North Carolina workers, dislocated from traditional manufacturing jobs due to industry moving overseas, have successfully experienced the transition from job loss to higher education to a new career field utilizing their Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits. Using narrative research methodology, the experiences of dislocated workers who navigated a significant life transition through community college education were described and analyzed in an effort to better understand how and why they were successful. This qualitative study was designed and conducted through the conceptual frameworks of social constructivism, Merriam's (2005) notion of transitions, and Kasworm's (2008) notion of adult identity formation. Through these lenses, the stories of six dislocated workers paint pictures of success, helping colleges and agencies more deeply understand what is important to individuals in career transition. Three themes emerged from analysis of participant stories: pre-disposition to learning, opportunity, and competing identities. This chapter presents an analysis of the findings in the context of the conceptual frameworks. Implications for agencies, colleges, and federal policy concerning dislocated workers are also presented along with study limitations and suggestions for further research.

Overview of Study

Narrative life stories of six North Carolina dislocated manufacturing workers served as the foundation for this qualitative study. Previous research about trade-affected dislocated workers returning to employment has been mostly quantitative; this study sought to bring a

qualitative element to the research base, as the lived experiences of individuals can help us better understand how to successfully address issues of significant job loss, re-education, and re-employment.

Discussion of Findings

Three intertwined conceptual frameworks guided the design and interpretation of this narrative study. Social constructivism posits that objective reality does not exist outside individual experience and that humans actively create their own realities (Lee & Greene, 1999). Cultural, social, and historical contexts are the means by which individuals create reality (Creswell, 2003; Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Lee & Green, 1999). This perspective was important to the study, as previous research has attempted to define reality of worker dislocation and re-employment through more objective, empirical means. Socially constructed meaning, and the knowledge to be gained from it, has been under-represented in the literature. The six dislocated manufacturing workers who participated in this study are unique individuals who constructed meaning of a life transition through their own belief systems and knowledge. While quantitative data regarding dislocated worker transition from manufacturing to other employment identifies significant economic trends, meaning from lived experience illuminates a more complete understanding of how individuals are adapting to new economic conditions.

Merriam's (2005) concept of adult life transitions and Kasworm's (2008) notion of adult identity formation were woven with the epistemology of social constructivism to broaden the framework for the study. Merriam's (2005) research with adult students found that most often, adults enter higher education as a result of a life transition. Similarly, Kasworm's (2008) research with adult students found that adults tend to enter higher education as a result

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of crisis and begin to question their identities as they transition into academia. Previous quantitative research provides data regarding the number of dislocated workers using TAA benefits for higher education, degree completion rates, and re-employment rates (Benedict & VanderHart, 1997; Decker & Corson, 1995; Marcal, 2001; Osterman, 2005). However, the meaning of the college experience for dislocated workers and the personal changes they experience as a result of higher education has not been as well researched. Thus, to add dimension to the research base, it was important for this study to not only explore the actual transitions of participants, but to also explore how participants describe personal change as a result. Findings in this study were consistent with the findings of Merriam (2005) and Kasworm (2008), as all six participants entered college as a result of life change and negotiated their comfort levels with academia and transforming identities during and after their enrollment. While some participants fully embraced the idea of college right away, others needed time to accept college as a next step in life and adjust to being students. Through the process, participants questioned their identities to varying degrees. In the end, some described significant change in self as a result of education, while some reported maintaining their same sense of self.

Social constructivism served as the epistemological framework for this study, while Merriam's (2005) adult transition research and Kasworm's (2008) adult student research served to focus the interpretation of how dislocated workers constructed meaning from their education experience. Study results add depth to the current knowledge base regarding dislocated workers, their use of TAA benefits, and their return to the workforce, as the qualitative perspective in this field of research is lacking. Three themes explaining how participants constructed their life transitions and were successful in college emerged from

participant stories and will be presented in relationship to the literature on TAA and adult

learners. The themes of predisposition to learning, opportunity, and competing identities will

be discussed as orientations that facilitated successful life transitions and in terms of how this

knowledge can be useful to colleges and the agencies responsible for guiding dislocated

workers through change.

Predisposition to Learning. Predisposition to learning refers to naturally developed

characteristics, beliefs, or experiences participants possessed that eased their transition into

academic life. These predispositions came from the early, positive influences of parents or

school personnel and/or from participants' own personal inner resources such as love of

learning, affinity for and skill in reading, and strong work ethic. This theme emerged in

many places along the continuum of participant life stories from childhood to present day and

were described as academic achievement in early schooling, motivation and achievement in

the workplace, and dedication to their academic programs as adults.

Prior research about adults transitioning into higher education focuses on why they enter,

transformations in beliefs about education, and the types of collegiate environments that

foster success (Kasworm, 2005, 2008; Merriam, 2005; Sargent & Scholossberg, 1988;

Simmons, 1995). Specifically, prior research demonstrates that adult students tend to enter

college as a result of crisis or transition and cite support from faculty as a significant factor in

their success (Kasworm, 2005, 2008; Merriam, 2005; Sargent & Scholossberg, 1988;

Simmons, 1995). The stories of all six participants in this study support these prior findings.

All participants pursued an associate's degree because they had been permanently released

from their long-time manufacturing jobs and believed college to be their best avenue toward

re-employment. With Darren as the only exception, all participants stated that they would

have otherwise remained in their jobs indefinitely; thus, enrollment in a community college program was indeed the result of a life transition or crisis. Across all six stories about their college experiences, participants passionately described how support from college faculty and staff and support from their Employment Security Commission counselors positively influenced their persistence.

Predisposition to learning as a theme may be an addition to the literature base on adult learners. Prior research examined in preparation for this study did not investigate intrinsic dispositions for learning that either positively or negatively influenced adult student outcomes. In contrast to prior qualitative studies by Bamber and Tett (2000) and Kasworm (2003) on how adults reconcile meaning of formalized learning and knowledge with their lives outside of academia, participants in this study placed faith in academia as a pathway to employment, as Tracy described: "I knew this was important. I knew this was my life. I knew I had to make this work." Consistent with both prior studies, all participants wondered if they would fit into college and questioned their academic abilities in the beginning; however, none expressed skepticism in developing "book knowledge," being resistant to formal learning, or doubting the expertise of faculty, as did participants in prior studies. Rather, participants accepted entry into academia as their next steps in life and did not describe negotiating and resolving conflicting beliefs about formal education during their college enrollment. Thus, within the picture of acceptance and faith in formal education, predisposition to learning emerged as a salient factor in the academic success of six dislocated workers.

Early influences and inner resources were two aspects of an orientation toward learning that facilitated the participants' successful college experiences. As could be reasonably

expected, the two participants whose families highly valued formal education, had prior college experience and entered community college with the intention of earning an associate's degree from the outset. For them, and for the other participants whose families placed less value on formal education, inner resources such as loving to learn, strong reading skills, and solid work ethic served to facilitate their academic experiences. Alan, Annie, and Eleanor all described a natural interest in learning and shared stories of how their inquisitive tendencies led to a thorough knowledge base and advancement within the workplace. When they decided to go to college after being laid off, the chance to learn something new was exciting for them. Reading was a significant factor in the success of Vernon and Eleanor in particular, as neither completed high school. Both participants began their education journeys by earning a GED and were surprised at how quickly they progressed through the program. Both attributed their success to liking to read and having well-developed skills. For all participants, but especially for Tracy and Darren, who described themselves as marginal students in their teenage years, well developed work ethics served to help them remain determined and focused on their studies. The same was true for Vernon, who described his first conversation about the Pharmacy Technology program with a faculty member and said, "I assured her that I was going to give my best… ." All participants, regardless of the level of formal education completed prior to entering community college and the strength of their academic skills, integrated themselves into the academic environment by making extensive use of learning resources beyond the requirements of their courses. Attending tutoring, engaging in additional reading and library research, and establishing firm study schedules were strategies representative of how work ethic helped them successfully complete associate's degrees. Thus, assimilation into academia, through

early positive influences about formal education and strong inner resources, coupled with support from faculty and counselors, facilitated successful degree completion for all participants. This is consistent with prior research on adult student persistence (Kasworm, 2005; Simmons, 1995; Sorey & Duggan, 2008) that found support and social and academic integration to be significant factors in adult student persistence.

The participants' stories of entering college and the resources they used to successfully complete associate's degrees, when there were "no structural reasons why they should succeed" (Lucey & Walkerdine, 2003), support prior research findings about adult students and add the notion of predisposition to learning to the knowledge base. Research has been conducted regarding influences on adult student persistence and how adults make meaning of formal education. Thus, professionals in higher education have a significant knowledge base from which to develop policy and practice in order to create the best possible learning environments for adult students. However, at least within the scope of the literature review for this study, exploration of the natural learning strengths adults bring to higher education was only minimally addressed. By developing more understanding of how naturally developed learning skills and tendencies can facilitate success in academia, higher education professionals may be able to design additional support mechanisms to help ease the transition into college for adults in crisis.

Opportunity. Participants viewed their layoff and going to college through the use of TAA benefits as an opportunity. For all participants, the primary influence of the TAA program in decision-making was the opportunity it provided for higher education. Resoundingly, participant attitudes about going to college were optimistic, which allowed them to see their layoffs as more of a positive than a negative life change. All participants

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viewed TAA as a vehicle for opportunity; however, some initially set short-term education goals and warmed up (Alexander, Bozich, & Entwisle, 2008) to the idea of pursuing longer term education programs after experiencing some success. The opportunity TAA provides for education was a prominent theme across all six life stories about transitioning from work to college.

All six participants were permanently laid off from traditional manufacturing jobs in North Carolina due to forces of globalization that have made it more economical for production in furniture, textiles, plastics, and other industries to relocate overseas. Globalization has resulted in a significant reduction in manufacturing employment over the past ten years, which has left many workers in a quandary regarding re-employment. One of the most significant concerns has been worker adjustment to a changing economy where traditional manufacturing job skills may no longer be relevant. The federally funded TAA program is designed to help dislocated workers become re-employed by providing income, insurance, travel, and education benefits for a period of time after permanent layoff.

At the time of their permanent layoffs, all participants in this study had spent most of their working lives in manufacturing. Generally, they all chose to work in manufacturing early in their lives because jobs were plentiful and easy to secure, pay and benefits were good, or going to work in manufacturing was simply expected. Some had weathered periods of layoff during their careers but were always called back to work. When permanent layoff occurred, all described feelings of sadness about losing their jobs and uncertainty about what to do next. Through different means, each participant concluded that college offered the best chance of re-employment in a changing economy.

My own personal experience as a community college administrator helping dislocated workers with decisions about college led me to conduct this study. Most of the workers I have talked with over the years experienced difficulty beginning college and expressed frustration with obtaining and using TAA benefits. Thus, my belief approaching this study was that regardless of the good intentions of TAA, its requirements often make it difficult for dislocated workers to enter college and complete an education program. Evaluative research about the TAA program conducted by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and other agencies and researchers (Aheron, 2004; Estes, Schweke, & Lawrence, 2002; McAtee & Benshoff, 2006) confirmed my beliefs, as findings illuminated inadequacies in support provided to workers and problems with program administration. I conducted this study expecting similar findings; however, I found just the opposite.

All six participants believed that the TAA program made education possible when it otherwise would not have been. Darren began college courses prior to being laid off, planning to learn for personal interest and perhaps complete a certificate program. When he was laid off and learned that he qualified for TAA benefits, he said, "when I got the opportunity to go for my degree, I decided to go for my degree." Likewise, Alan recalls being excited about returning to college: "I wanted to learn something new – a new opportunity." Previous evaluative literature reviewed for this study (Aheron, 2004; Estes, Schweke, & Lawrence, 2002; GAO 2006) demonstrated that problems exist with the support TAA provides and the administration of the program. Particularly, the literature consistently pointed out that time frames for degree completion are sometimes inadequate and that acceptable training options were too limiting, ultimately forcing workers to make career decisions based upon what would be funded rather than upon their interests. The literature

also showed that misalignment of TAA time lines and college timelines made it very difficult for workers to use their benefits. Contradicting these previous findings, all six participants described the process of obtaining TAA benefits as easy. Alan said, "it was a good transition – smooth, no problems at all." Further, the participants also reported no problems with aligning community college program start dates with TAA time lines, even for Annie and Alan who did not begin college immediately after layoff. Additionally, all six participants had enough TAA funding to support them through degree completion with the exception of Annie, who had to drop a course due to extenuating personal circumstances. Although Vernon, Eleanor, and Tracy began their college experiences in Basic Skills programs, they were able to complete their degrees within the time allotted by TAA. Lastly, the only influence of the TAA program in their decision-making was the opportunity it gave them for going to college. All participants made their career decisions based upon their interests and were not driven to choose a program solely because TAA would support it. Of everyone, Vernon was the participant who considered the support of TAA the most in his decision-making, as he entered college with few ideas about what to study and vacillated between two very different programs before choosing pharmacy as his next field of work.

Although participants described the process of accessing and using TAA benefits as easy, some problems related to program administration were identified. Particularly, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the periodic meetings they were required to have with Employment Security Commission counselors. Darren and Eleanor vehemently described the meetings as time wasting and useless, as the only objective was to prove they had been continuously enrolled in coursework. Darren firmly believed that the meetings made poor use of human and monetary resources that could be employed to serve individuals who

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needed help with finding a job. Because the meetings appeared to have little value, when added to several other compliance measures such as calling in and submitting accurate paperwork, Eleanor felt as though she was having to "beg" for her benefits and likened the process to "being at the welfare office." She pointed out the contradiction between being told she was entitled to benefits and then feeling as though she had to "beg" for them. Although this particular issue was not specifically addressed in the literature about TAA, it is reflective of the collection of issues that serve as barriers for dislocated workers identified in previous studies, such as time limits for training, training enrollment deadlines, and inadequate funding for the education/training benefit (GAO, 2004, 2006). Ensuring that processes are necessary, meaningful, and efficiently managed, and that recipients of TAA benefits are treated respectfully in the administration of the program are two important steps agencies can take to strengthen the value and attractiveness of the TAA program for dislocated workers.

Other problems participants described were related to periodic delays in benefit payments, having to submit perfect paperwork at precisely the right time, and noticing differences in the interpretation of TAA education benefits by counselors. Tracy believed that her medical program of study was supported by TAA because her counselor made extra effort to have it approved. Some of Tracy's classmates in her Basic Skills program were not approved for the same program because their counselors did not offer to seek approval. This inconsistency is similar to those identified in prior research about the administration of TAA (Aheron, 2004; Estes, Schweke, & Lawrence, 2002; GAO 2006). Several participants talked about how the paperwork and other requirements were simple enough to complete but were overly crucial to maintaining TAA eligibility. Eleanor described mistakes as detrimental to eligibility:

"getting it wasn't as difficult as keeping it. It was like, you could make one little mistake, and you could lose it." All participants were diligent about managing the compliance requirements for TAA but felt that the multitude of tasks imposed on beneficiaries could be a barrier for older workers who did not have adequate reading or management skills.

Other issues identified, such as the pressure of the time frame to complete degree programs and the end of TAA benefits at the point of graduation, were described as worrisome or problematic but did not present a barrier. Vernon was most concerned about the time line for completing his degree, as he worried about the possibility of failing and repeating classes. Tracy described having to be a full-time student every semester so that she didn't waste any time within her allotted TAA time line. For Darren and Eleanor, graduation was particularly stressful, as their benefits ended at that time and they did not find jobs right away. Darren cited this as the largest problem with TAA and recommended that benefits be extended beyond graduation to support individuals during the job search process. Although participants noticed or experienced some problems with the TAA program, most were described as minor and relatively easy to work around. Perhaps because they saw TAA as providing an opportunity for higher education and were optimistic about achieving re-employment through education, the participants were able to work through minor issues rather than allowing problems to significantly influence their decision-making.

Consistent with adult student research emphasizing the value of mattering and belonging to adults in transition (Sargent & Scholossberg, 1988), participants in this study described how positive support from their companies and Employment Security Commission counselors helped them learn about TAA and ease the transition into college. When their human resource offices showed empathy during layoff and counselors were excited about

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helping them go to school, their plans for education became more firm. As Sargent and Scholossberg (1998) iterate, it is often the little things others do to offer support that eases transition and builds confidence. A gesture as seemingly small as a counselor being excited about plans makes mountains of difference to adults in transition. Embracing this approach will be important for companies, agencies, and colleges that continue to assist dislocated workers with planning and decision-making.

After being permanently laid off, all six participants decided that college was the best path to re-employment. The decision to pursue an associate's degree was firm for Annie and Alan from the beginning of their return to college. Darren, Eleanor, Vernon, and Tracy, however, experienced a warming-up period to the idea of pursuing degree programs. In a study of how high school students think about college, Alexander, Bozick, and Entwisle (2008) found that some students "warm up" to the idea of being in college by trying classes and experiencing success; once they achieved passing grades, students wanted to continue their studies. Consistent with this research, all four participants needed to warm up to the idea of pursuing college before they committed to a longer term program. Eleanor and Vernon began by earning a GED, which was their only academic goal in the beginning. The ease with which Eleanor and Vernon completed their GEDs surprised them, and upon discovering their capacity for academic work, both set new goals for completing associate's degrees. Tracy started college by participating in an academic skills refresher class. She was advised by her instructors of her readiness to begin a degree program earlier rather than later, but she chose to remain in the refresher program a while longer to mentally prepare for further study. Darren took some classes before his layoff purely for personal interest. When he connected with an instructor and earned high grades in the classes, he wanted to continue. As Darren,

Vernon, Eleanor, and Tracy began their degree programs and earned high grades in their early classes, they all wanted to earn high grades in every class. Each of these experiences is consistent with research conducted by O'Donnell and Tobbel (2007) about adult students transitioning into higher education. The researchers found that initially, adult students experienced anxiety about fitting into the college environment, but once they became more comfortable in the classroom, a student self-image began to form, which is precisely the same experience for all six participants in this study. The participant's experiences are also consistent with quantitative research about adult student persistence indicating progress as the strongest predictor of persistence (Simmons, 1995).

The concept of warming up to college is important to assisting dislocated workers faced with significant career decisions. For the participants in this study, and as indicated by previous research (Bamber & Tett, 2000), entering college is characterized by uncertainty. Creating opportunities for dislocated workers to try college in small, safe, low-impact ways, such as non-credit college preparatory classes or short-term college orientation programs, may help more individuals see themselves as capable learners and view higher education as a worthwhile opportunity. As previous empirical research has shown, few dislocated workers use their TAA education benefit, and of those who do, most enroll in short-term programs (Beneria & Santiago, 2001; GAO, 2006). If attainment of higher education is truly one of the answers to maintaining economic prosperity, perhaps more could be done to encourage dislocated workers to go to college. Employers, agencies, and colleges would be wise to understand that many dislocated workers may need to warm up to the idea of college and design pathways to education that are easier for them to try and accept. Such an approach, modeled after the research of Alexander, Bozick, and Entwisle (2008) and the findings of this

study showing that motivation coupled with experience produces sustained ambition, would require adjustments to TAA, such as allowing a trial period for education.

If research has shown TAA to be somewhat inadequate in supporting dislocated workers, and participants in this study had few problems obtaining or using benefits, the question became, why was navigating TAA easier for them than it perhaps has been for others? The fact that all six participants viewed college as an opportunity, were optimistic about how college would help them prepare for employment, and were predisposed to learning may have given them an advantage over other dislocated workers with less enthusiasm for learning or going to school.

Competing Identities. Once participants graduated from college and became employed in their new career fields, four of the six found themselves situated between a previous identity and a newly forming sense of self. The notion of competing identities emerged in a study conducted by Lucey and Walkerdine (2003) about working class girls who attended college and subsequently negotiated a professional identity. For participants in this study, differences in beliefs and behaviors associated with former and future lives produced some questions about identity, which appeared directly or indirectly along three continuums in their stories: former versus new approach to career choice, intellectual versus manual labor, and worker versus professional identity. Two participants described little change in identity as a result of going to college as adults, while other described some or very pronounced change. Competing identities in former and recent decision-making processes about work establish context for how the participants describe changes in their work and career identity after becoming re-employed.

Alan and Darren had inklings of experiences with competing identities before they left manufacturing. Alan had earned a bachelor's degree while working in manufacturing and talked about how his co-workers perceived him to be overqualified for the job because of his education. Darren, who never saw himself as a long-term manufacturing employee, believed that he was capable of more than repetitive work even though he did not have formal education beyond high school. For other participants, experience with competing identities seemed to be more indirect and was first mentioned in their stories of choosing to go to college and selecting a program of study.

Prior to college, all participants chose to work in manufacturing somewhat by default or for convenience purposes. After significant economic shift and permanent layoff, they were suddenly faced with making more conscious career decisions. This shift in the way decisions about work had to be made placed some participants in flux between using former and new thinking processes to choose a career direction, perhaps raising questions about the meaning and purpose of work in one's life. Alan, Annie, and Darren, relying upon their prior academic preparation, aptitude, and views of opportunity seemed to experience less flux. Seemingly, the three participants transitioned into a new thought pattern rather fluidly by basing career choice on broader criteria such as personal interest and life satisfaction rather than on more objective criteria formerly used in decision-making, such as pay and benefits. They discarded some criteria of the past and pursued fields primarily because of personal interest and life satisfaction.

Eleanor, Vernon, and Tracy, however, relied on familiar ways of thinking to make their career decision. Vernon and Tracy chose their college majors based upon criteria familiar to them: job stability, adequate pay, predictable working conditions, and absence of manual

labor. These criteria served them well; thus, issues of competing identities did not surface

for them in the decision-making process early in college. Eleanor initially sought a career

field that would allow her to work with her hands, as she was most familiar with hands-on

work. However, in the first week of the program, she discovered that an outdated decision-

making process was no longer useful, as the program she chose was not the right fit for her.

Thus for a brief time, she was in flux between former and new thought processes about work.

She ultimately chose another program based on its hand-on nature and the prospect of

enjoying the work. The approach of these participants in choosing college majors is

consistent with prior empirical research conducted about adult student persistence and

retention (Simmons, 1995; Sorey & Duggan, 2008), which found that income potential of the

pursued occupation and the utility of the degree programs were two significant factors in

persistence.

Another place in their stories in which participants experienced competing identities to

some degree emerged when they began working in their new career fields. Comparing their

new jobs to the old, all participants described being trusted (as opposed to being closely

observed), being viewed by supervisors as competent people, using their minds rather than

their hands, and knowing that their work has humanistic value. These differences were

described as satisfiers and appreciated aspects of their jobs. Eleanor was surprised to find

herself thinking of her new work as more than a job. When she first began working with

children in a child development center, she pictured a typical day as being similar to her

manufacturing days: receive the children in the morning, feed them, diaper them, send them

home, and do it again the next day. After a while, she discovered that being involved in the

lives of children made her work more than just a job. Suddenly, she was influencing the

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growth and development of people, which was a new view of work for her. However, a less positive difference was stress, primarily related to using the intellectual and humanistic aspects of their work. In comparing stress levels between their different work environments, Darren and Vernon indicated feeling torn between wanting a life of less cognitive work with lower stress and a life of more meaningful, intellectual work with more stress. In a state of negotiating competing identities, they appreciated many things about their new jobs but missed working in a less stressful environment where human life was not at stake every day on the job.

Finally, view of identity as worker versus professional was another continuum participants negotiated as they transitioned into new jobs. Within the range of no change (maintaining worker identity) to significant change (view self as a professional), four of the six participants experienced some overall identity change. For Tracy and Annie, the life transition had little effect on their views of work and self as a worker. However, prompted by a friend to think differently, Tracy briefly negotiated the prospect of adopting a new work identity as she applied for jobs. The dilemma came in the form of determining whether she was applying for a "job" or a "position." The term position carried implications for a professional identity that she was unwilling to accept. She explained, "Like I've told several people – I don't want a career. I want a job where I can make a decent salary, and that's it. I'm not looking for positions and titles and all that." At the other end of the continuum, Darren and Eleanor described profound identity change associated with viewing self as a professional. For Darren, earning a degree meant social class mobility, interacting with more educated people in more sophisticated ways, and even dressing differently. Similarly, Eleanor describes transforming from an "ordinary factory worker" to an "educated person."

As an educated person, Eleanor now sees herself as an individual who can accomplish significant tasks and contribute to the lives of others. In the middle of the worker versus professional identity continuum, Vernon and Alan described the changes they experienced in terms of personal growth and fulfillment rather than as noticeable identity change. Both participants indicated feeling smart and confident as a result of earning a degree but could not express a precise change in self. Identity change associated with achievement, as described by Vernon and Alan, is consistent with prior research by O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) and Kasworm (2003, 2005) who found that a student identity evolved into one of achievement as adult students progressed through degree programs.

The stories of how all six participants transitioned from college to work and began to see themselves differently, either through their decision-making, the type of work they perform, or how they classify themselves in their jobs are consistent with research by Bamber and Tett (2000) about transformation that occurred for adult students as they progressed through an education program. The researchers found that toward the end of education, participants negotiated a transition labeled "becoming professional," in which education becomes less of a "ticket" to employment and more associated with an identity that may be new for adults with little previous professional experiences. Interestingly, participants in this study knew that education was their best avenue for re-employment, but none viewed their college programs as tickets. In fact, several participants described understanding fairly early in the education process that there were no guarantees to finding a job; thus, doing their best in college was of the utmost importance.

Although research has been conducted about adult student identity, it appears that more could be done to explore identity change associated with the re-employment of dislocated

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workers. As Alan and Darren alluded, higher education may often be associated with being professional in the workplace, an identity that may initially carry an uncertain connotation for workers who have traditionally viewed work as a means for living rather than an extension of self. Such uncertainty may prevent workers from engaging in education programs simply because they are unable to see themselves differently. In fact, in the class for dislocated workers my college has developed, I have observed participants experience an identity shift from worker to student, and it appears that this shift empowers them to make subsequent decisions. As Merriam (2005) and Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) found in research about adult students, most enter higher education as a result of transition, which makes understanding transition imperative to the design and delivery of effective education. This study reiterates that identity questions arise for dislocated workers transitioning into higher education and also that identity may continue to change as workers transition into new career fields. Researching dislocated worker identity shift resulting from transitioning into higher education and a new career field could be useful to worker assistance programs, particularly in informing the design of initial counseling conducted with workers as they are released from jobs. Intentionally addressing the notion of viewing self differently could very effectively address the emotional gap between job loss and decision-making that is so critical for dislocated workers.

Conceptual Framework Revisited

As the economy continues to shift, and the current presidential administration emphasizes education as a primary means for achieving economic stability, understanding the lived experiences of dislocated workers transitioning into new careers through the TAA program will add depth and significance to the mostly quantitative knowledge base about federal

worker assistance programs and adult students. Thus, participant interviews were analyzed

from a social constructivism epistemological framework, while Merriam's (2005) adult

transition research and Kasworm's (2008) adult student identity research served to focus the

interpretation of how dislocated workers constructed meaning from their education

experience. The conceptual framework was effective for this study and could serve well as

the framework for future studies of this topic.

Implications for TAA and Institutional Practice

The narrative design of this study adds depth and breadth to the research base about the

effectiveness of the TAA program in facilitating worker re-employment. Prior research has

been mostly empirical; thus, more is known about the numbers of workers who have used

TAA and their rates of re-employment than is known about how workers describe the

meaning of significant life transition. When considered along with previous research about

dislocated workers and the TAA program, the life stories of participants in this study

illuminate four implications for TAA policy and institutional practice (workforce

development agencies and community colleges) that may be useful in facilitating successful

life transitions for dislocated workers.

First, a whole person, integrated approach to worker re-employment could be integrated

into policy and carried out in practice as a means for facilitating more successful life

transitions for dislocated workers. Such an approach would acknowledge that workers are in

a state of transition, help them identify their natural learning tendencies, provide low-impact

introductions to higher education in order to develop academic ambition, and account for

identity change and the tension associated with living between former and new views of self.

The six narratives of this study illuminate the complexity of life transition; when considered

along with previous research that calls for modernization of worker assistance programs such as TAA, (Leigh & Gill, 1997; Levin, 2001; Sumner, 2008), the effectiveness of TAA could be improved by the program becoming more attuned to what is important to people who are making decisions about their futures. The stories of participants who expanded their academic plans after experiencing some success with college are a testament to the effectiveness of pairing a low-risk, introductory college experience with encouragement to develop intrinsic motivation to learn. Individual workforce agencies and colleges are discovering this need and implementing whole person practices within the boundaries of current federal policy as best as possible. However, only the small populations of dislocated workers these institutions serve benefit.

Second, flexibility in both policy and practice could facilitate completion of education programs for dislocated workers who become adult students managing multiple life roles. TAA policy and institutional practice could be flexed to meet the individual, unique needs of dislocated workers. If policy acknowledges that people need time to determine a life direction, that life happens, and temporary disruptions to academic progress are possible or even necessary, counselors responsible for program administration could perhaps focus on the success of beneficiaries in addition to accounting for compliance with program requirements. Recipients of TAA benefits could thus feel less pressured to be perfect in terms of their use of funding. This suggestion does not imply that accountability be discarded; rather, it suggests that the human aspects of life transition be acknowledged as important without lowering standards or jeopardizing credibility of programs such as TAA. Although participants in this study were diligent about adhering to requirements, they worried unduly about making paperwork mistakes and taking too long to complete a

program. Several participants thought that the number of high-stake TAA eligibility requirements were probably difficult for many of their fellow dislocated workers to follow, especially those with poor reading skills. Annie fell victim to the TAA time limit for life circumstances beyond her control and had to seek assistance from other sources to complete her last class. Had the provisions of federal TAA policy allowed for short interruptions in coursework, the burden on Annie to complete her program would have been reduced.

Third, as dislocated workers using TAA benefits to go to college are navigating a significant multi-faceted life transition, examining the necessity and role of continuous eligibility requirements in serving the mission of TAA could be useful. As Darren and Eleanor passionately pointed out, the requirement to meet with an Employment Security Commission counselor monthly, solely for the purpose of submitting paperwork, did very little to support them through transition. As mentioned earlier, accountability for use of the TAA program is important. However, periodic evaluation and revision of accountability requirements may be helpful to advancing the purpose of the TAA program and ensuring its currency within a changing economy. Although all participants in this study accepted accountability for the TAA funding they received, some believed that counselor time and federal funding could be better spent providing in-depth career exploration assistance those who were not transitioning well or were failing to make progress. Additionally, associated with monitoring eligibility is trust. Darren and Eleanor both felt that they were being forced to engage in practices meant to catch dishonest people who take inappropriate advantage of government assistance. Neither appreciated being made to feel untrustworthy by the requirements of federal policy, as they were dislocated from manufacturing through no fault of their own. Darren and Eleanor were entitled to TAA benefits and had established a firm

path for transitions; therefore being trusted by the system would have had made a positive difference for them.

Fourth, incorporating career development services for students early in the enrollment process may be a valuable consideration form community college practice. Darren was the only participant who had a negative advisement experience during his enrollment in community college, but his suggestion for ensuring adequate career counseling early is important. Likewise, the positive experiences participants had with early career development interventions, such as completing interest inventories and talking with faculty about academic programs serve as further evidence that this approach to enrollment is worthwhile. Not only would such a practice be another avenue for offering support; it would also perhaps enhance efficiency in decision-making for dislocated workers receiving TAA benefits who are concerned about completing a degree program within a prescribed period of time. Early career development guidance could also begin to address identity change that may be associated with becoming professional after graduating from college.

Limitations and Further Research

Acknowledging the limitations of research allows qualitative researchers to carefully assess the chosen study methodology and determine whether or not findings are useful within the knowledge base (Creswell, 2003). The limitations of this study could provide solid footing for further research regarding the meaning dislocated workers construct from their experiences transitioning into higher education and a new career field through the federal TAA program.

One limitation is that the study is focused on understanding the success stories of six dislocated workers in their transitions to re-employment through higher education. While

understanding success makes an important contribution to the knowledge base, future studies

could employ the same research design to gain understanding of why dislocated workers may

not successfully accomplish transition. Associated with this limitation is the participant

selection process used to identify the six individuals who agreed to share their stories with

me. Purposeful and convenience sampling methods were used to choose participants for the

study. Although objective participant criteria were communicated to my contacts who

recommended participants (over the age of 30, laid off from traditional manufacturing jobs in

North Carolina, used the TAA education benefit to go to college, completed an associate's

degree, became re-employed in a new career field), my community college colleagues

gravitated toward recommending their best students. Thus, in future studies designed to gain

understanding from unsuccessful transition experiences, it might be helpful to develop

selection criteria to target students with specific strengths and needs. Additionally, the fact

that only six participants were involved in this study limits the practicality of

recommendations for policy change. When combined with data and results from previous

research about dislocated workers, and when considered within the context of significant

economic change, the policy suggestions provided earlier may have more legitimacy. Thus,

policy-makers and practitioners are encouraged to consider the results and recommendations

of this study in conjunction with existing research on the topic.

A second limitation of this study is the fact that participants were from urban areas within

the Piedmont Triad region of North Carolina. Access to support services for dislocated

workers in more rural regions or semi-urban areas within or outside of the state may be very

different and worth exploring in future research.

Thirdly, this study focused on the use of TAA funds for attending a community college. Examining experiences and outcomes associated with education or training received from other institutions such as proprietary schools, private industry training, or on-the-job training would add another perspective to the body of knowledge.

Lastly, age was the only demographic factor considered in participant selection for this study. Older dislocated workers were specifically recruited, as the literature has raised concerns about the ability of older individuals to adapt quickly to change. To determine whether differences exist in the experiences of dislocated workers based upon other demographic factors, further research could be conducted with single gender groups, single race or ethnic groups, and with a younger dislocated worker population.

Conclusion and Summary of Research Findings

Through exploration of narrative life stories related to work and education, the purpose of this study was to seek understanding of how North Carolina workers, dislocated from traditional manufacturing jobs due to industry moving overseas, describe their experiences successfully transitioning from job loss to higher education to a new career field utilizing their Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits. Three themes emerged from analysis of participant stories: pre-disposition to learning, opportunity, and competing identities. The themes served to address the research questions and illuminate several findings that may have important implications for worker assistance policy and practice.

The themes that materialized from the narrative interview data illuminate the complexity of dislocated worker transition from unemployment to college to re-employment using TAA benefits. Because the scope of this research was limited to exploring the life stories of six dislocated manufacturing workers in North Carolina who successfully navigated transition,

suggestions for policy and practice as a result of data analysis may be most useful when

considered in conjunction with results from previous research.

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Appendix A

APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

**Informed Consent for Participants in
Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

**Institutional Review Board
Study #: 10-0248**

Title of Project: Perceptions of Displaced Manufacturing Workers about their Transition to Re-employment through a Community College Education Experience

Investigator(s): Kim Sepich

I. Purpose of this Research/Project:

This research is about understanding how dislocated workers, who have been laid off from traditional manufacturing jobs due to international trade, experienced community college education programs utilizing Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) benefits and becoming reemployed in a new career field.

II. Procedures:

I will talk with people who were laid off from traditional manufacturing jobs, completed a community college degree program using TAA benefits, and are now reemployed in a new career field. There will be five participants in the study who attended a North Carolina community college in an urban area where traditional manufacturing was a predominant field of employment. I am asking you to participate in my research because I believe that your connection to manufacturing work and your decision to return to school can help me better understand your experience with higher education.

During the course of the study (approximately 3-5 months), I will meet with you individually three to four times for an hour each time to talk about various aspects of your background. In our first interview, I will ask you questions about your upbringing, family, and your early views of education. In later interviews, we will talk about your previous experience in traditional manufacturing work and your lay off experience, your experiences in accessing Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits and how the benefits influenced decisions you made about going to college, and your experience as an adult student in a community college. A theme that will connect our conversations will be about life transitions, and I will ask you questions about how you made the transitions from job loss to college to reemployment. Overall, we will spend approximately three to four hours together.

III. Risks and Freedom to Withdraw:

There is a risk to participating in the study. For some people, sharing life stories and personal information is quite private and can be uncomfortable or upsetting. As a study participant, you have the right to redirect or discontinue conversation at any time you become uncomfortable. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

IV. Benefits:

Participating in the study might have some benefits to you. First, as we talk, you might enjoy sharing your story and might learn something new about yourself. Second, your participation might help me and the community colleges learn how to better meet your needs and provide students with an improved college experience.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality:

The work we will do in this research study is highly personal. Thus, your identity and the information you share with me will be kept private and confidential at all times. With your permission, I would like to tape record our conversations and take written notes so that I can better understand and accurately remember your answers to questions. I am the only person who will listen to the tape recordings and read the notes during the study. All tapes and written notes I make will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home, and I will be the only person with a key to that cabinet. In my notes and final write-up of the study, your name, the names of anyone you mention, and any other form of identifying information such as address(es) and workplace(s) will be changed. At the end of the study, tape recordings will be destroyed.

From the taped recordings of our conversations, I will transcribe our discussions into documents and ask you to review them for accuracy. You may request changes and request that information be included or kept out of the research report.

Once I begin writing the research report, I will ask you to read sections to make sure I have interpreted your story correctly, and you may revise or correct the report as needed.

VI. Compensation:

At the end of the study, you will be presented with a small token of my appreciation for your time and participation in the project.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board of Appalachian State University and _____ (if others, i.e., school or school system, hospital, daycare center, multi-institutional project etc.).

_____4/30/10_____   _____5/16/12_____
IRB Approval Date   Approval Expiration Date

IX. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

Meet with Kim Sepich 3-4 times for approximately an hour each time.

X. Subject's Permission (May be modified in the case of minors or members of other vulnerable populations.)

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____Date_____
Subject signature

_____ Date _____
Witness (Optional except for certain classes of subjects)

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

_____
Investigator(s) Telephone/e-mail

Dr. Jim Killacky__   828 262 3168/killackycj@appstate.edu
Faculty Advisor (if applicable)   Telephone/email

Timothy Ludwig, Ph.D. (IRB Chair)   Phone: 828-262-2712
Graduate School and Research and Sponsored Programs
Appalachian State University
Boone, NC 28608
irb@appstate.edu

Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent unless documentation of Informed Consent has been approved by the IRB.

Participant interviews were conducted in an unstructured, open-ended format. The questions below were designed to initiate conversation on a particular topic. From there, I engaged in conversation with participants and asked additional questions based on how interviews progressed.

Interview 1: Family, upbringing, early views of education

1. In your own words, tell me about your family and the story of your upbringing.
2. Describe how your family taught you to view work and education.
3. Think with me back to middle school – that's usually a time when teachers and counselors are encouraging students to go to college. At that time in your life, what did you think about going to college?

Interview 2: Working in manufacturing

1. Tell me, in your own words, the story of your career in manufacturing. I have no specific questions; rather, I'd like to hear about your work in your manufacturing plant as though it were a story with a beginning, middle, and end.
2. Tell me the story of your lay-off.
3. Describe how you came to know about TAA.
4. Tell me about your experiences with obtaining and using TAA education benefits.

Interview 3: Going to college

1. Tell me the story of how you decided to go to college. Talk about how you chose the college you attended, how you chose the degree program you entered.
2. Describe your experience with being admitted to college.
3. Tell me what it was like to be a college student as an adult.
4. Talk about how you see yourself after completing a college degree.

Interview 4: Reemployment

1. Tell me the story of how you began the job you have now.
2. Tell me what it is like to work in your new career field and how it is different from manufacturing.
3. Are you in the job, career or field that you imagined as you began your college program?

Biographical Information

Kim Sepich has a bachelor of science degree in Dance Education from East Carolina University and a Master of Arts degree in Student Development from Appalachian State University. In 1995, she began her community college career at Forsyth Technical Community College in Winston-Salem, NC where she held coordinator and director positions in the college's Learning Center. In 2001, Kim transitioned to Davidson County Community College in Lexington, NC where she has served for ten years in several roles, including Coordinator, Learning Assistance, Director, Admissions, and Associate Dean, Enrollment Services. Kim currently serves Davidson County Community College as the Vice President, Student Affairs.