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STATE, COMMUNITY, AND ASIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S WORK: A STUDY IN LABOR MARKET ORGANIZATION

by

Kamini Maraj Grahame

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

This study is an institutional ethnography which begins from the standpoint of Asian immigrant women to explore how their occupational location is shaped by government-funded job training programs. The study elucidates the complex organization involved in preparing them for low-level white collar work through the Job Training Partnership Act, the largest federally funded jobs skills training program in the U.S.

An institutional ethnography directs attention to how activities in a local setting are structured and shaped by institutional relations which extend beyond the local. It involves an exploration of the social relations individuals bring into being through their practices as they go about their daily work and as that work is co-ordinated in relation to the work of others in extra-local settings. Such co-ordination is textually mediated and dependent on ideologies which provide for exchange among the different parts of the institutional complex. Various methods of data collection are used including interviews, observations, document analysis.

The study demonstrates that program structure and administration, built on principles of "efficiency and performance," are consequential for client selection into the program. Intake work, through which women are selected, is organized in relation to successful job placement mandated by the legislation governing these programs. Client selection is determined by
“performance standards,” specifying wages, types of jobs, and benefits, and the procedures for accountability built into program administration. Programs offered are determined in relation to labor market needs. In the intake process, agency workers employ expectations about Asian women’s conduct and family responsibilities, assessments of the cultural capital they bring or can develop (through training), and employer perceptions of Asians, in selecting them for the programs in “office skills.” In displaying such processes, the study shows how race, class, and gender enter into the organization of Asian immigrant women into the labor market. It illustrates the mediating role of the state in the management and organization of local labor markets as it produces these women as commodities for the labor market. The latter is a feature of labor market organization which tends to be overlooked in the standard social science discourse on immigrant labor markets.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I labored through writing this thesis, I often wondered if I would ever get to this moment of writing this page, the final step in concluding this work. Though the work has often been solitary, lonesome even among the din of day to day family life and the frenetic pace of teaching, it also bears the good will of many friends, old and new, the hope of parents, and the forbearance of those closest to me--my daughters and husband.

This work would not have been possible without the aid of the immigrant Chinese and Vietnamese women in this study, and the people who work in the job training system who generously gave their time. I thank them for providing me the opportunity to speak with them.

To Dorothy Smith, my thesis supervisor, I owe a great intellectual debt. Her work has been a transformative one for me. I thank her for patiently guiding me through an institutional ethnography. I know too that she understood well the challenge of trying to be a mother, write a thesis, and teach in a context where I had very few supports. I also appreciate the useful comments given by the members of my dissertation committee, George Dei and Kari Dehli. Marjorie DeVault, the external examiner’s careful appraisal of my thesis was much appreciated.

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Chapter One

Immigrant Labor, Asians, and the State

Introduction

The stories told about modern immigrants typically focus on opportunity and adjustment. Whether the place of arrival is an advanced industrial nation or a developing country, the move is presented in popular media as a narrative of individual progress. Opportunity and adjustment are represented in personal and often moral terms as dimensions of individual behavior. What is missing from these accounts is a focus on the social organization of opportunity and adjustment, on the ways in which these notions are entangled in an institutional complex which such accounts represent in misleading and ideological ways. For example, the classic immigrant story in American life is the story of the immigrant coming in search of opportunity (economic) and freedom (political and religious). It is a story that is offered up every Thanksgiving for public consumption in reminders of the hardships that the “first” immigrants--the Pilgrims--faced, the struggles they endured, and the victories achieved. New tales of immigrant struggle and achievement are added on in the continuously unfolding script of the American saga. So ingrained is the notion that immigrants voluntarily come in search of opportunities, start at the bottom, and work their way up, that people who are born here express deep resentments at the presence of well to do new immigrants in their midst--especially those who are visibly different,
such as Asians (see Newman 1993)—so much so that they allocate a good measure of blame to these successful immigrants when accounting for why they themselves are unable to achieve the “American Dream.” Along with this story of immigrants exists the story of America’s poor who, in the popular imagination, fed in large part by the popular press, are poor either because they do not work due to their laziness and instead rely on government handouts, or because they lack education and skills. Often, as Reagan did, the habits of the poor are offered in counterpoint to the “model” behavior of immigrant groups such as Asians, viewed as hard workers who come with little and are able to achieve a part of the American dream. The “lack of education and skills” account of the existence of America’s poor, when set against the “lazy welfare queen” account, seems the more palatable version of why some people are poor in America. It is the kind of thinking that has informed the formulation of employment training policies to deal with the problem of poverty in American society. Both views of poverty, however, locate the problem in the poor person herself. In these renderings of the immigrant experience and the poor condition, individuals essentially encounter an unfettered American landscape which they merely need act upon or within so that they too can lay claim to what it has to offer. Such renderings obscure the myriad obstacles that close off opportunities, that structure the “choices” people can make. Both the idealized path of the immigrant epitomized in the Horatio Alger story and the “dysfunctional welfare queen” of Reagan’s imagination are stripped of social context, of the relations of ruling (Smith 1987, 1990a) in and through which their experiences
and their lives are managed, shaped, and ruled.

While it might be assumed that social scientific accounts tell a different story than the foregoing popular accounts, this is not always so. In many respects they too contribute to the dominant view of the immigrant experience. As Smith argues, social sciences also play a role in maintaining the "relations of ruling." In her formulation of "relations of ruling," Smith has emphasized that "ruling" refers to a broad array of spheres of activities by which our kind of society is ruled, managed, and administered. These include the professions, government, business, and the activities of those who select and train those who will rule. Among the latter are the business schools, the sociologists, and the economists who furnish and specify the procedures for governing our society and who develop methods for accounting for how it is done. As sociologists, therefore, we participate in ruling (1990a:14). The activities or practices of ruling, Smith has argued, are co-ordinated across a diverse array of sites in contemporary societies and are mediated by various forms of texts. Such texts include those developed in the practice of sociology which help create the abstract conceptual tools through which we are governed.

Popular renderings of immigrant labor and the poor condition both reflect and help reproduce, in circular fashion, some of the standard social science discourses on such phenomena. For example, standard sociological treatments of immigrant labor rely on a conception of skill to explain immigrants' work/labor market location. One, the "human capital skills model" attributes immigrants' labor market location to
human capital skills such as education, language ability (English) and occupational training, while another, the "segmented labor market model" divides the labor market into two segments—primary and secondary—and argues that the secondary is comprised of low skill, low pay work reserved for immigrants. Skill is assumed to be something that is objectively there for us to see rather than a category that is socially produced and used.

Both of these models form part of the conceptual currency through which social scientists and others come to understand immigrant labor and they are also part of the conceptual currency through which labor stratification is understood generally. Not surprisingly, then, these views also organize understandings of poverty—that is, the poor are poor because of lack of education and skills. Such understandings become woven into policies and programs—for example, employment training programs with which this study is concerned—designed to address problems of poverty and low-waged labor. These problems are thus defined and acted upon from the standpoint of ruling institutions. However, a treatment of immigrant labor that avoids reproducing the relations of ruling needs to begin in a different place.

This study is an exploration of the relations of ruling through which the lives of a group of Asian immigrant women, engaged in employment training programs, are managed, shaped, and ruled. Following the research strategy "institutional ethnography" originated by Smith (1987), the study begins with the experiences of subjects located in the everyday world to uncover the extended relations which
coordinate and structure those experiences. Thus, beginning with the standpoint of immigrant Asian women located in employment training programs, I explore the institutional processes which enter into and organize those experiences with the programs. "Institution," as Smith uses it, refers to a complex of relations organized around a particular function--for example law, health care, education--and not a specific kind of organization. Job training is the specific institutional complex which is brought forward for investigation here. In Smith's sense of institution, the focus is on the ways in which the activities of a variety of organizations, agencies (including the state), individuals, professional associations, and the discourses they produce are co-ordinated into a functional complex. "Ethnography" directs attention to the practices and activities of people situated in the everyday world as they go about their daily work. The co-ordination of people's activities across multiple sites are constitutive of the relations of ruling in society. Moreover, the co-ordination of these work practices is textually mediated and dependent on ideologies which provide for exchange among the different parts of the complex. Thus texts, in the variety of forms that they take--documents, plans, application forms, economic forecasts, policy directives, poverty reports, etc.--are brought under scrutiny for how they enable the coordination of these activities, in how they are taken up, interpreted, and used within the institutional complex. Thus, "institutional ethnography" is a distinctive research enterprise which focusses on how the routine, textually-mediated practices of people engaged in their daily work co-ordinate multiple sites into a single institutional
In this study, using institutional ethnography, and beginning in the standpoint of the Asian immigrant women in the employment training programs, I shift the focus entailed in the popular and social science renderings of immigrant labor mentioned above, to the complex of relations giving shape to these women's experiences. Specifically, the study investigates how Asian immigrant women are produced as commodities for the U.S. labor market through government funded job training programs. The women's experiences in the programs provide a point of departure for opening up exploration of the processes through which an array of sites are coordinated in a complex of labor market organization that is consequential for their lives. These sites include community organizations, various levels of government, and private businesses and the discourses on immigration, poverty and skills on which they draw. In investigating government funded job training programs, the activities of the state in managing and organizing local labor markets are analyzed. The analysis reveals that employment training programs come to be a way of managing the relations between capital and labor. In the context of economic restructuring they have come to play a part in managing the ebb and flow of labor (at least the lower-end segment of the labor force). The state is the intermediary in the relation between capital and labor through its use of the community organizations which service training clientele. The labor market location of Asian women is an outcome produced in and through these activities of the state in concert with private business and community organizations.
My journey to this research (which unpacks this organizational complex through which immigrant women's labor can be understood) had its impetus in two experiences. The first was a long held dissatisfaction with the idealized immigrant story. Twice an immigrant myself—to Canada and to the U.S.—I on both occasions encountered bureaucratically organized structures which could permit or deny me entry into their borders, and permit or deny me the opportunity to work. Such encounters entered me immediately into an institutional complex through which labor has come to be managed on an international scale and they were experiences which stood in sharp relief to the idealized immigrant who simply comes or arrives. Second, my work in the social organization of knowledge, in conjunction with my experiences as immigrant and with other immigrants, led to a dissatisfaction with much of the sociological discourse on immigrant labor and how that labor is to be understood. For example, the formulations entailed in the "human capital skills" model and the "segmented labor market" model did not quite square with the skilled or educated immigrants I knew who were working cleaning offices, or even doing data entry work. In my study, I examine these formulations as part of the conceptual categories organizing job training programs.

The discovery of the significance of these concepts and categories in the job training enterprise came through a focus on the activities of people who were engaged in putting together these programs and women who were clients in the programs. These work activities became available to me through interviews with a variety of
personnel in different parts of the institutional complex through which job training is delivered, observations of some of the work processes at the community organizations I studied, and examination of a host of documents. These are among the research strategies entailed in institutional ethnography. The research reveals that at the level of the community organization, the practices of recruiting clients, the programs they were recruited into, and the counseling and placing them into jobs were articulated to the funding requirements of the state. Programs were to adhere to “market principles” by demonstrating “efficiency and performance.” The screening devices they used for selecting clients into programs were a tool for managing the quality of the labor pool community organizations produce for the labor market. These devices changed in response to conditions in the labor market. The requirements of the funding mechanisms structured the work of the agencies in myriad ways and led to antagonistic relations between agency clientele and agency workers.

Focus on the work practices at the local governmental level led to the discovery of an increasing role for private businesses in the development of training programs and plans. Increasingly, employment training programs come to be defined as servicing both businesses and “disadvantaged” segments of the population. Having themselves to meet requirements of the funding mandates, local government bodies overseeing training programs came to have local capital set the parameters for the kind of labor they required. In this sense, through the training programs offered, the state comes to bear the cost of training and retraining that is needed in a rapidly changing
economy. Through these concerted activities of the state, capital, and community, we have the ongoing production of a labor force that is organized by gender, race, and class.

Interestingly, in following through the organization of employment training, I discovered that "immigrant" was not a relevant category within the program accounting mechanisms the state had in place. Though the women I interviewed for this study are immigrants and are involved in the job training program, an early discovery for me was the absence of the category "immigrant" in the ways in which clients are tracked in the job training system. Yet the category has currency and relevance in a number of different contexts, including an array of government funded programs. That absence, I argue, has to be understood in relation to political processes out of which such programs arise and into which they are inserted, and in which accountability is sought at every level. Thus, the absence depends on understanding the mandates of the job training legislation, how those are interpreted, and how fulfilling the mandate might be displayed in documentary form. As such, the research takes up some of these categories—for example, race-ethnic categories such as "Asian" that were identified as relevant in these accounting mechanisms.

In the rest of this chapter, I will discuss the notion of "immigrant" as a social construction and the construction of immigration processes as ways of managing the supply of labor in the context of U.S. society and organizing that labor along lines of race and gender—features of immigrant experience which are obscured in the classic
The Category Immigrant and Immigrant Woman

Since 1994, with the passage in California of anti-immigrant Proposition 187--a ballot initiative in California to limit a number of public services to illegal immigrants--and the Republican "Contract with America" proposed in that election year, the subject of immigrants and immigration has been ever present in the public discourse. But what does this term "immigrant" mean anyway? In a country that is often referred to as a "nation of immigrants,"¹ who is an immigrant and who is not? For ordinary people it seems a ridiculous question with an obvious answer: an immigrant is someone who was not born in this country but who nevertheless lives here. In academic discourse, for the most part, the term remains unproblematic since in the United States, in much of the writings on immigrants and immigration, it is often used to describe people who have moved to the U.S. from other countries and usually with some consideration of the different legal categories of people who arrive here.

Some scholars, however, have problematized the concept in ways in which I have found useful in undertaking my own work. Notably Griffith (1979), writing in

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¹ This is a phrase which renders invisible the presence of indigenous peoples who inhabited these regions prior to European colonization and whose populations were decimated in this process. I do not mean here to subscribe to the notion which the phrase conveys, that the United States with its history of colonization, conquest, and slavery, is merely a nation of immigrants.
the Canadian context, has argued that the term "immigrant" indexes a set of socially organized practices through which members of a society constitute some persons as different from others "within the larger society as well as within their own cultural and national groupings" (p. 5). In her paper, she provides evidence of how some persons who are immigrants in a technical sense (that is, in a legal sense) are treated as different in their social interactions and how other technical immigrants are not so treated. Also in the Canadian context, Ng has drawn attention to the sense in which "immigrant woman" is a social construct. She has argued that in everyday life women who are white, educated, and speak English are not usually considered immigrant. Thus, the term "conjures up an image of a woman who does not speak English or who speaks English with an accent; who is from the Third World or a member of a visible minority group; and who has a certain type of job (e.g. a sewing machine operator or a cleaning lady)" (Ng 1988:15).

I have found the notion of "immigrant" as a social construct a very useful one but one which, not surprisingly, plays out somewhat differently in U.S. society than in Canada. This became evident to me as an immigrant woman to both places and also as a sociologist who became familiar with the "immigration" literature. As in Canada, in the U.S., the term immigrant has both legal and common sense uses and meanings. Both the legal meaning and the ordinary everyday usages of the term came to have an impact on my research program.

In the United States, immigrant in a legal sense is subsumed under the more
general and legal category "aliens" which refers to citizens of another country who reside in the U.S. In the legal sense it is paired with the term "documented" where together they refer to people who have been through a variety of bureaucratic processes--such as filling in of a form to immigrate to the U.S., having photographs and fingerprints taken, having a medical examination, and having an interview with an Immigration and Naturalization Service official--and have been lawfully admitted into the U.S. for permanent residence whereupon one receives a "resident alien registration" card (commonly called a "green card"). Thus, in the legal sense, "documented immigrants" (legal immigrants in ordinary usage) are different from the other legal categories of refugees, asylees, and undocumented aliens (the latter being lumped together under illegal immigrants in ordinary usage).

In everyday life, what is meant by immigrant is quite complex. The differences between Canada and the U.S. emerged in my conversations with people about my work--e.g. "I'm doing research on immigrant women..." In response I would get "Which group?" By this, it was usually meant "which ethnic group or which nationality?" Sometimes I would be asked "Are you including refugees and undocumented?" The latter question usually came from people who were activists working with immigrants and refugees and refers to the legal distinction that is made in U.S. immigration legislation. In the U.S. the concept of "visible minority" is not used, but it was clear to me that as I spoke about what I was doing, people did not necessarily assume that I was referring to people of color. For example, on more than
one occasion I have had people launch into a description of Soviet Jews or the Irish who are both considered white in this context. In these conversations, I would have to further explain that I was more particularly concerned with women of color who were immigrant. Thus, it seemed to me that people did not ordinarily treat immigrants as an undifferentiated mass of people from the Third World or people who did not speak English.

On the other hand, my own experiences have been that I am viewed as an immigrant. Usually people ask me where I am from—a question which typically indexes a recognition that one is a foreigner. If I answer Canada (since I came to the U.S. from there), they usually ask where I am from originally or what my ancestry is. I have taken this to be an assumption that real Canadians cannot be non-white. My interpretation is supported by the experience of my white husband who is never asked where is he from originally and from the occasional newspaper article which might describe Canadians as tall and blonde. Further, Takaki (1993) in his work A Different Mirror recalls an incident in Virginia where the white cab driver asks him:

"How long have you been in this country?"... "All my life," I replied, wincing. "I was born in the United States." With a strong southern drawl, he remarked: "I was wondering because your English is excellent." Then, as I had many times before, I explained: "My grandfather came here from Japan in the 1880s. My family has been here, in America, for over a hundred years." He glanced at me in
the mirror. Somehow I did not look "American" to him; my eyes and complexion looked foreign. (p. 1)

The experiences described above suggest that when provided with the term immigrant, some people recognize that immigrants are racially and ethnically diverse but when confronted with a particular individual, color and other physical characteristics act as visual cues to whether one is a foreigner or not. Both my experiences and those that Takaki describes support the view that some of us who are non-white are always treated as not of this country, hence as immigrants, even when we speak English well. I wish to emphasize some, since my sense is that it is less likely for people who are black (African-American) to be identified or treated as "immigrant" on the basis of visual cues of color and physical features alone (rather than auditory cues also) than for people who are "Hispanic" or "Asian." For example, I have found in my own interaction with blacks that I cannot know whether they are immigrant until I speak to them or get to know them better and they tell me that they are "Trinidadian" or "Jamaican," and even that they are not African-American although they were born here but have immigrant parents from the West Indies.

There also seems to be a tendency in the U.S. for people to talk about themselves in terms of their nationality (and sometimes about the region they are from, e.g., West Indian or Caribbean). In these cases "immigrant" is often but not always understood. Thus, for example, in everyday language people are likely to speak of
Haitians, Vietnamese, Cambodians, or Cape Verdeans. This also tends to be the case in press reports about immigrants.

The ordinary, common sense usage of “immigrant” in Canada does not quite coincide with my U.S. experience. However, there also seems to me increasingly to be a sense that when immigrants are talked about, it conjures up images of people who speak Spanish (and Puerto Ricans who are legally U.S. citizens are routinely treated as immigrants in everyday life) or who are from some part of Asia. This is an outcome of a public discourse, in the last few years, in which a great deal of attention has been directed to increases in immigration from Asia and South America in the aftermath of substantial changes to the immigration laws in 1965, and the end of the Vietnam war and the flow of refugees from that country to the U.S. (see for example Time magazine's April 1990 issue “America's Changing Colors” which seemed to have been instrumental in fueling the debates on immigration and interestingly centers the discussion around issues of color/race/ethnicity). Thus, there seems to be a peculiar elision that is taking place between “immigrant” and being “of color.” This is despite the diversity of places from which immigrants come into the U.S. and despite the range of “colors” of people from the regions, particularly Latin America and the Caribbean which provide the largest proportion of current immigrants.

The elision is significant, I think, at this historical juncture in the U.S. because of the trajectory of racial politics in this society. Takaki, in explaining the cab driver's view of him as “not American,” argues that the driver like so many Americans has a
view of America as European in ancestry (though perhaps Takaki over-reaches here).

It seems that almost daily in the mainstream media, there are warnings about America's racial divide or America's racial crisis. Most often this is spoken about in the binary terms of black and white usually with an implicit or explicit acknowledgment of the long history of Africans in this society. Sometimes in this discussion though, mention is made of America's multi-racial character--and particularly when it involves antagonisms between blacks and other non-whites such as between Korean merchants and blacks during the riots in Los Angeles in 1992. In this context, an ongoing concern is with “the haves” and the “have-nots” and by what means did they or did they not get it. Whites, we are told, are angry because they have not got enough and many think it is because blacks and other “minorities” (including immigrant Hispanics and Asians) have privileges and advantages they do not have (see for example Newman, 1993, on white resentment); while blacks, it seems, are angry about the continuing discrimination they face from whites and the apparent advantages acquired by people who have not been here as long as they have (namely Asians and Hispanics; see Terkel 1993; Yoshihashi and Lubman 1992). Thus, these new immigrant groups, who are also sometimes seen as “minority,” are viewed as competitors for increasingly scarcer resources (including a number of government benefits) in a racially divided society. The discussion of immigrants and immigration appears in contemporary times to turn into issues of race/ethnicity and issues of class as well (see Newman's 1993 discussion; Hossfeld 1994). This is a matter I return to later.
Both legal and ordinary usages of “immigrant” have a bearing on my research, for the category comes to have different relevances, uses, and significance at different moments in the employment training process which I analyze. For example, access to the programs depends, among other things, on being eligible for work in the U.S. and thus on having legal, proper documentation. But at other moments, such as being considered for a job, ordinary understandings of “immigrant”—particularly an understanding that “she is one who looks different” (not “white”) and cannot therefore be assumed to speak English well—come to be salient. More specifically, the stereotypical understandings of the particular group of immigrants that my study is concerned with—“Asians”—come to be significant in the employment training process. Thus, it appears that it is a combination of race/ethnicity, gender, and immigrant status which has relevance in this context.

Population movements, or human migration, is an ubiquitous part of human social life. In terms of United States history, while every schoolchild learns that the colonial settlers (or Europeans) to the U.S. came fleeing religious persecution, many scholars link the migrations (forced and voluntary) from elsewhere into U.S. society with the emergence and development of capitalist economies which have drawn populations from their old sources of livelihood into new areas of agricultural and industrial production (see for example Takaki 1993; Sassen-Koob 1983; Fernandez-Kelly 1983). Slaves, indentured laborers, and immigrants have all been part of these “migrant flows.” While it is often claimed that this is a nation of immigrants, clearly
this is not the case. Immigrant as a social category emerges with the process of
immigration which itself has undergone significant historical shifts in U.S. society. Of
significance for my study is the historic shift toward control by the federal government
over the process of immigration. Often sociological studies of immigrants and
immigration tend to focus on “push” and “pull” factors in the immigration process--
what causes people to migrate, as if migration were simply a matter of people deciding
that they want to move to a new country and do so. What often gets overlooked in
such discussions are the mechanisms a nation-state develops and exerts in its attempts
to decide which and how many immigrants it will allow in. While I do not provide a
comprehensive history of U.S. immigration legislation here, it is important for my
study to understand the circumstances under which the population my study is
concerned with has been permitted entry into the U.S. This historic treatment provides
a window into the inter-relation of race, class, and gender in the U.S. immigration
process and ultimately into the issue of how these are involved in the organization of
“Chinese/Asian” women into the labor market.

Immigration and Immigrant Legislation: Race, Class, and Labor

In the United States, federal control over immigration emerged shortly and only
for a very brief period (the Alien Act of 1798 lasted only 2 years) at the end of the 18th
Century and it provided the President the authority to expel foreigners who were a
threat to national security (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1980). For much of the
18th century, the selection standards for immigrants was set by each colonial settlement. While there were waves of nativist movements in the 19th century advocating restrictions on immigration, it was not until the 1870s that a resurgent nativist movement--fueled, some historians claim, by an economy in depression and declining wages and the "discovery of unemployment"--led to the U.S. Congress passing the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 (May 6). This legislation banned the immigration of Chinese into American society for 10 years, prohibited Chinese from becoming naturalized citizens, and denied entry to the wives of Chinese laborers already in the United States (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1980; Takaki 1989; Kim 1994). The legislation was later changed and expanded to prohibit all persons who were of the "Chinese race" with some exemptions for students, officials, tourists and merchants. Takaki argues that the exclusion of Chinese was "symptomatic of a larger conflict between white labor and white capital: removal of the Chinese was designed not only to diffuse an issue agitating white workers but also to alleviate class tensions within white society" (1989:111). The Chinese, who were deemed "unassimilable" but who were only a small proportion of the total U.S. population, were viewed as competitors for few jobs at the closing of the 19th century. Thus, the emerging class conflict between white labor and capital was to be contained through the use of race. (Note that this is reminiscent of the racialization of class in slave times.)

With the Exclusion Acts, the federal government for the first time came to be in
the business of controlling the supply of labor into U.S. society. Later, in 1882, the federal government came to pass a more comprehensive piece of immigration legislation which established the regulation of immigration as a federal responsibility and which prohibited certain classes of people from entering the U.S. (e.g., felons, and people likely to become public charges). In the 1880s it became increasingly clear that the immigration laws would be used to control the supply of labor for in 1885, 1887 and 1888 national contract labor laws were passed to prevent a flood of foreign labor into the U.S. (U. S. Department of Justice 1991). By 1917, with the codifying of all immigration laws into the Immigration Act of 1917, there would be no more free immigration into the U.S. (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1980). The 1917 legislation retained all previous prohibitions as well as barring illiterates from admission into the U.S., and also created the Asiatic Barred Zones designed to exclude Asians specifically from immigrating into the U.S. The provisions barring illiterates has been viewed as an attempt to restrict immigration from the less desirable southern European societies. At the turn of the century, people from these societies were also seen as unassimilable. By 1924, Congress passed a National Origin Quotas Act which was to have a impact on Japanese immigration, placed a ceiling on the total number of immigrants allowed in, established quotas for different nationality groups, and prohibited the admission of anyone ineligible for citizenship in the U.S. (a 1790 law
had provided that only "white persons" were eligible for citizenship). This was perceived as an attempt to prevent Japanese immigration in particular as other Asians had already been excluded (Takaki 1989:209). Prior to the 1924 law, restrictions on Japanese immigration were subject to "voluntary" restraint negotiated through a Gentlemen's Agreement between the Japanese Government and Theodore Roosevelt" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1980:285). While the enactment of U.S. immigration legislation has been driven by what many argue are clearly racist attitudes, I think it would be a mistake to argue that those policies have been only racist. It seems also plausible to argue that the immigration policies that the U.S. has adopted throughout its history have been policies designed to accommodate its need for labor as well as to be politically expedient. Thus, the U.S. has accommodated people considered racially different when there has been a demand for labor (the Chinese and Japanese railway workers in the last century, and the Mexican Bracero program this century are cases in point). And though in 1915 an amendment to the immigration laws sought to exclude blacks from immigrating to the U.S., this failed to pass after

2In a series of interpretations of this law, Asian Indians came to be excluded from citizenship. On scientific grounds of the early 20th century, this group was categorized as "Caucasians" and on that basis claimed eligibility for citizenship, especially since the Supreme court in 1922 had ruled that white was the same as Caucasian, and therefore Japanese were ineligible for citizenship. In a later ruling the court held that Asian Indians were ineligible because the definition of race had to be based on common sense understandings, not scientific ones. (See Takaki 1989:299)

3 It is also argued that the 1924 law had a negative effect on blacks as well, particularly West Indian blacks.
intensive lobbying by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1980:284). The repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts in 1943 has also been seen as politically motivated. It was presented as “a friendly gesture to a wartime ally” but nevertheless cautiously argued because of the anti-immigrant feelings in the depression era of the 1920s and 1930s (Reimers 1981). They were still subjected to quotas, however, and only 105 Chinese were allowed in the year 1943.

That U.S. immigration policy is closely tied to labor market needs is clearly visible in the 1952 immigration legislation which still guided immigration policy well into the 1980s. The McCarran-Walter Act established three principles for immigration policy--the reunification of families; the protection of the domestic workforce; and the immigration of persons with needed skills. But the legislation still contained racial preferences for in retaining the national origins quotas it continued to favor immigration from western and northern Europe, and provided for unrestricted immigration from the “western hemisphere.” Moreover, it limited immigration from European colonies (only 100 were allowed from each) and allowed only minimal quotas for Asian “races.” For example, persons who were one-half of any Asian ancestry, regardless of which country they were born in, were counted as part of the quota for their Asian nation. Thus, a person of Chinese ancestry born in Columbia (a non-quota nation) would be counted against the quota for China (see Reimers 1981). Thus, although the new law lifted the explicit ban against Asian immigration, it
nevertheless operated to restrict the number of potential Asian immigrants.\textsuperscript{4}

In addition to the laws governing “immigrants” as a category, foreigners could arrive in the U.S. through special refugee provisions and because most refugees in the 1950s were defined as those fleeing communism, many Chinese and Cubans were allowed in as refugees in the 1950s. Such special provisions, some researchers claim, had the effect of undermining the immigration laws and by 1965, when an overhaul of immigration legislation took place, most of the new U.S. arrivals were people who fell outside of the established quotas.

For Asian-Americans, the 1965 changes to the immigration act were an important milestone. Not only did this legislation repeal the national origins quota system and the Asia Pacific Triangle (the latter established by the 1952 Act), but it put in place a preference system which was to have a profound effect on the racial and ethnic makeup of the United States. (However, according to Takaki (1993) it was not thought so at the time.) Under the new system, visas were to be allocated on the basis of family reunification, skills in demand in the U.S., and refugee status. The 1965 legislation did impose some limits. It allowed for the migration of 170,000 people per year from the nations of the eastern hemisphere with no single nation being permitted to exceed 20,000 immigrant visas per year. However, spouses, dependent children (under 21 years), and parents of adult U.S. citizens were exempted from the limits

\textsuperscript{4} The 1952 law also removed racial barriers to naturalization--so now Chinese could become citizens and presumably then use the family reunification preferences for citizens to bring family members over but within the numerical national origins quota.
which were imposed. For the first time limits were placed on western hemisphere
nations including Europe, thus reshaping immigration from these nations. A total of
120,000 per year were allocated to these nations and those of its former colonies and
was on a first-come-first-served basis with no country limits or preference categories
(U.S Department of Justice 1991).

Under the new system, the bulk of new visas (74%) were reserved for family
reunification which was perhaps the most significant category for people from
countries which had previously been stringently limited in the numbers that could
immigrate. For Asians, in addition, the fact that they could now become U.S. citizens
aided the process of family reunification because of the sub-categories established
within the preference system, which was as follows:

1st preference: unmarried sons and daughters age 21 or older of U.S. citizens
(maximum of 20 %);
2nd preference: spouse and unmarried sons and daughters age 21 or older of an
alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence (maximum of 20%);
4th preference: married sons and daughters age 21 or older of U.S. citizens
(maximum 10%);
5th preference: brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens (maximum of 24%)  
(Reimers 1981; U.S. Department of Justice 1991)
For Asians, notably Chinese and Filipinos, family reunification proved to be a key aspect of the legislation, laying the groundwork for increasing their population in the U.S. Thus, for example, the numbers of Asian immigrants in 1970 was almost 5 times that in 1965 (Gonzales 1993). Interestingly, the Chinese numbers were high despite the fact that for so long they had either been barred or had had low limits. The newer wave of Chinese immigrants into the U.S. after 1965 is attributed to the large numbers of Chinese students who were allowed into the U.S. in the 1960s. (Takaki says in 1980 half of the foreign students were Chinese or other Asian.) Many of these were able to find employment, then obtain immigrant status by applying for Labor Department certification under the new preference category for skilled workers (Takaki 1993:422). Then these students could bring in spouses and children under the family reunification category, and once they had become citizens they could then both bring in their relatives. The 1965 legislation has been widely acknowledged to be the key to opening the doors to Asian immigration.

Also important for some Asian groups in the 1965 legislation were the immigration categories related to the issue of the kind of labor they could offer. The 3rd and 6th preference categories each of which made up 10% of the immigrant visa allotment were to go to, respectively, members of the professions or persons of exceptional ability in the sciences and arts, and the skilled and unskilled workers in short supply in the U.S. The migration of Filipino nurses and Indian doctors has been attributed to the existence of these categories (Takaki 1989; Portes and Rumbaut
The immigrant category is only one through which people from other places end up in the U.S. The other large category is “refugee” and then there are those who are “undocumented” or “illegals.” However they arrive migrants end up as competitors for the supply of jobs in the overall labor market. They also create jobs in their new societies often through the establishment of ethnic enterprises. Refugees have been a significant part of the flow of migrants into the U.S. for some time. The 1965 legislation provided for only a small percentage (6%) of refugees (seventh preference), but the executive branch of government could admit more refugees in an emergency. This was done for refugees from Vietnam and Indo-China, thus increasing the presence of “Asians” in the U.S. In 1975 about 130,000 Vietnamese arrived in the U.S. and by 1980 more than 380,000 Indo Chinese refugees were in the U.S. (Reimers 1981). By 1980, Congress had passed a Refugee Act in order to respond to the “refugee crisis” and a limit of 50,000 refugees was established but subject to revision (this meant that more could be permitted in an emergency).

Subsequent pieces of legislation have provided for increased total immigration. Of recent major importance, the 1990 overhaul of immigration legislation has provided for increased numbers of immigrant visas (700,000 from 290,000 in 1978) but has revised the preference selection system. Although it retained the family reunification class of immigrants (465,000 visas), and employment based category (140,000 visas), it also created a number of other categories including a “diversity” one which, though
small, was intended to reverse some of the consequences of the 1965 law. The diversity visas (40,000 per year) are directed to immigrants from Western Europe. It was argued that they had been unable to utilize the family preference category. (16,000 of the 40,000 were allotted to immigrants from Ireland--a direct result of lobbying by Senator Kennedy.) Beginning in 1995, the legislation provides for 55,000 visas for countries with “low admission” (from which Asian countries are omitted). Within both the employment based category and what is now called the “family sponsored” category, a system of preferences was established that is different from the 1965 legislation. Within the employment based category there are now five preferences:

First preference: Priority Workers (aliens with extraordinary ability, outstanding professors and researchers, Multinational executives and managers) and their spouses and children.

Second preference: Professionals or those with exceptional ability, their spouses and children

Third Preference: Skilled workers, professionals and other workers, their spouses and children

Fourth preference: Employees of the U.S. Mission in Hong Kong (special immigrants), religious workers and their families, juvenile court dependents.

Fifth preference: (Employment Creation)

(U.S. Department of Justice 1991)
Even a cursory examination of these preferences begins to reveal how class is embedded in them. The first two and the fifth are directed to well educated middle and upper-class people. The fourth category is embedded in political processes designed to address the returning of Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1997. In addition, the re-articulation of the employment based preferences has been a result of social and political pressures in recent years to tie immigration more closely to labor market needs. I return to this point later. The influential report *Workforce 2000* by Johnston and Packer of the Hudson Institute (1987) has been a catalyst in the debate around this aspect of immigration policy. It has also been influential in informing the development of employment and training policy. That report is an important element in understanding the “links” between job training, immigration, and the labor market and I will return to it later.

Within the family sponsored category, the preferences are reduced to four as follows:

First preference: Unmarried sons and daughters of U.S. citizens and their children

Second preference: spouses and children of alien residents, unmarried sons and daughters of alien residents, 21 years of age or older

Third preference: Married sons and daughters of US citizens, their spouses and children
Fourth preference: Brothers and sisters of US citizens, their spouses and children

(U.S. Department of Justice 1991)

It has turned out that the family sponsored category is important for understanding the experience of women in the immigration system. It is to their particular experience, especially those who are Chinese and other Asian, I now turn.

Women Immigrants

The language of the preference system in the family sponsored category in the 1965 or 1990 legislation does not raise gender as an issue. However, interestingly, Reimers (1981) argues that the sex composition of immigrants has been changed since the 1930s with the majority being female. He attributes this to family reunification and refugees. Takaki explains that the spouses of the Chinese students who had come in the 1960s, found jobs, then received labor department certification, were “wives.” Houston et al. (1984) indicate that between 1972 and 1979, over two thirds of the spouses admitted under the second preference (spouses of resident aliens) in the 1965 legislation were women. In the same period, in the category of immediate relatives of U.S. citizens—a category which included spouses, children under 21, and parents of adult U. S. children—women were the majority (62%) of immigrant spouses of U.S. citizens. Interestingly too, in the occupational preference categories, men
outnumbered women--women were 43% of the admittees in the professional category and in the 6th preference (skilled and unskilled workers) men outnumbered women by almost 3 to 1 as the principal immigrants in this category. Thus it appears that women have been immigrating under different circumstances, often joining men who were already here.

The mode of entry into the U.S. turns out to be consequential for the social and economic life of the individual immigrant. There are consequences for that person's access to work and to a number of social services. If someone comes into the country as a refugee, she has access to a number of social services that immigrants, both legal and illegal, do not have. For example refugees have had access to cash and medical assistance, which legal immigrants do not. Legal immigrants can receive a social security card which will display entitlement to work legally in the U.S. Illegal immigrants cannot and they are denied access to a host of social services as well. Legislation such as the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 is designed to deny to legal immigrants a number of social service benefits that other tax payers receive. For example, access to programs such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)--which replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), a welfare program targeted to primarily single parent women with young children--is denied to an immigrant for her first five years in the U.S. and after that, any aid is at the discretion of the state she lives in. The legislation also made immigrant sponsors responsible for the economic livelihood of a "new immigrant" and excluded legal
immigrants from an array of social services—e.g., food stamps and Medicaid (except for emergency services) for their first five years in the U.S. After this period, immigrants seeking aid are subject to "deeming"—a sponsor's income is deemed to be available to an immigrant in determining her eligibility for a program (Tomasi 1998).

The tendency of women to enter as "dependents" of men places women in a vulnerable position, more so in a society growing increasingly hostile to immigrants. This is because if they must wait several years for assistance, they have few alternatives for securing a livelihood should they need to in case of abuse, or even in case of divorce from, or death of, their husbands who are in somewhat less vulnerable positions as sponsors (because they would have been here long enough to have access to a number of government programs). The legislative changes will have far reaching negative consequences for all immigrants but might be expected to be intensified in the case of women because of the category under which they tend to enter the U.S. Though the legislation passed in 1996 made some exception for battered women it was somewhat limited in scope. While legal immigrants might be subject to deportation for becoming public charges—that is accessing a host of needs based programs for a period of 12 months within first seven years after entry into the U.S., those subjected to battery would be regarded as public charges if they accessed such services for 48 months within the seven year period but could exceed the 48 months if they

can demonstrate that any battery or cruelty under clause (ii) is ongoing, has led to
the issuance of an order of a judge or an administrative law judge or a prior determination of the Service, and that the need for the benefits received has a substantial connection to such battery or cruelty (HR2202, 1996).

Though they may arrive as "sponsored" dependent immigrants, this does not mean immigrant women do not work. The evidence clearly indicates that they do. However, the blockage of admission to training programs will further handicap women as they attempt to move into better paying jobs. The research literature already indicates that it is typical for women who immigrate to be in the labor force in the U.S. The kinds of jobs they are in depends on a number of different considerations, including language, education and race/ethnicity. Many Asian women end up working in the paid labor force in the U.S. after they arrive here. It has been particularly noted that there is a split labor force for Asian women, including Chinese women. Some end up in white collar professional jobs. Others are confined to the low waged sectors of the economy in dead end low level factory work. The nature of that work depends on the region of the country one is considering. In Boston and New York many Chinese women end up working in the garment industry which has remained in the face of "economic restructuring" which has led to many manufacturing plants closing and relocating elsewhere. In fact this was part of the experience of some of the women I have come to know. They tend to work in places where English is not required. In Chapter Three, I provide an account of the kinds of work that Asian women are
performing in U.S. society.

The overview of immigration legislation and labor suggests that U.S. immigration policy has had a long history of being fashioned to respond to labor market needs, to be politically expedient, and to keep at a minimum the numbers of people deemed undesirable—usually people considered non-white. In meeting its need for labor the U.S. has sometimes resorted to the use of non-white labor anyway and sometimes, as Takaki has argued, to diffuse tensions between white capital and white labor. The development of the "family reunification" category might suggest that migration is not as closely tied to labor needs as some of the historical record suggests. "Family reunification" has been the subject of debate as to whether it establishes a mismatch between labor market needs and the skills such immigrants bring since it is not a process through which one can directly control for skills. However, some researchers argue that not only do people coming under this category enter the labor force but that the Department of Labor analysis of such immigrants "reports that the occupational profile of immigrants entering through family preferences resembles that of immigrants entering through occupational preferences" (Bach and Meissner 1990:14).

The examination of immigration legislation suggests, then, that the ways in which these have operated have been such that they become part of the process organizing a labor market along lines of race, class, and gender. Immigrants entering the U.S. do so through institutional processes such as those described above which
shape their experiences of migration into U.S. society including their labor market experience. But also significant in labor market organization, particularly for the immigrant women who are the focus of this study, are the processes of job training and placement into which they enter once they have arrived.

The research this study reports begins to open up for scrutiny other aspects of the ways in which the state is involved in integrating immigrant labor, intentionally or not, into the labor market. Following the institutional ethnographic approach, the study begins from the standpoint of immigrant Asian women who were involved in employment training programs. Their stories of their entry into U.S. society and of their attempts to find ways of caring for their families and themselves in their new context provided a gateway to seeing the complexity of how labor markets come to be organized and the allocation of immigrant Asian women into this labor market. The women's objectives in seeking out employment training included learning English, gaining better positions than they had so far managed to obtain in U.S. society, and escaping from the loneliness some experienced. The investigation of how the training programs are organized brought into focus how the women's objectives had to be fitted into the relevances of the institutional order. These women were not unskilled but they had to appear as lacking in skills for the training for which they were accepted. The emphasis on efficiency and performance structured the work agencies did in selecting clients and in managing the quality of the labor pool that they produced for the labor market.
Organization of the thesis

In the next chapter I address the question of how immigrant labor has been studied and analyzed in the social science discourses on immigration with a view to later elaborating the ideological work they do. I draw attention to some of the shortcomings of these analyses at the same time that I argue that such analyses also become part of the conceptual currencies organizing employment and training programs. I propose institutional ethnography as an alternative research strategy which allows researchers to disclose the actual organization of labor markets, and I outline the methodology for my research.

Chapter Three provides a review of the literature on immigrant women's work generally and specifically on Asian immigrant women's work. The emergence of "Asian" as an ethnic category has significance for my analysis and I explore how this came into being.

In the chapters that follow I begin the process of unfolding the co-ordinative work activities of putting together employment and training programs. In Chapter Four I provide an overview of the history of job training programs and the role they have played in managing labor in U.S. society. Chapter Four also provides an overview of the legislation which mandated the Job Training Partnership Act, the source of funding for the programs these women clients are in, including an account of the overall way in which these arrangements are structured. This is intended to
provide a sense of the shifting relations between the different layers of the state apparatus—local, state and federal—as well as those between the state, capital, and the community.

Chapter Five describes the experiences of some of the Asian women clients in the program. Their stories, as we shall see, include aspects which are not attended to in the employment training programs. There are also important disjunctures between how they define their training needs and how the state defines those needs. At the same time we see that the women view the programs in the context of their lives in ways which are different from the agenda as defined by the state.

In Chapter Six I examine the requirements for accountability that were built into the job training system. Thus, the record keeping and reporting system is analyzed for how it shapes the work processes of people in the different layers of the enterprise and ultimately for who gets served by it. The records of clients, the reports of their performance and the agencies performance are among the texts which link the activities in one part of the institutional complex to those in another. Texts such as these play a critical role in accomplishing ruling.

Chapter Seven focuses on the funding process. I discuss the formula for funding established by the federal government and the procedures followed by the different levels of state government and community organizations in accessing funding. These included the development of training plans by the state and local government, and identifying labor market needs and populations to be targeted for
services. This chapter lays the groundwork for demonstrating that the funding requirements structured the work processes of community organizations providing training. Here too I show that in implementing the legislation, the local service delivery area increasingly drew private businesses into a more consultative role in developing appropriate training programs.

Chapter Eight continues the examination of the funding process by directing attention to how funding proposals were developed by community organizations and evaluated by the service delivery area. Proposal development and evaluation are closely linked. In this context the performance standard that is established by the state emerges as a crucial component of training that is forcefully brought to bear on community organizations' work.

Chapter Nine focuses on the work processes of the community organization which are the direct deliverers of the training programs. This encompasses a discussion of the recruiting, training, and job placement and counseling work the agencies do. I explore how these processes interrelated and how the work of producing the women as commodities for the labor market creates some degree of tension between the agency workers and the clients they are there to serve. Race, class and gender are significant elements in the selection of clients for the programs and in the jobs they are placed in. The adjustments agencies undergo as they have to respond to the mandates of the state agencies that fund them are addressed.

The last chapter takes up a number of thematic issues raised in the study. I
consider the ways in which the implementation of job training programs as a matter of the work processes located across diverse sites restructures relations among different groups of people. I address the ways in which real people's needs are ignored in this process which does seem driven by "market principles" and reconsider the role of community organizations, now operating, in a sense, as an arm of the state in mediating between capital and labor.
Chapter Two

Conceptual Framework and Method

Introduction

Researchers who wish to investigate immigrant labor will, should they follow the standard social science route, encounter a large body of literature which has established the contours for research in the field. There is thus a standard conception of what the “field” is. This is of interest here not because I wish to follow it but because I wish to explore how the field is ideologically organized within an institutional complex. Unfolding this ideological organization requires a different strategy than suggested by the standard approaches to researching immigrant labor. The focus of this chapter is to explicate the conceptual framework and methodologies used in generating this research. The research strategy which has guided this inquiry from the beginning is one developed by Smith (1987) called “institutional ethnography.” Using this approach a researcher is able to map the complex of relations through which activities of individuals located in an array of sites are coordinated. This mapping includes consideration of how the standard social science discourse for accounting for immigrant’s labor market locations enter into how employment training programs are constructed. As such I wish to explore the ideological work these formulations do with respect to immigrant labor within the context of employment training.
To these ends, this chapter begins with a critical overview of the prevailing models within the standard approaches to immigrant labor: the human capital skills model and dual segmented labor market models of "immigrant incorporation into the labor market." "Immigrant incorporation into the labor market" focusses on immigrants' occupations and incomes, which are typically used as markers of their class location, and is seen as a significant aspect of "immigrant adjustment" to their host society. I also consider a new development within these approaches: social capital. I then provide a more detailed description of institutional ethnography as an alternative research strategy, the methods used in collecting data for this study and key features which guide my investigation in subsequent chapters of this study.

**Human Capital Skills**

The "human capital skills model" of "immigrant incorporation" attributes immigrants' position in the labor market to the individual's human capital skills such as education, occupational training, work experience, and for the U.S., proficiency in English (see Morawska 1990; Glenn 1986). This model combines human capital theory developed in economics and the assimilationist school in sociology and explains immigrants' "assimilation" and "social mobility" in terms of the human capital skills of the individuals of the group. According to the theory, the tendency for immigrants to hold menial jobs is explained by their lack of skills. However, after a period of time in the U.S., such immigrants are able to attain upward mobility by acquiring the skills,
including English proficiency. Thus immigrants' upward social mobility is linked to the degree to which they assimilate to the host society.

The problems inherent in this model have been widely discussed (see Glenn 1986; Morawska 1990; Phizacklea 1983). Notable among the shortcomings of this approach is its inability to account for why certain groups of immigrants, regardless of education and skill levels, are relegated to unskilled jobs. For example, it has been noted that Mexicans often fail to achieve returns on their "human capital skills" as outlined by the theory (see Portes 1995:23). Critics have also argued that this approach fails to take into account other "contextual factors" which affect immigrants' adjustment patterns. For example, it is argued that hostility to immigrants, conflict in the host society between the desire for immigrant labor, and resentment of their presence might affect where they participate in economic life. It is claimed that human capital skills interact with "contextual effects" determining the extent to which such human capital can be used and increased (Portes 1995).

Having identified the social contexts into which immigrants arrive and must operate as important in understanding "modes of incorporation," sociologists have proceeded to categorize the different "contexts of reception" for immigrants.

**Contexts of Reception**

Portes and Rumbaut (1990) have articulated three different contexts or "levels of reception" for immigrants: "policies of receiving governments, conditions of the
host labor market and the characteristics of their own ethnic communities" (p. 85). In a later work by Portes, the three levels are identified as government policies, “civic society and public opinion,” and the ethnic community (Portes 1995). In the later formulation, one of these “contexts,” the “conditions in the host labor market,” has disappeared from view. It is thus useful to explore what each of these “levels” entails.

By government policies are meant those policies which are designed to either facilitate immigrant incorporation or to actively persecute groups of immigrants—for example by denying claims for asylum. There may also be the absence of policy whereby governments do nothing to aid immigrant resettlement. Generally, in recent times, governments have not actively done much for immigrants to aid in their resettlement (Portes & Rumbaut 1990). In the U.S., a few policies have been explicitly directed to refugees on a limited basis—for example, the establishment of refugee cash and medical assistance to aid refugee resettlement and a refugee employment training program. More recently, government policies have been or are being designed to actively exclude immigrants from accessing resources which may help their integration into the society. In 1996 legislative proposals included attempts to exclude both illegal and legal immigrants from a web of social programs, notably access to health care and public education for illegal immigrants, as well as restricting access to social services for recent legal arrivals and even to denying access to educational assistance programs such as loans for community and 4 year colleges) to legal immigrants and their children (See the Chronicle of Higher Education 19 April
1996). These new measures will potentially have the greatest effect on women who are much more likely than men to arrive as "sponsored immigrants"—the category of immigrants to which this legislation is directed.

While government policy directed to immigrants once they arrive is a significant aspect of understanding immigrants' labor market work, so too are those policies which are formulated before the immigration process begins. These include immigration policies designed to attract workers with specific skills. Curiously, these policies are treated by writers on "immigrant adjustment" as different/unrelated to the issue of incorporation. I elucidated some of these in the previous chapter.

The aspect of "context of reception" identified as "host labor market contexts" include "stage in the business cycle, demand for specific kinds of labor, and regional wage differentials" (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:86). These are seen as items of relevance in the "economics of immigration." It is held that more important sociologically is the "manner in which particular immigrant groups are typified," where those typifications may range from negative to positive or may be indifferent (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:86). Here it turns out that "discrimination" towards particular groups may account for their presence in low wage jobs. In Portes' subsequent writing on this matter he has dropped what he identified as an economic concern (demand for specific kinds of labor) to focus on the "sociologically significant." Thus, "civic society and public opinion" is a reference to the "attitude" towards particular immigrant groups that obtains in American society that determines
whether or not they are located in the low wage segment of the labor market.

I would suggest that both "labor market demand" and the treatment of particular immigrant groups are to some degree interconnected and thus sociologically important. Indeed, numerous writers on immigration have pointed out that the hostility to immigrants in general increases in times of economic recession. Contemporary commentators note that the present anti-immigrant sentiment characterizing American society--manifested in the legislation to curb immigration--is linked to the ongoing sense of economic insecurity experienced by Americans, especially white Americans, in the face of economic restructuring which has led to massive job loss. However, it is also the case that some groups are more likely to be subjected to negative treatment than others regardless of labor market demand. These historically have been immigrants who are regarded as racially and culturally dissimilar to the dominant white majority--for example, as Portes notes, the Irish illegal immigrants in Boston are generally treated more positively than are legal Ethiopians or Jamaicans (1995:25).

The third element of "contexts of reception" is the ethnic community. Not all groups of immigrants constitute themselves as a "community." But where they do constitute themselves as a community then it is argued that new arrivals can avail themselves of a number of resources within the community in order to aid in their integration into the new society. It is recognized in the literature that not all groups are sufficiently large enough to have formed "ethnic communities" but conventional thinking on the ethnic enclave seems to be that the existence of social networks within
the enclave provides information about employment outside the community, sources of jobs inside the community, and sources of credit and support for entrepreneurs (see Portes and Rumbaut 1990).

My view is that the structure and organization of work would be an important contextual determinant. However, I also think that the question of what is a skill has to be examined. Too often in these accounts of human capital skills--"skill" is a taken for granted category which is supposed to be objectively available for anyone to see. I return to this in a later section for I believe the other standard model for explaining immigrants' incorporation into the labor market--segmented labor market theory--falls into similar difficulties regarding the issue of skill.

Segmented Labor Market Theory: Its Features and Problems

Segmented labor market theory emerged as an attempt to address some of the shortcomings of the human capital skills model. In this approach, the concepts of "dual economy" and "segmented labor markets" are employed in dividing capitalist economies into two sectors--primary and secondary. The primary sector is said to be composed of large monopolistic firms which offer stable employment, provide opportunities for advancement up an institutionalized job ladder, tend to be unionized, and offer good wages. The secondary sector, on the other hand, is characterized by small competitive firms in which employment is unstable. These are firms which are non-unionized, experience rapid turnover, and have low productivity. It is stated that
jobs in this sector require little training, are menial and low paying, and offer few opportunities for advancement (see Morawska 1990). These are the jobs that are reserved for immigrants while jobs in the primary sector are for the native born (see Piore 1979).

Two questions arise from this brief account: why are the characteristics of these sectors different—i.e. why do monopoly sector firms pay better and offer more stable employment, and why do immigrants end up in the secondary sector?

These questions are addressed by Bonacich and Cheng (1984) who argue that monopoly sector firms require higher levels of skill and training because of their heavy investment in technology and mechanization. Employment stability and security are linked to the cost to the firms of reinvesting in training. Further, unionization, which leads to better wages and working conditions, is likely in this sector because of the type of labor force the sector requires. On the other hand, competitive sector firms have little capital and a high ratio of labor to capital. They have little to invest in technological innovations and so their productivity is low. Characterized thus by instability of production, such firms require seasonal and part-time workers. There is little investment in training; worker turnover is less important and may be preferred as a way of keeping wages low.

Proponents of this model claim that this model departs from a reliance on skill as the determinant of immigrants' lack of access to good (primary sector) jobs and their access to "poor secondary sector" jobs. Instead they argue that "workers in [the
secondary sector] are often hired according to racial, ethnic or gender markers indicative of their labor market vulnerability, rather than according to their skills. In particular, immigrants in a tenuous legal status are frequently preferred for such jobs" (Portes & Borocz 1989:621). Thus it may be race, ethnicity, gender or an immigrant’s legal status which explains their entry into secondary sector jobs. How that happens remains unspecified. Notwithstanding the claim that immigrants’ presence in secondary sector jobs is not about their skills, it seems to me that in the segmented labor market model there is an underlying assumption that immigrants end up in such jobs because they lack the appropriate skills. This is an assumption which overlooks the diversity of contemporary immigrants in terms of levels of education and training. This is similar to the problem suffered by the human capital skills approach.

The inadequacy of this approach lies in part in its insistence on “skills” as an important determinant of good jobs and good wages. While I do not wish to dismiss altogether the idea that “skill” is important, I do wish to problematize the concept by locating it in a set of institutional relations for, as my research suggests, it is a rather fluid category, shifting and changing with the availability of labor among other things.

As a model which emerged to take into account “contextual factors” in immigrant adjustment, segmented labor market theory has nevertheless been criticized for also being ahistoric and focussed on the “monopoly stage of capitalism” (see Glenn 1986). According to such critics, not only is there variation historically in the nature of labor market segmentation but such segmentation also varies by locale. Thus,
Glenn, for example, points out that in the 19th century, the economy was divided between competitive capitalism and pre-capitalist independent producers. In this arrangement native born and migrant labor were respectively to be found in independent and "competitive" sectors. Migrant Asian and Hispanic workers were recruited for the more competitive capitalist sector at the time while native whites were predominating in the "independent sector." Today, she claims, the situation is reversed.

In terms of locale, Glenn argues that "[t]he way in which the local economy develops, the mix of industries, the composition of the labor force, and the relationship of the local economy to the national and international economies determine the structure of the local labor market and the allocation of different groups within it" (Glenn 1986:16). As an example of the importance of these she points to the presence of Japanese and Chinese immigrant men in domestic service work in California at the end of the last century. In other areas of the country this was work that was done by women but the unavailability of women in the west to do this labor provided an opportunity for these immigrant men.

In my view, however, in contemporary times there are not only a number of political processes (for example, having to do with the legal/political control of immigration) but also immigrants' access to and use of avenues for "skill building" (such as the job training programs with which this study is concerned) which are important in how different groups are "allocated" within the labor market. How those
are relevant for understanding immigrants' labor is a question which still needs to be answered.

Another critique of segmented labor market theory is connected to the observation that in the way the dual labor market was originally formulated by political economists, the primary and secondary labor markets "belong to the mainstream economy in the sense that they are managed and controlled by representatives of the dominant group in American society" (Morawska 1990:202). However, critics point to the existence of the "ethnic economic enclave"—consisting of ethnically owned enterprises employing workers of the same immigrant groups—as a third aspect of labor market segmentation. There is a long history of such enclaves in American society. There has also been considerable debate in the ethnic literature on the reasons for their development and persistence. An early explanation was that "ethnic enterprises" provided a way for immigrants to survive in the face of discrimination in the American labor market. More recent research suggests many reasons for immigrants' "entrepreneurship." While my own work is not concerned with such enterprises, it is relevant to note that the agency through which I did my study is located in what is considered an ethnic enclave (Chinatown). There are aspects of the existence of the ethnic enclave which are important for understanding the ways in which women come into programs.

An outgrowth of the recent interest in "contextual factors" and especially the development of studies of "ethnic enclaves" and "ethnic entrepreneurship" in recent
times has been the application of the notion of "social capital" as a tool in describing how people in these enclaves are able to establish businesses. More generally, the concept of "social capital" is articulated as an alternative form of capital which helps explain how immigrants can be incorporated into the labor market in their new society.

Social Capital and Immigrant Adjustment

The concept of "social capital" as it has been used in the literature on immigration has been attributed to James Coleman. It is of interest to me that, in (what now appears to be) an influential paper, Coleman explores the relationship between what he calls "social capital" and the development of human capital. He formulates social capital as a resource that is available to actors ("corporate" and individual):

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. Like physical capital and human capital, social capital is not completely fungible but may be specific to certain activities. A given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useful or even
harmful for others. Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors. It is not lodged either in the actors themselves or in physical implements of production (1988:98).

As Coleman works through some examples to illustrate "social capital in its different forms" it becomes clear that what he is talking about is a set of resources that one can draw on by virtue of one's membership in particular institutions--family, community, religious--and the ties that one develops with other members based on transactions involving obligation, trust, and reciprocity. In other words, it appears that he means resources one can draw on in the pursuit of some goal or interest by virtue of being in particular social networks. In his discussion of how "social capital" is involved in the development of human capital, his focus is on the family. Thus social capital in the family is held to be important for the child's intellectual growth. His examples consist of pointing out that John Stuart Mill's father expended plenty of time and effort on his child's intellectual development and identifying an Asian immigrant family who purchased two copies of texts needed by the child in order for the mother to study to help the child do well in school. Social capital in the family lies in the nature of the relationships between parent and child (are they strong? does the child receive attention?--indicated by such things as how many siblings she has and the mother's expectation of the child's going to college) as well as other family members, and in the physical presence of adults in the family (thus he sees the single parent family as
deficient in social capital). The upshot of his discussion is to claim that "social capital in the family is a resource for education of the family’s children..." (S113). Thus it is important for the production of human capital—which is obtained by children through the schooling process.

In the recent immigration literature, the "social capital" which immigrants bring or have access to is held to be an important element in understanding their incorporation into American society. In some of these writings social capital is held to consist of the resources an immigrant can draw on from her membership in extensive kin and family networks, interpersonal relationships shaped or constrained by cultural values and norms, and a specific social context. This concept has been primarily used in discussions of immigrants who operate in an ethnic enclave economy. Such capital, it is said, provides immigrants an edge in overcoming disadvantages associated with migration (see Zhou 1992). The focus on social capital seems to represent a shift from "individualistic" explanations of immigrant adaptation characteristic of the human capital model to a focus on the social context in which the immigrant operates. Yet I find the transport of "social capital" into the discussions of where immigrants fit in the overall economy troubling because it appears to return us to where we started with the notion of human capital skills—that in the end it is the skills that one brings which determine where one ends up in the labor market. However, we still need to describe how those resources indexed by the concept "social capital" are brought into being and used instead of simply stating that they are available for use.
An Alternative Approach: Institutional Ethnography

The critique of human capital skills and segmented labor market theory has led sociologists interested in immigrant labor to look at a variety of “contextual factors” in understanding that labor. However, the procedure of delineating factors tends to suggest a linear approach to understanding how immigrants come to occupy the positions they do in the labor market. I want to posit a way of thinking that looks at the interrelationship among these various pieces of the puzzle in putting together a labor market in which immigrant women who are “Asian” come to occupy specific positions. That is, community, labor market contexts, and government policy are interwoven elements in understanding these women's labor market work. I wish to propose an approach that does not think “community” apart from “labor market contexts” apart from “government policy.” Rather these are to be treated as inextricably linked in a complex organization which helps to facilitate some “Asian” immigrant women’s entry into the mainstream (non-enclave) labor market while simultaneously failing to help others. Furthermore, the ability to see these linkages has come through a focus on the activities of people engaged in the process of pulling together—through their work of administering, monitoring, delivering—specific government funded employment training programs. Their work processes have provided a window onto part of the process through which Asian women are organized into the labor market. In studying the government training programs attention is directed at how the state, intentionally or not, is an important element in the
organization of immigrants into the labor market. In that the state is an often overlooked player in this process, this research fills an important gap. More significant however, is the work this research does in beginning to articulate the relationship between the state, capital, and community in defining appropriate work for Asian immigrant women.

The realization of the interconnectedness of the various elements in the complex of labor market organization came through following a method of inquiry developed by Dorothy Smith (1987) which she terms "institutional ethnography." In this approach attention is directed to how activities in a local setting are structured and shaped by institutional relations which extend beyond the local. It involves an exploration of the social relations individuals bring into being through their practices as they go about their daily work and as that work is coordinated in relation to the work of others in extra-local or trans-local (see McCoy 1998) settings.

Critical to the project of institutional ethnography is the methodological stipulation that the entry point of an investigation is always "the standpoint of actual individuals located in the everyday world" (Smith 1987:159). Standpoint refers to the location of an "embodied subject" in a specific local, historical setting. Although the beginning of inquiry is the standpoint of individuals located in the everyday, the point is not to confine inquiry to the direct experience of the everyday world. Indeed we cannot fully understand the everyday world by remaining within its scope for the everyday world is "organized by social relations not fully apparent in it nor contained
In the enterprise of institutional ethnography, the everyday world is taken as sociology's problematic (see also P. Grahame 1998). The task of an inquiry beginning in the standpoint of individual or individuals located at a specific place in the everyday world is to explore and analyze the complex of relations structuring and coordinating the individuals' activities in the particular setting. Thus the goal of undertaking such a project is to make visible the social relations, conceived as "temporally concerted sequences or courses of action" in and through which the activities of people in different sites, who may or may not be known to one another, are coordinated (Smith 1987, 1990a, 1990b).

In institutional ethnography, "institution" refers to a "complex of relations" organized around a specific function such as law, health care, or education. This complex of relations forms part of the ruling apparatus in contemporary society. It does not mean a specific form of social organization but refers rather to the coordination and intersection of an array of activities into a "functional complex." For example, Smith points to the ways in which state agencies are typically linked to professional forms of organization and how both are "interpenetrated by relations of discourse of more than one order" (1987:160). The concept "institution" refers not to each of those as entities in themselves but rather to the way in which they are interwoven around a particular function. In the case of employment training I examine, the institutional complex providing employment training involves many players including multiple state agencies, community non-profit organizations,
economists who develop labor market forecasts, industrial development, and the like.

Ethnography, as Smith uses it, demarcates not a description of a particular local setting as it does in standard sociology, but directs us to focus on the activities of people in some local setting with a view to explicating how those activities are coordinated in relation to multiple sites and as such accomplish social relations of ruling.

Central to the coordination of institutional processes is the development of ideologies which "provide categories and concepts expressing the relation of local courses of action to the institutional function" (Smith 1987:160). Ideological categories can be viewed as a kind of conceptual currency which provides for exchange among different parts of the institutional complex and through which the different sites are coordinated. The categories and concepts of ideology are used by members of the setting to describe and analyze how their own practices fulfill the institutional function. Moreover, members to a local setting, in their actual work practices, intend the categories and concepts of those ideologies (Smith 1987:160). In this study I display what some of these ideologies are evidenced in the ways individuals talk about their work processes and what they are trying to accomplish. Thus, for example, "skill" and "skill transferability" come to be critical currency in the enterprise of job training. The discourses on "poverty" and "disadvantage" provide other significant categories through which immigrants' needs are understood and addressed within employment training practices.
Undertaking an institutional ethnography thus involves three main tasks. One of these is the analysis of ideological procedures which are used to make the institutional work processes accountable as described above. The second is an examination of the work activities (broadly defined) of people engaged in the production of their daily lives with a view to analyzing how that world is shaped by and maintains the institutional process. The third task involves analyzing how these work processes in a particular sphere are connected to those performed by others elsewhere and as such operate as part of an extended set of social relations (Smith 1987:160-161).

In my study, I examine the work activities of a variety of individuals in a number of different sites as they put together employment training programs. As I worked to make sense of the kinds of work processes I saw, heard, and read about, I was able to begin to identify some of the ideological categories pulled into service as a way of accounting for the courses of action that were followed and that thus made sense of the practices people were engaged in, in terms of the institutional function. As I followed through the various work processes, it became evident that every aspect of training, from recruitment to counseling women for jobs in the community organizations, developing proposals for funding, and planning processes at the state and local governmental levels, were components of an extended set of relations organizing immigrant women into specific locations in the labor market. It also became clear that these relations were mediated through texts of various kinds. The
variety of activities that people were engaged in, in managing, planning, and delivering programs, were coordinated through texts. These included participant records, planning documents, labor market analyses, legislation, and the like.

**Fieldwork and methodology**

Conducting an institutional ethnography is not dependent on a single method for data collection. Rather, the methods used can be diverse and varied (Smith 1987). Thus, interviewing, participant observation (Ng 1988) recollections of past work experience (K. Grahame 1998) analysis of documents (McCoy 1998) are all possible. The data on which this study is based were generated by a number of different methods. These included interviewing, observation, and collection of documents for analysis. I begin with an account of gaining access to the field.

Gaining entry into the field to the research was a first hurdle to overcome. As a newcomer to U.S. society, I faced the problem of how to get access to what I wanted to study, given the absence of affiliation with a local university and no other connections here. The route to the field was circuitous. In my first few months here I landed a job which gave me access to both people who were working in government and in community organizations--some which were women focussed but others which were multipurpose. This provided me with the means of getting into the field. The job, in a women's organization, involved outreach work to women of color and work with the state legislature and drew me into making connections with people who
worked in a variety of capacities with state agencies such as the Massachusetts Office of Immigrants and Refugees (ORI), the Department of Employment and Training (DET), the Women's Bureau in the Federal Department of Labor, among others. In my position, I was engaged in some joint work with people from the Office of Refugees and Immigrants and Department of Employment and Training, helping to put together a resource guide to employment and training programs and services which were available, and which could be distributed to organizations servicing immigrants and refugees. It was here that I began to learn about the range of job training programs that were available though not necessarily targeted to immigrant populations. Here too I learned that there was funding specifically set aside through federal legislation for programs for refugees and which were given to the states. In Massachusetts, this money and responsibility for allocation of funding for this program was done through the Office of Refugees and Immigrants. But I was interested in the broader class of immigrants and whether and what kind of training programs were available to them. As we helped put together this resource guide, I began to learn that there were a number of eligibility criteria for the different programs and I began to narrow my search down to programs that were open to adult women (as opposed to programs targeted to youth) and eventually came to locate the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA, pronounced Jetpa by those involved in it) programs, as the largest federally funded set of programs. These were not restricted to immigrants but they could be eligible for participation. Once I had decided that I would investigate this set of
programs and how "immigrant women" were being served by these, I set about trying to find people who were working either with women, with immigrants, or with employment training. My job had given me the opportunity to form many connections with people in a variety of places and I used these connections to put me in touch with community organizations who were delivering programs, with individuals in the State Department of Employment and Training who were directly involved with JTPA and also in the Federal Department of Labor who were involved in employment and training. As I contacted people, I arranged for interviews, and as I did each interview I learned something more about the complexity of the organization of JTPA programs.

The first interview that I did was with a person who had worked with the State Department of Employment and Training, the Office of Refugees and Immigrants, as well as with the local level agency in employment training (called a service delivery area). I met her while I was engaged in the joint work of putting together the resource guide for refugees and immigrants. Another person involved in that project put me in touch with Department of Employment and Training staff involved with JTPA, and a connection I had in the Federal Department of Labor introduced me to a federal worker who had some direct responsibility for JTPA. This federal worker then connected me with another. At the same time, I contacted two community organizations which were located in the city and which I expected, given their location, might be providing employment training services to immigrants who were from Asia. One is very widely known in the city and the other less so. One of the
organizations was located in Chinatown and one was in close proximity to it. The central focus of my study came to be the community organization in Chinatown. It was here I interviewed not only workers who were involved in the intake and delivery of programs but also female clients. In the second agency I did the same but in a less intense way.

In the end, I interviewed in all four people who worked in employment training at the federal level, three at the state level, three at the local level (called the service delivery area) and five at the community organization level. In addition I interviewed seven clients of the programs. All but one of these interviews were taped. I also did an “informal interview” with an academic who was on a state board which advised the governor on employment and training matters.

The interviews were unstructured interviews, in the form of conversations (Lofland and Lofland 1995). At all levels of the job training enterprise, the interviews were focussed on the work processes of those who were involved in managing, administering, and running these programs. My objective was to get at the work practices through which programs were put in place and managed. So the questions that I asked were, for the most part, focussed on what they did and how they did their work. Because these were open ended interviews, people would sometimes talk about politics and political processes and how those entered their work. This was particularly true of the federal level workers but also of some of the community organization workers. The open ended structure allowed me to pursue lines of inquiry
suggested by the subject's comments and which often proved fruitful—for example, when a local governmental worker raised the issue of a specific economic model of industry/labor market development that her service delivery area was using.

The interviews with women clients were also unstructured and conversational, but with different objectives. The interviews came to focus on their school and job history before they arrived, their work and family lives at present, and their future plans. I also asked about the process of getting into the programs, how they came to know about the organization, and what they had to do to get in. I also asked about their family lives in the U.S.—children, husbands, working in paid labor. These topic areas were intended to address the claims made in theories of labor market incorporation that human capital skills of immigrants explain their labor market location. Education and work experience are routinely taken to be indicators of such skills. In addition, since I had come to this research versed in a sociological literature which had established the challenges faced by women who carry both the burden of paid work and family responsibilities (see Hochschild 1989) and since I had also found that the training program was organized as an all day endeavor, I sought to understand whether and how these women managed. By the time I interviewed the women I had discovered, due to my earlier community work, that many Asian women sought jobs which provided benefits such as health care. I had also discovered the programs intended that people find jobs at the end of training. Thus, I wanted to get a sense of how the women viewed these programs in their lives. All of these interviews were
conducted in English. Although in some cases there was a little difficulty in our understanding of each other, I would repeat what I said or rephrase it to get the sense of what they were saying. Sometimes, if I found their pronunciation was difficult for me to understand or mine for them to understand, I wrote down words to help facilitate our conversation. For the most part I had little difficulty.

In addition to interviews I collected a variety of documents which were produced and used in the course of contracting, delivering, administering, and what individuals referred to as "monitoring" of the programs. Every time some document was referred to I asked for it. Thus I have examined planning specifications, policy documents, participant records, and requests for proposals to run programs to name a few. These were collected from every level of the organization of these programs--federal to community organization.

Finally, I was able to observe intake interviews as well as a class at the community organization in Chinatown I call "Asia House," and one "information session" at the community organization I call "City Services." The latter was recorded but I was unable to record at the first site and instead I kept detailed field notes. I also kept field notes for all my visits to interview workers and clients as well as the follow-up telephone conversations I had with workers.

The collection of data took place over a period of time primarily between 1992 and 1995 as time and ability to set up meetings and visits permitted. One interview was conducted in 1997. This meant that I did not observe the program at the same
point in time. Initially I had thought this would mean a certain degree of discontinuity in the programs I was interested in but, as it turned out, because of the calendar year cycles of different aspects of programming—the training cycle, the cycles for proposal requests, planning cycles at the various levels—there was somewhat of a "discontinuity" among the different levels of government anyway. As one state worker put it, the work process was not a "linear" one but rather one where "multiple things were going on that the same time." Ideally one is supposed to have a plan in place before a request for proposals is issued but "in the real world" that does not happen. At the federal level one worker expressed frustration at the overdue oversight plan from the Washington office of the Department of Labor. I quickly learned that delay, overlap, and departures from the "rational sequence" that planning documents might suggest was a routine part of how work was done. Although I understood that the training programs themselves had 20 week cycles of classroom time, there is a lag time between proposals, programs and "outcomes" which is the term used to refer to whether and how people are placed in jobs and the "skill competencies" they achieve. There is also a lag between amendments to legislation and when those amendments begin to take effect at the program level. Part of employees' work became responding to changes in the legislation by incorporating them into their activities of overseeing and monitoring programs where appropriate. Thus, given the character of the work process, I came to realize that what I was engaged in was, in a sense, ongoing work and there was no clear beginning or end of this whole process.
Chapter Three

Immigrant Asian Women in the Labor Force

Immigrant Women in the Labor Force

There are few studies of the labor market participation and location of immigrant women as a category in the U.S. Research in the 1980s by Tienda et al (1984) and Houston et al (1984) provided accounts of the occupations of "immigrant women" with that of "native born" women but told little about who the women were in terms of national origins or race, or how they got into the jobs they did. However a basic image which emerges is the double clustering of women in the occupational hierarchy. Thus, "immigrant women were more likely to be at the top of the occupational scale than either their male counterparts or their U.S. sisters, but they were also more likely to cluster at its bottom" (Houston, Cramer, and Barrett 1984:944). Using data gathered from the women's reports of their occupations on entry into the U.S., this study found that immigrant women were clustered in professional and technical "high-skilled occupations (28.1%)" but were also to be found in white collar low level clerical work (18%), semi skilled blue collar jobs (17.9%) and in private household work (13.9%) (Houston et al. 1984:944). But while interesting, those data do not tell us about where they end up in the labor market once they enter the U.S. labor force. Tienda et al.'s research based on sample data from the 1970 and 1980 censuses argued that immigrant women in 1980 were clustered in high
end and low end jobs with 16.2% in professional and technical jobs, 26.3% in clerical, 21.7% as factory operatives and 19.7% as service workers (which includes both social and personal services—but apparently immigrant women are more likely than are native born women to be in personal services). While the two studies' data are not directly comparable, it is noteworthy that they report a similar clustering and that immigrant women's presence in professional and technical occupations seem to decrease after arrival, while their presence in clerical work, service work and blue collar operative work increase. Could this be evidence of the downward mobility many immigrants experience after arrival (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Prieto 1986; Haines 1986; Woo 1989), and if so how and why? Further, in comparing native born women's and immigrant women's occupations, Tienda et al point to increased disparity between native and immigrant women's occupational allocation between 1970 and 1980 despite claims that the economic transformations taking place in the period would reduce socioeconomic disparities (1984:1033). The data presented in both these studies raise questions about who is in the high end, who is in the low end, and how they got there. Tienda et al’s study is speculative about the race-ethnic composition of immigrants at the different occupational levels suggesting by use of tabular data they present that since Latin American immigrants have lower levels of education and Asians have higher levels the former would be “disproportionately concentrated in low status positions while the latter are disproportionately represented in the high status positions” (1984:1042). The statement assumes a direct match
between education (often taken to be an indicator of skill) and type of job. But whether such statements are warranted requires further study into the allocation of jobs on the basis of education levels. This is particularly so since other research on Asian American women, for example, provides some evidence that there is a mismatch between their levels of education and the kinds of jobs they get. Woo (1989) argues that Asian American women do not get the income returns on their high levels of education that other women receive and that Asian women who are foreign born and college educated (4 or more years) are most likely to find clerical and administrative support jobs—that is lower level positions than their education credentials might allow.

The shortcomings of approaches focussed on aggregate data are highlighted by studies of women in the labor force which focus on specific ethnic and racial groups, nationality groups, and geographical region. Such studies begin to provide a better map of who is doing what, where, and sometimes how it is they came to be in those jobs. The picture which emerges is a somewhat complex one in which where the ethnic group is from, when they immigrated to the U.S., where they migrated to, and whether they are “documented” (legal) immigrants or “undocumented” (illegal) immigrants all have a bearing on the kinds of work they do. Sometimes, time of arrival into the U.S. is used in the literature to provide a sense of a particular sub-group of immigrants class background—for example, Cubans who came in the period immediately following the Cuban revolution were business and professional class people, and Vietnamese who arrived shortly after 1975, in the aftermath of U.S.
withdrawal from Vietnam, are mostly middle class. My review of studies of different race-ethnic and nationality groups revealed that some ethnic groups are concentrated in the low end of the labor market, in jobs that pay little, are non-unionized and usually dead end. Other groups are located in both high end and low end of the labor market, and still others seem to have a large proportion in the high end. Thus for example Mexican women in Los Angeles County work as operatives or laborers in services (including private households) and in clerical and sales positions (Simon and Deley 1986); Chinese women in New York city are likely to be employed as sewing machine operators in the garment industry, as waitresses in the restaurant industry, and in sales and clerical positions (Loo and Ong 1987); the vast majority (67%) of Cuban women in one county in New Jersey are in blue collar work in the apparel and textile industry but some are business owners (7%) or in professional/managerial jobs (8%) (Prieto 1986); and while a substantial proportion (34.7%) of Vietnamese women had jobs in clerical or sales positions some (5.9%) had professional or technical positions (Haines 1986). Haines points out that when compared with South East Asian groups (e.g. Khmer, Hmong, Laotian) or Chinese, Vietnamese women were best represented in professional and technical occupations.

While these studies began to fill in some of the gaps of the research of immigrant labor, they also created some trouble for me since the occupational categories used to describe the work women do are not always clear or consistent. For example, business owners could include anything from someone providing child care
in their homes to someone operating a successful grocery store. The general sense that one gets from these studies however is that most immigrant women who are considered minority are in low end, poorly paid, non-unionized jobs. A further finding is that most experience significant downward mobility after immigration (see for example Grassmuck and Pessar 1991; Prieto 1986; Haines 1986). For example, Prieto’s study of Cuban women found that most of the blue-collar workers used to be white-collar workers or business and professional workers in Cuba. A notable exception to the trend of downward mobility for newer immigrants is Soviet Jews who apparently are able to find jobs in the U.S. “consistent with their prior training and skills in the Soviet Union” (Simon et al. 1986:87).

It is also notable that, with the exception of Soviet Jews, the ethnic groups that are the focus of contemporary studies are members of what are considered race-ethnic minority groups in the U.S. Perhaps this is due in large part to the fact that these groups form a large part of the new wave of migration to the U.S. However, this observation must also be coupled with the observation that race continues to be an ongoing concern in U.S. society. One is hard pressed to find studies of, for example, Canadian women or women from Western Europe, even though Canadians make up a substantial number of the new legal immigrants to Massachusetts (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 1989).

Although the studies which focus on particular race-ethnic groups began to provide some insight into women’s work, they often compress together those who are
“immigrant” in a technical sense with those who are not. This creates some trouble to the extent that for the Asian groups who are the focus of this study, some have been in the U.S. several generations and others have only recently arrived. Such studies thus provide no insight into whether or not aspects of their immigrant status impinge on their labor market location. In addition, some research focus on specific nationalities (say Chinese, Vietnamese) and others on a range of nationalities assembled under “Asian.” Below, I provide a brief overview of the research literature on Asian immigrant women’s work with a particular focus on Chinese and Vietnamese women since these form the subjects of my research. Before doing so, however, some explication of the term “Asian” is in order.

The category “Asian”

In this study I use the term “Asian” to describe the particular group of women participating in the job training programs. Rather than uncritically incorporating it into my study, the term deserves some explanation. The term “Asian” is to be found in many writings ranging from chapters on race and ethnicity in introductory sociology text books to descriptions on a variety of government documents, to accounts of race-ethnic groups or immigrant groups in the daily newspapers and popular magazines. It has a life in a “text world.” In the sociology texts, “Asian” includes people who are Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indian, Filipino and so on. In government documents including birth certificates, census forms, and the participant records of the
federal job training programs, we are given a similar breakdown of those who are Asian. Asian or, more precisely, Asian/Pacific Islander is used in the participant record of the job training program to refer to people “having origins in any of the original peoples of the far east, southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent (e.g. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan), or the Pacific Islands. This area includes, for example, China, Japan, Korea, the Philippine Islands, and Samoa. Hawaiian Natives are to be recorded as Asian or Pacific Islanders” (p.32 ). It is interesting that while the participant record omits “immigrant” as a category of relevance to the program, it includes Asian among a number of other race-ethnic categories. It is not merely because of its appearance on government documents or in sociology texts that I have come to use the term. It is also because as I did my work of uncovering the organization of these programs that I came to understand that Asian (as do other race-ethnic categories) has currency in the larger social context of everyday life that influences how these women are seen and treated. Asian, Hispanic, black, white, Native American are taken up and used by people in everyday life—co-workers, friends, students, neighbors all use these terms.

The problematic nature of the concept “Asian” is revealed in my experience of disjuncture between what is called “Asian” or who is counted as Asian in some “official sense” and who is perceived as “Asian” in an ordinary everyday sense. In the official sense, as a person with origins in the Indian subcontinent and not from a Spanish speaking country, I am Asian. But no-one has ever taken me for Asian. I am
much more apt to be taken for "Hispanic." When I have asked class after class of
students to provide a description of Asian, people from the Indian subcontinent are
never mentioned. Specifically, I am never seen as Asian. Media accounts of Asians
also typically do not include Indians and when they do, they are mentioned as one
nationality among others and then dropped from the discussion (see New York Times
30 May 1996). A similar pattern takes place in sociology writings, even in a book
about the emergence of a "pan-Asian" ethnic identity (see Esperitu 1992). Elsewhere,
I have described this as being a marginalized Asian (Grahame, 1996) and have
explored how "Asian" as a category is embedded in relations of ruling (see Smith
1987) in society.

As a race-ethnic category, Asian is relatively new. It is also clear that there
continues to be not only contestation about who should be included in the category but
what the problems are in lumping so many disparate groups together. Both problems
turn out to hinge on the question of what might be politically best for the people
concerned. That political expedience and social circumstances seem to be a driving
force in the emergence of "Asianess" is traced in Esperitu's book (1992). Here she
locates the evolution of an "Asian" identity in the political and social processes in the
context of 1960s activism and struggles against racism, poverty, war, etc. Prior to this,
she cites evidence of "ethnic disidentification" among people who were and continue
to be lumped as Asians—distancing oneself from a perceived other ethnic group—e.g.
no Chinese or Filipino person wanted to be identified as Japanese during Japanese
internment in WWII and so some walked around with buttons proclaiming their ethnicity, and the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 which prohibited the Chinese from immigration led to Japanese dissociating themselves from this group. She also, however, points to the development of coalitions across ethnic groups historically (Filipino and Japanese sugar field workers in Hawaii in their struggles for better working conditions and wages).

According to Esperitu, beginning with student organizations on college campuses in the 1960s, the term Asian American then came to be taken up by professional and community activists to lobby for resources for their constituencies. Pan-Asian news media were also developed helping to forge an “Asian consciousness.” On college campuses the establishment of Asian-American studies and the development of a discourse on Asian American experience began to be put in place.

Esperitu further argues that out of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, the state redefined and expanded the rights of minorities and in so doing institutionalized ethnicity. The implementation of government mandated affirmative action programs designed to ensure minority (women and race) representation in education, employment, housing, etc., provided a “compelling interest for minority groups to resurrect dormant ties or create new ones in order to pursue interests that may or may not relate to culture” (pp.12-13). The organization of U.S. electoral politics is also an important element in the different groups coming together--in order, for example, to
apply some pressure for having their needs met. Coalition-building among the disparate groups has intensified in the 1990s in response to anti-immigration rhetoric and since Asians are among the newest immigrants. Thus, for example, a day long conference was held in Boston in 1996 and in other cities across the U.S. in an effort to build coalitions, educate people about Asians and the current proposals around immigration and to get Asians to become more politically aware and involved.

From the early days of the forging of the category “Asian,” who were included in this concept came to be contentious. Koreans and Filipinos often complained that the concept seem to imply only Chinese and Japanese Americans. For example, their groups, they argued, were neither represented in what was being taught nor among teachers on college campuses. It seems that there is ongoing debate about “inclusion/exclusion” within the category. “Asian Indians” is a category developed in the 1970s to demarcate people with origins in India from Native Americans while at the same time to include them as “Asians”—this according to one source was lobbied for by Indians. Prior to this such people were either “other” or “white” (depending on the socio-political climate). Today contestations over who should be included in the category co-exist with arguments over the problem of lumping so many disparate groups together. And in this process, some groups become more marginal than others. I have already noted that Asian Indians have appeared as marginal Asians in texts. The official inclusion of Asian Indians in the category does not translate into inclusion in everyday life. For example, a meeting of Asian Sisters (a feminist organization) is
announced to me but I am not included and the Chinese woman I am speaking to apologizes and says she forgets. I think it is because I do not fit the ordinary, common sense understanding of what “Asian” is. In recalling the killing of Vincent Chin, who was a Chinese-American man killed because he looked Japanese, a prominent scholar reminds us that anyone “with black hair and slanted eyes” is assigned membership in a single racial category--Asian. Indians do not quite fit this description. And other “Asian-Americans” too cannot distinguish among nationalities. Thus a young man is quoted in the New York Times as saying when he went to public school with many Asian students his friends turned out to be Korean, Thai, Chinese, and Taiwanese--“it just seemed that they looked like me” (30 May 1996: B6).

Being perceived as Asian brings along with it a great deal of stereotypic baggage. The stereotypes which abound about Asians, and Asian women in particular, play a role in how they are perceived and treated in the job placement segment of the job training program.

As Smith has pointed out, as sociologists we participate in the creation of the “conceptual currency” with which we are governed (1990:14). The creation of race-ethnic categories is part of that work we do. Race-ethnic categories are a significant part of the job training programs I study in a number of ways. They are present in plans for programs and the participant records used for tracking clients in programs. The data thus generated can then be used in a variety of ways. Compilations are made in order to provide for accountability on the basis of “race” in the programs. For
example, the General Accounting Office (GAO), an arm of government charged with the monitoring of government programs on congressional demand, produced a report for Congress on gender/race disparity in the program I study (see JTPA, Racial and Gender Disparities in Services). In the report women and race-ethnic minorities appear as demographic groups concerned about disparity in services to them. These kinds of reports are done with requests from Congress who may, in turn, be pressured into doing them perhaps on the basis of media reports or by organized citizen groups such as, in this case, the Urban League and the Women’s Action Alliance. There are, however, also more routine ways in which the race-ethnic categories are pulled into service—for example, in determinations about which organization might be awarded a contract for job training on the basis of services being offered to “disadvantaged groups” including particular race-ethnic minorities.

Asian Women’s Work

Although I have pointed out above that, as a category, “Asian” has come to have relevance in a variety of ways, it is also the case that many academic studies may focus on particular nationality groups and I have relied on these studies to provide an overview of where the two main groups—Chinese and Vietnamese women—in my study are located in the labor market.
Chinese women

Recently published work based on the 1980 census data which directs attention to immigrant women’s work on the basis of race and/or nationality suggests that Asian immigrant women who are married (with the exception of Japanese women) are much more likely to work in paid labor than are other married immigrant women (Duleep and Sanders 1993). Chow (1996) reports that in 1990 approximately 59% of Chinese American women are in the labor force. Since 69% of Chinese Americans in 1990 were foreign born, we can surmise that many of the women in the labor force are immigrant. According to Chow in 1990, “38 percent of Chinese women did technical, sale, administrative and clerical work, while 17% held professional jobs and 15 % managerial positions. Nearly one-third of them were employed as service and operative workers” (1996:120). But she points to social class as a means of understanding the different work and family experiences of Chinese Americans. The immigration legislation created two distinct groups of immigrants--often referred to in the literature as “downtown and uptown Chinese.” The downtown Chinese are those who are recent immigrant families coming from rural areas or from the urban working class who settle in or near urban Chinatowns and who find jobs either in ethnic enterprises working as seamstresses; in restaurants as cooks, waitresses, janitors; and in clerical and sales work. Some may be involved in home-based piece-work (Chow 1996; Takaki 1989).

The uptown Chinese on the other hand are better educated and are
professionals, managers, and business people. Many of these were anti-communist refugees who were admitted into the U.S. under the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act (legislation governing immigration). But some are also more recent admittees who have left Hong Kong “nervous about the impending return of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China in 1997” (Takaki 1989:426) and brought their capital with them; others are immigrants from urban areas of mainland China who came after the normalization of relations between China and the U.S. in 1979; still others are among those who came as students in the ’60s and ’70s and stayed eventually sponsoring their family members. These are among the Chinese who are able to find professional, technical, managerial or clerical work. Those who are American born are also among the professional and business class. However, as mentioned earlier, Woo (1989) has pointed out for many Asian women (including Chinese) there is a mismatch between their skills and the jobs they end up receiving, and that this is particularly so for immigrant women.

Zhou’s (1992) research on New York’s Chinatown provides an illustration of the work Chinese immigrant women do. She too reports the dual location of women noted above but with an overwhelming majority of immigrant working in low level positions as “laborers.” Based on 1980 census data, her research shows almost 59% of Chinese women in the New York Metropolitan area work as laborers, 23% work in “administrative support and precision production” and 13% in professional, technical and managerial positions. Further she found that it was women in the city who tended
to occupy the lower level positions—usually as garment workers (60% of them were garment workers) while women living outside the city were in the higher level positions (mirroring the uptown/downtown dichotomy described by others).

Zhou argues that women work in the garment industry because that is all that is available to them given their poor language skills and limited knowledge of the larger labor market. She also argues that the garment jobs grew as a result of a supply of cheap immigrant labor and the willingness of entrepreneurs to invest in and manage the garment trade. Most of these are in the “ethnic enclave.” Further she states that it is women’s family roles, gender discrimination inside and outside of Chinatown which makes this the women’s only alternative. Garment jobs are unstable and seasonal because the garment manufacturing which remains in New York’s Chinatown is that which is susceptible to quick changes in fashion. She argues that as secondary wage earners, job stability is not as important for women workers as it is for the man. In addition, the garment contractors will often permit workers some flexibility in terms of hours allowing women to take care of housework and children or to bring children to the factory. Thus, the more stable but less flexible restaurant jobs are reserved for men for the most part.

Some of the garment workers are women who are well-educated but who lack English language skills. Other well-educated women may find work in the mainstream economy. These are women who are likely to have been American trained—having attended U.S. schools and then decided to remain. However, well-
educated women trained in their home countries must find work in the enclave economy usually because they lack good English skills, or because “their skills are not transferable” (Zhou 1992:165). But they seem to fare less well than their male counterparts there because the good jobs in the enclave tend to be reserved for men, a characteristic which she attributes to the domination of males in Chinese culture.

While Zhou’s discussion fits with some of the material that I have gathered through discussions with people in Boston’s Chinatown, there is a need for a more thorough analysis of what is happening. It is not quite clear, for example, why it is that the skills well-educated professional immigrants bring are not transferrable. Secondly, it is not clear how it is that they do not use the resources that are available in the enclave in the form of social service agencies to find out about non-enclave jobs (a feature of enclaves that writers on immigrants including Zhou have remarked upon). Third, while I find her remarks on the nature of the two major types of jobs (restaurant and garment work) and how those fit with men’s and women’s presumed roles interesting, I had found that in Boston’s Chinatown, the restaurant jobs do not always offer stability though they too tend to be held by men. In the 1990s recession, I was told by workers in Chinatown’s social service agencies that unemployment was high among men because of the layoffs in the restaurant industry.

**Vietnamese women**

The research on the labor market work of Vietnamese migrant women in the
U.S. is sparse. Haines (1986) provides some information on labor force participation for Vietnamese refugee women (some of whom are ethnic Chinese from Vietnam). Drawing on data generated from surveys conducted by the federal government in the mid 1970s to early 1980s, following the beginnings of the refugee flow from Vietnam after the U.S. pulled out, Haines found that a slight majority of the women were in the labor force. He also found that as a group these women were better educated than most other South East Asian refugees, with the exception of Vietnamese refugee men. Furthermore, most of the women who had been employed in Vietnam were in professional or technical (19.2%) or sales and clerical positions (60%). However, in the U.S. only 5.9% and 34.7% respectively were to be found in these jobs. Many became involved in factory operative work (17.4%) or service work (14.9%) in the U.S. Thus his data show a downward spiral for Vietnamese women once they arrive in the U.S. That is, they are likely to be in lower level work post-immigration to the U.S. He offers little by way of explanation of what he calls their “economic activity” except to state that activity may be “subordinated to general family goals” (1986:75). Interestingly too, Haines offers some account of the involvement of this population in English language training and other training programs. His data suggest that they are heavily involved but without mentioning that the federal government had set aside funding for programs to train the refugee population (Grahame 1991). This is one advantage--access to English language training programs and other employment training-- that women who are refugees have over those who are merely immigrant.
While Haines’ work provided a broad picture of Vietnamese women’s labor market work, Kibria’s (1993) ethnographic study of Vietnamese families in Philadelphia provides a closer examination of their work lives. She points to the shifting structure of opportunities available in the labor market in the 1980s when there was a decline in manufacturing and an increase in services and a relocation of manufacturing from the city to suburbs which resulted in overall decreased work opportunities. In addition, for the Vietnamese, their skills were not viewed as appropriate or easily marketable in the U.S. labor market given that so many were in the military or in small business and trading. The net effect was high unemployment or jobs in the low-level service work—cleaning and waitressing. For women, the seasonal, unstable character of the jobs available meant that they were in and out of employment. It also meant that they often would end up working in the “informal” economy—that outside official government monitoring—in the garment or small food preparation industries. Although these jobs resemble the low level sector jobs in the “formal” economy in that they are poorly paid, unstable, have no benefits or opportunity for advancement, the earnings were tax free, such wages could be sheltered from welfare offices’ scrutiny and hours were flexible, and work could sometimes be done at home thus enabling women to be available for childcare and household labor. But workers had no recourse for the abuses they sometimes suffered--such as non-payment of wages for work done. Thus her findings show that familial responsibilities play a part in structuring women’s paid work.
Though Chinese and Vietnamese women may enter the U.S. under different legal categories, they share an experience which is characterized by downward mobility in the labor market and in having, like other women, to combine paid work with family responsibilities. The research thus far tends to posit human capital skills (women do not have them or they are not transferable skills in the U.S. market), women's particular responsibilities to family (either actual or potential), and the structure of opportunities available in the labor market in order to explain why it is that these women end up in the work that they do. By interviewing women about their lives, some of the research has captured very well the kinds of coordination women must do in order to do both paid and unpaid work.

More problematic in the research is the uncritical reliance on the idea of "skills." While I would not wish to dispute the idea that "skill," including the ability to speak and write English, is essential for a "good" job in the U.S. labor market, I believe we must more closely examine how that comes into play for immigrant workers in the U.S. How is skill assessed? What counts as skill? What is that makes certain skills transferable and others not--why for example are Soviet Jews able to get jobs commensurate with their Soviet experience but not Chinese or Vietnamese for the most part? In my own research "skill" itself becomes a category for analysis because of the particular way it becomes relevant in the employment training and placement process. The work that I do begins to reveal "skills" socially constructed character. The notion of skill as a social construct has been examined by Gaskell (1987).
examination of clerical work, she argues that the definition of certain kinds of work as skilled or unskilled arise out of political struggles waged in the workplace and in educational institutions. Because of their lack of economic and political power, she argues, women have not done well in these battles. Clerical work historically came to be defined as "unskilled" despite requiring significant technical and literacy skills because of the gender and class positions of those involved in it. Part of this historic transformation involved how training in clerical skills were provided. For example, the wide availability of clerical skills programs in public education, community colleges, and in private business schools created a large supply of female workers so that clerical work comes to be seen as "everywoman's skill," thus not really skilled.

In addition to taking up "skill" as a social construct, as I examine skill, part of what comes into view is that the "structure of opportunity" is not something fixed but shifts in relationship to changes taking place elsewhere in the society--e.g. as Zhou's work demonstrates the New York garment industry revives to take advantage of cheap immigrant female labor in the context of changes in the organization of the garment manufacturing industry much of which has been relocated to the third world (including Asia) to take advantage of cheap labor there, but which still needs a local labor force to produce stylish products on quick demand given the "vagaries of fashion."

What has been overlooked in the research on immigrant women's labor market work is the part the state plays in the process. This is striking given the focus on human capital skills in discussions of labor force work and immigrant's adjustment as
well as the involvement of the state in “skilling” people through the provision of job training programs. Such programs are also important in understanding how a labor force segregated by gender, class, and race is produced, elucidates some of the processes involved in downward mobility, and how some immigrant’s class position is determined in the new society. My research aims to shed some light on these processes. Accordingly, the next chapter provides an account of the development of job training programs and the role they served historically and describes the structure of the Job Training Partnership Act, which is the subject of my investigation. The latter task is undertaken with a view to elucidating the shifting relations between the state, the community, and private businesses in the production of people as commodities for the labor market.

To this end, the next chapter provides the background to the development of job training programs in U.S. society, the role they have served, and describes the structure of the federal job training program that the women in my study participate in.
Chapter Four

History of Job Training Programs and The Job Training Partnership Structure

Introduction

This study argues that job training programs are a significant avenue through which the state is involved in the organization of immigrants into the labor market. This chapter provides an overview of the structure of the job training program through which the women I interviewed received training. The first task I take up in this chapter is to trace the evolution of job training programs in U.S. society and the role they have served. My aim is not so much to provide a comprehensive history but to mainly identify the changing conceptions of purpose of job training programs and how those embody specific understandings of the relation between labor and the market for it. Viewed in historic perspective, conceptions of the purpose of job training programs have undergone significant shifts. For example, while in the early stages of their development programs were generated to fill a job shortage, in the contemporary period they have been viewed as filling a skills gap. This overview includes some of the fundamental assumptions which undergird contemporary job training policy, among them that such programs provide necessary skills to unskilled workers seeking or who ought to seek jobs in the labor market.

The second, more substantial, task taken up in this chapter is to begin to map the shifting relations historically between the various layers of government--federal,
state, and local—as well as between the private sector and the state. My main aim here is to demonstrate how this structure reflected a reorganizing of the relationships between the different layers of government, between business and government, and between private business and community organizations. The overview of the structure of contemporary programs begins to provide a sense of how the changing notions of the role of employment and training programs is embodied in how the framework for delivery, administering, and oversight of programs were conceived in the legislation. Understanding this structure is important for analyzing the processes through which the women's experiences and the experiences of the front line workers who served them unfold.

**Historical context**

The provision of training programs is only one of a number of ways in which the state intervenes in labor market processes. In the United States, the federal government’s involvement in such programs, as well as in direct job creation, is usually traced to the post Great Depression era (Bassi and Ashenfelter 1986; Barnow 1993). Bassi and Ashenfelter argue that the development of such programs occurred in several phases to address different problems. The direct job creation programs of the Works Progress Administration, founded in 1935, were a response to the unemployment crisis arising out of the depression. Those programs were gradually phased out by 1943 as the involvement of the U.S. in the second world war helped fuel
job growth.

It was not until the 1960s that there was a re-emergence of public employment training programs. The development of these federal programs has been linked to the increase in displaced workers because of technological developments such as automation. Thus, the Manpower Development Training Act (MDTA) was developed in 1962 to provide on-the-job training for displaced workers and was directed to male heads of households who had substantial work experience. This was eventually changed to provide training for "disadvantaged workers"—i.e. people who were persistently unemployed. The programs provided through MDTA included classroom training and on-the-job training for which employers received wage subsidies for up to six months (Barnow 1993).

The development of President Johnson's "Great Society" programs in the 1960s included numerous employment and training programs which came to be directed to race-ethnic minorities, "low-income" youth, welfare recipients, and the elderly. According to some researchers, these programs were intended to address the needs of those with "hard-core" unemployment problems by providing work experience and classroom training to improve their prospects of "long-term" employability. Work experience was provided through temporary publicly funded jobs with the goal of moving participants into permanent private sector jobs (Bassi and Ashenfelter, 1986). While these programs focussed attention on the "disadvantaged," attention became refocussed on the needs of those thrown out of work because of economic recession in
the early 1970s and once again the federal government established a significant program designed to create jobs within state and local governments.

By the early 1970s many of these programs were ended, partly as a result of the problems in coordinating so many programs, and were replaced by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) which was passed in 1973. CETA provided for public service employment in areas with a high unemployment rate. Thus, it included provisions for job creation albeit in a rather diminished capacity compared to previous legislation. In addition, however, the legislation required that training was given to those “most in need” including those who were low income and with limited English-speaking ability (Barnow 1993).

The history of employment and training programs shows a shift from a strategy which involved the government in job creation, specifically within the public sector for people out of work, to its involvement in training only. The strategies of direct job creation came to an end with the enactment of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA, but pronounced “Jetpa”) in 1982. JTPA replaced the programs established under CETA. With the enactment of JTPA there was a decisive rejection of job creation in the public sector. So decisive was the rejection of job creation that even in the midst of a recession in the early 1980s, when the official unemployment rate was 10%, the Republicans in the Senate rejected a public works measure for poor people (Lafer 1994).

JTPA is the largest federally funded employment training program currently
The programs falling under its umbrella are numerous. The rejection of job creation and the emphasis on training reflected an emphasis on the concept of a "skills gap" between those who were without paid jobs—especially the numerous groups targeted by the legislation, those who were "disadvantaged" poor—and the jobs that were supposedly available within the private sector labor market. This underlying assumption that there is a good supply of jobs available in the private sector labor market for anyone who wants to work and has the skills to do so persists.

Articulating the Skills/Jobs Gap

The idea that there is a gap between the jobs that are available in the labor market and the skills the workforce has is articulated in a number of documents that the federal and state governments have produced. The document released by the National Commission on Employment Policy (I refer to this as the "Commission") which outlined the Job Training Partnership Act and which this chapter draws on states "... the Federal Government has assumed responsibility for funding job training and related employment services to economically disadvantaged persons who lack job skills and to 'dislocated' or 'displaced' workers who possess outdated skills for jobs that are fast disappearing" (1987:1). The variety of documents locating a gap between skills and jobs were produced during and before the period in which I was collecting data. It is in these documents, some produced by the Federal Department of Labor, one by a private "think tank" contracted by the Department of Labor, and yet
others by state and local governments, that this linkage is to be found. The theme is repeated over and over again. Usually, a link is also made between the jobs/skills gap and the changing nature of the economy.

I had indicated earlier that the Hudson Institute’s publication *Workforce 2000* seemed to be an influential document. Though this was released several years after the JTPA program was put in place, it is nevertheless relevant to my study because it was released prior to the start of my study and it was first brought to my attention in my interviews with federal workers. Many other training related documents came to have that “2000” theme—e.g., “Education 2000” “Job Training 2000.” The Institute’s report expressed concern over the mismatch between new jobs created in the changing economy and workers:

The workers who will join the labor force between now and the year 2000 are not well matched to the jobs that the economy is creating. A gap is emerging between the relatively low education and skills of new workers (many of whom are disadvantaged) and the advancing skills requirements of the new economy.

(Johnston and Packer 1987:75)

This mismatch is repeated in JTPA documents. For example:

To remain competitive, employers will require a workforce with high levels of
basic literacy and skills and an ability to meet the rapidly shifting demands of an increasingly technical workplace. At the same time, there is mounting evidence that a high proportion of potential job entrants--and workers already in the labor force--are ill equipped to staff our offices, hospitals, laboratories and technical facilities. This mismatch is likely to increase at the same time that the number of new workers actually diminishes through the year 2000.

(U.S. Department of Labor 1989:6)

This and other department of labor publications credit *Workforce 2000* with bringing such issues to the nation’s attention (see for example, U.S. Department of Labor, *Labor Shortages* 1989). The solution to this mismatch was to be employment and training programs to enhance the human capital skills of workers. As the document *Working Capital* put it, the developments in the economy and the emergence of the need for better trained workers demonstrated that JTPA’s mandate was essentially right.

The economic imperative of global competition and employers’ increasingly critical need for well-trained workers confirm the correctness of JTPA’s original mandate. We also believe that the effectiveness of the structure of JTPA has been proven by experience and should be retained

(U.S. Department of Labor 1989: 8)
The emphasis on “competitiveness” is also repeated in many documents. It is a term which references an interest in keeping costs down or in economistic terms “increasing productivity.” Such a reading is confirmed in the Commission’s statement that the concern for “bottom line” performance is reflected in the stipulation in the JTPA that “program funds must be treated as investments in human capital from which a profit shall be realized and not as expenditures that yield no measurable return to the Nation” (1987:2). Efficiency and performance were new watch-words for employment and training. “To calculate the actual return on the public investment, the Act further stipulates that program success be determined by measuring the increased employment and earnings and reduced welfare dependency of participants through performance standards . . .” (1987:2). It was to be the dawning of the new era in employment training of partnerships between the public sector and the private, the latter being defined as a sector more attentive to “efficiency and performance.”

The Emergence of JTPA: Partnerships and Performance

The JTPA programs were ushered in under the Reagan administration, which was deeply opposed to direct job creation in the government sector. The legislation made it clear that the emphasis should be on training with the goal of placing people in unsubsidized jobs where they would be earning a “real wage”—i.e. not a government “handout” masquerading as a wage as public service employment was regarded. Thus Title II A of the Act, which authorizes the provision of services for disadvantaged
youth and adults, prohibits public service employment and specifies that “no less than 70%” of the funds allocated to it be used in training activities (National Commission for Employment Policy 1987).

Also of significance in the history of the development of job training programs is the changing character of the relationship between the federal government and the state and local governments in terms of their responsibility for decision making, administration, and oversight of employment and training programs. For example under MDTA in the 1960s, the federal government negotiated all contracts for services which included services provided by state, local governments, and community organizations. States had only a minor role as potential service providers but no authority to make decisions about which programs would be funded. Local governments had no entitlement to funding or decision making authority either. The establishment of CETA in the 1970s brought with it, however, some important changes in the relationship between the different layers of government. It has been argued that the changes reflected the “New Federalism” advocated by Nixon who supported the notion of block grants as a way of returning responsibility to states and local governments for such programs. CETA gave local governments the authority to decide the clientele for the new programs and how they would be served by creating entities called “prime sponsors” which were cities, counties, or a consortium of those with populations of 100,000 or more. The state government could be prime sponsors too, but only for the “rest of the state” which did not fall into the “prime sponsor”
designation. The responsibility for allocating funds and oversight of programs fell to the federal government. Over time criticism about various aspects of how CETA functioned led to increasingly diminished authority for local and state governments over how programs were run. Amendments to the legislation, in what appeared to be a greater push for accountability over how funds were being spent, eroded much of the freedom that had been initially given to local governments to decide program types, wages for employment programs, and eligibility criteria for participants (Barnow 1993).

The JTPA legislation which replaced CETA and signed into law by Reagan has been represented as reflecting his administration's philosophy of the “New Federalism,” embodied in the concept of the “block grant” to the states, which transfers the responsibility of administering federally funded programs such as these to the states and local governments. Thus, the federal responsibility is supposed to be minimized. However, viewed in the context of the history of job training policies, the significant involvement private businesses were given in these programs was precedent setting. This reflected the administration’s belief that the private sector businesses have a better sense than government officials about what kinds of job training are needed in their communities. Moreover, it was argued that they would be more attuned to issues of “efficiency and performance,” which was characterized as a problem in earlier federal programs (National Commission for Employment Policy 1987). Indeed, embodied in the concept of “partnership” is the new structuring of
relationships between the state, local, and federal governments, between business and government, and between private business and the community agencies which provided the actual training. Below I provide a brief description of the legislation.

The JTPA Legislation

The Job Training Partnership Act is actually a comprehensive piece of federal legislation, passed by Congress and signed into law by President Reagan, which is made up of different "titles" or segments. The description of the legislation here is taken from a publication by the National Commission for Employment Policy which itself is authorized by JTPA under Title IV, and which was created as an "independent Federal agency to advise the President and the Congress on broad employment policies and solutions" (NCEP 1987:2). Under the legislation the Commission has the responsibility for evaluating JTPA.

Since it is impossible to produce the whole of the legislation here, I have reproduced the synopsis of the various segments of the legislation drawn from the Commission's document. There are five major segments to the legislation detailing the organization of the administrative structure, training services for various populations, programs which would be federally administered, and a set of miscellaneous provisions. The Commission's synopsis is presented below.

The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)
Title I. The Job Training Partnership

Authorizes, describes and provides procedures for the development of basic elements of the partnership structure for administering JTPA programs at local, State, and Federal levels. These administrative elements include sub state service delivery areas (SDA's), local private industry councils (PIC's), State Job Training Coordinating Councils (SJTC's), and the program responsibilities of local and State elected officials and administrators at all levels of government. Contains a description of what must be included in local job training plans and the Governor's co-ordination and special services plan, procedures for their review and approval, and other local and state responsibilities for planning and administering programs. Further describes Federal responsibilities in the administration of JTPA programs, including the allocation of funds, monitoring, fiscal controls and sanctions, judicial review, reporting, record keeping, and investigations.

Title II. Training Services for the Disadvantaged.

Authorizes basic training services for economically disadvantaged youth and adults (part A) and summer youth employment and training programs for disadvantaged young people (part B). Provides a description of authorized services, including exemplary programs, fund allocation procedures, limitations on the use of funds, and other program provisions.
Title III. Employment and Training Assistance for Dislocated workers.

Defines "dislocated worker" for the purposes of the Act. Provides a description of authorized activities, funding requirements (including a matching provision), and limitations on the use of funds for administrative and support services. Requires a state plan for the receipt of financial assistance with a description of program elements and plans for co-ordination with other state programs such as energy conservation, low income weatherization, and social services.

Title IV. Federally Administered Programs

Authorizes programs for Native Americans and Migrant and Seasonal Farm workers (part A); the Job Corps (Part B); Veterans Employment Programs (Part C); National Activities (part D) in support of JTPA programs, including multi state programs, research and demonstration activities, pilot projects, evaluation, training, and technical assistance; Labor Market Information (part E); the National Commission for Employment Policy (part F); and training to Fulfill Affirmative Action Obligations (part G)

Title V. Miscellaneous Provisions.

Contains amendments to the Wagner-Peyser Act and Part C of Title IV of the Social Security Act, which provide for closer co-ordination between respectively, JTPA and the employment service and JTPA and the Work Incentive (WIN) programs for recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Also
contains provisions related to earnings disregard of JTPA income for dependent children in a family receiving AFDC and for the enforcement of the Military Selective Service Act for JTPA participants. 

(NCEP 1987:3)

Many training programs are alluded to in this brief description. Some of these are directed to very specific groups—race-ethnic groups such as Native Americans, a segment of labor such as migrant farm workers, and other special groups such as veterans. Moreover, the legislation articulates relationships between this set of federal programs and others—for example the Social Security legislation. The program with which I am concerned is the Title II A programs for “disadvantaged” adults since this is the part of the Act which funds the programs which the women I study take. Because the organization of these programs are articulated in relation to Title I, I will elucidate what the features of the new “partnership” are and how that relationship is organized in practice. Title I mandates a specific organizational framework with each body within the organization having specific sets of responsibilities. It also requires that a system of accountability be put into place. How this organizational framework and system of accountability works in practice is a matter for investigation. My study sheds some light on this and in particular on how the private sector becomes increasingly integrated into organizing local labor markets using state resources and community agencies.
Structure and organization

A schemata of the overall organization of JTPA is presented in Figure 1. The diagram presented here is a modified version of one from the Commission (NCEP 1987) which represented the flow of funds from the federal government to other levels of government. This system has been presented in their discourse as an example of "blocks grant" funding which reallocates authority and responsibility to the states for administering and overseeing programs. The federal government is supposed to have a very limited role in administration and oversight of the programs—a feature which was mentioned by all of the federal employees I interviewed. This in itself seems to be a contentious feature of the legislation from the point of view of the federal employees who work in it. And despite the principle of a lessened "Federal role," not only does the legislation itself provide for a fairly significant role for the federal government, but as one federal fieldworker pointed out,

over the course of the last eleven years, we, the Feds, have been dragged kicking and screaming into a stronger role through questions raised by Congress, GAO (General Accounting Office), by OIG office, inspector general of the Department of Labor—each of which has sort of gradually pulled us to look more closely at programs but we still don't get into anywhere near the degree of oversight as under the old legislation (CETA).
Figure 1
Diagram of Employment Training System JTPA

Federal Government
Department of Labor

May have to respond to requests from congress to review some aspect of program operations.

State Government
Department of Employment and Training

Annual Status report on participants and outcomes; Semi-annual status reports on total expenditures. Also must be able to open records for federal scrutiny if request is made through political process. (E.g., "wave reviews")

Local Government
Service Delivery Areas (SDA)

Overseen by Private Industry Council (PIC) (majority membership: business people)

Issues Request for Proposals
Evaluates proposals and distribute contracts to successful CBOs

Submits two year plans to the state. Charts 10 fastest growing and declining occupations, needs and goals for target populations; types of training services offered. Budget summary and fund allocations; trends and goals of occupational training emphases and % of total training represented by these occupations; performance objectives and accountabilities (e.g., employed, wages and other outcomes; annual summary of activities.)

Community based organizations (CBO)
Contracted in some SDAs to provide training programs

Develop proposals for funding

If funded submits monthly narratives during program cycle; client application, participant eligibility cover sheet, intake records and employability development plan, client enrollment record, client completion/placement notices.
Title I of the legislation authorizes and describes the basic elements of the structure for administration and oversight. According to the legislation, the Governor of each state is responsible for administration and oversight. With respect to this responsibility, the federal government is to have a very limited role, and is also not to be involved in the formulation of policy. Policy is set at the state level. Federal workers who I had interviewed shortly after they had engaged in a series of "procurement reviews" (a form of monitoring that entailed how the service delivery areas across the country advertised their service and contract out employment training services) were careful not to label the outcome of those reviews--the development of a document to guide how SDAs procure contracts--"policy":

Wouldn't call it a policy. This administration is reluctant to say this is how it ought to be done. No edicts from Washington. It's being yanked into that kind of stance. We are trying to balance . . . Our role I guess was to issue, that's why we came up with this awkward terminology, a template, which is kind of a set of principles, procurement principles, OJT (on the job training) principles which we didn't mandate on anyone but which we encouraged the adoption of by the state by saying that if you adopt these and establish a policy then all of the detail work, problem by problem negotiations will be eliminated. In Massachusetts there are a hundred of them--which would involve sitting down and going through this mind boggling assortment of people (Interview Bill, DOL).
We didn't say here are the policies that you must follow but we offered them as principles which they could adopt, which was to their advantage. They interpreted them and then in Mass case they gave us their policy in draft form, we commented on it and then they adopted for the most part some of the recommendations we made. (Interview Bill, DOL)

The legislation specifies that the Governor should determine the state agency that would administer JTPA at the state level. In Massachusetts, this is the Department of Education and Training (DET). The Governor is also required to establish a State Job Training Coordination Council and is responsible for appointing its members. The membership of the SJTCC (in Massachusetts this is now called the Mass Jobs Council) is to include 1/3 business and industry, at least 20% local government representatives, at least 20% state legislators and state agency personnel, and at least 20 % representatives of the larger community, education, and labor. This body is to serve in an advisory capacity to the governor, to recommend the service delivery areas (SDAs), provide advice on job training plans, review the operations of programs, review plans of the state agencies providing employment and training, provide management guidance and review for all programs in the state, among other duties. They may hire their own staff (NCEP 1987).

While the SJTCC is responsible for recommending the SDAs to the Governor, the legislation specifies that SDAs be "consistent with labor market areas or standard
metropolitan statistical areas (SMSA’s) and areas in which related services are provided under other State or Federal programs” (National Commission for Employment Policy 1987:18). Thus, the formation of SDAs is not arbitrary nor is it entirely up to Governors to determine this. As such, the legislation provides less authority to the states than the principle of a “lessened federal role” and more state control might initially suggest. And indeed as the federal fieldworker quoted earlier suggests the federal government has increasingly become more involved in oversight than originally intended. Still, the legislation appears to build in for the states some discretion over what is going to constitute an SDA. For example, the law says that the Governor must approve a request from local government to be designated an SDA if that area has 200,000 or more people. However, a local government that serves a labor market but which does not fulfill the population requirement can seek the state Governor’s approval to be designated as an SDA. Thus some states may have one SDA but Massachusetts has 15 distributed across the state. The SDAs are responsible for planning and carrying out program activities.

While the legislation is not entirely unequivocal about handing authority to the state, it is decidedly so on the question of private business involvement in the service delivery areas. The legislation specifies that the service delivery areas must include local government officials—thus the Boston SDA includes Boston city government officials. But significantly, JTPA also requires the involvement of private business through the establishment of Private Industry Councils (PICs) within each service
delivery area. The membership of the councils, which is selected by local elected officials but which has to be certified by the state, must be at least 51% persons from private business who have "real authority" in their firms--namely that they are owners of business, chief operating officers, or executives with substantial management or policy responsibilities (NCEP 1987:39). Further, at least half of these must be from "small business." The rest of the council can be members from community-based organizations, organized labor, rehabilitation and education agencies, etc. This structure favoring involvement of private business was intentional because "conservative lawmakers" felt that "local employers are the best judges of what kinds of training are needed within the local community" (p. 38). The Senate Report which was attached to the bill which eventually became law made this quite explicit (NCEP 1987).

The PIC is responsible for guiding policy and overseeing local job training activities within the SDA; for developing the job training plan; selecting an entity to administer the programs and planning. These duties are to be carried out in agreement with the chief elected officials--thus encompassing, in theory, the idea of public/private partnership. In Boston, an entity called the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC) administers JTPA as well as other state job training programs. This organization is the SDA for the city of Boston. The PICs develop and approve their budgets and can hire staff and can seek and accept funds from other sources--both public and private. The SDAs have most immediate responsibility for deciding
which agencies will receive funds for training programs. Some SDAs are involved in directly providing training programs, others contract those out to private non-profit corporations such as community based organizations (CBO), and education agencies such as community colleges. Boston’s EDIC contracts out its programs. In such an organizational structure, the community based organization such as the one in this study, is entered into a sub-contractual relationship to the state to produce immigrant women (and others defined as disadvantaged) as commodities for the labor market.

While the legislation provided an expanded role for private business, for CBOs the opposite was true than under prior employment training legislation. Under JTPA legislation, CBOs “are no longer ‘presumptive deliverers of service’.” Instead while they are to be considered for contracts, the “‘primary consideration’ is to be given to the ‘effectiveness’ and ‘demonstrated performance’ of organizations that are selected” (NCEP 1987:45). Thus CBOs who cannot demonstrate “effectiveness and performance” are not to be awarded contracts. Apparently, from the CBO’s point of view, this re-organization is reflective of an emphasis not so much on the needs of participants in the programs, but on labor market needs.

In sum, JTPA mandated a restructuring of the relationship between local, state, and federal governments for job training activities. It allocated majority authority to private business over job training plans and in so doing re-organized the relationship between business and government, and between private businesses and community organizations--many of them private not-for-profit organizations. As I shall discuss
later, this re-organized relationship included authority over aspects of how community organizations are structured.

While the above only offers a sketch of the basic framework of JTPA training system, how this works in practice is another matter. Because of the complexity of the system and the limited access I had to it, I can only focus on specific moments of the way in which the system works. The programs in which the women in my study were enrolled provided a point of entry for discovering the ways in which this framework was being implemented and through this implementation, the interconnections between the state and private enterprise in the organization of local labor markets on a day to day basis. The next chapter describes the women’s experiences in the programs and how they viewed job training in the context of their lives. As we shall see, the ways in which they envisioned the programs in their lives diverged in some important respects from the ways in which these programs were viewed from the perspective of the institutional order. While the ways in which the programs were organized were critical in shaping women’s experiences, the women also negotiated their way through these programs to fill their own needs.
Chapter Five

Constructing a New Life: Asian Women’s Stories

Introduction

The women whose stories are presented here were clients in job skills training programs at community organizations. As pointed out earlier, the aim of an institutional ethnography is to investigate and analyze how people’s experiences are trans-locally organized. The standpoint of immigrant Asian women who were involved in employment training programs is the point of departure for analyzing the institutional arrangements organizing their lives. Because I was interested in learning about whether and how such programs played a role in the integration of immigrant women into the labor force in the U.S., I came to these sites to talk to the Asian immigrant women who might be participating in such programs. At one agency, “City Services,” individuals from diverse race-ethnic groups were participants in the variety of skills training programs they offered. Two of the women clients I interviewed took a program offered here. At the second agency, “Asia House,” where five of the women interviewed took classes, services were offered to a largely Asian immigrant population.

Their stories of their entry into U.S. society and of their attempts to find ways of caring for their families and themselves in their new context provided a gateway to seeing the complexity of labor market organization and the allocation of immigrant
Asian women into this labor market. The women’s objectives in seeking out employment training included learning English, gaining better positions than they had so far managed to obtain in U.S. society, and escaping from the loneliness some experienced. The investigation of how the training programs are organized brought into focus how the women’s objectives had to be fitted into the relevances of the institutional order. This chapter examines those relevances from the standpoint of these women.

In Chapter One I had pointed out that immigration legislation has historically served as a means through which labor markets are organized. I also pointed out that the aegis under which contemporary immigrant women enter into the U.S. has been the “family reunification” category. There has been debate about whether immigrants entering the U.S. under such conditions participate in the labor market and whether there is a mismatch between needed labor market skills and this class of immigrants. The research thus far suggests that such immigrants, largely women, do indeed participate in the labor market. I had also earlier argued that standard theoretical models of labor market adjustment posit a lack of skills as the chief factor explaining the low level work that some immigrants and low-waged workers do. These understandings of low-waged labor and poverty have informed the construction of job training programs. Given such formulations, my interviews with women took up some of the questions about the circumstances under which they entered the U.S., past work experiences, and education. In addition, in part drawing on my own experiences as an
immigrant with children, I was alerted to the possibility that, like myself, they might face specific challenges in coordinating their family lives and their schooling. It was not until I actually did some interviews that I discovered that some of them were managing schooling (training), a family, and a job. Furthermore, as I put together what they described to me and what I learned about the job training programs from the other sources in my study, I began to see how family responsibilities were differently relevant to the women and the job training complex. Below, I have thematically organized these critical issues—work experiences, education, family responsibilities, and how they came to the U.S.—raised in the interviews. I also wanted to find out how they viewed the role of the programs in their lives. What did they want from them? I begin with one woman’s (Min) story because, in a way, it crystallized for me many of the experiences that the other women also described.

I first met Min at a job training program admission interview at Asia House. Min, like two other of the clients I interviewed for this study, had been in a pre-vocational program at the multi-service agency and was now seeking to continue into the job skills training program which the agency also offered.

Like the majority of the women I interviewed, Min had followed a family member to the United States. Of the seven women trainees, only one (Jenny) had arrived in the U.S. by herself. Min had been sponsored by her husband, himself an immigrant from China, who had returned to China four years after immigrating to the U.S. and married her there. Two years after their marriage, paperwork was finalized
enabling her to immigrate.

After immigrating here, Min encountered an environment which posed many challenges for her. The first was her lack of knowledge of English, which made understanding what people said impossible. In addition, she had to find a job to help her family since her husband earned very little as a restaurant worker and she needed a job which would carry with it health insurance benefits. At the time I interviewed her she had been in the U.S. for six years, had a child who was turning five, and was also concerned about how to get her pre-schooler into kindergarten. One of her first tasks was to begin learning English.

When I come here I don’t understand what people say, the English. My husband ask me, “You want to study English if you live in US?” My first school in Asia House is English as a second language . . . almost half a year. I can now speak a little English.

This was not, however, Min’s first ESL class. Shortly after arriving in the U.S., she took ESL classes for two years at an area public school. “After work, I came to class at Josiah Quincy (for) almost two years after work--4:45 to 6:30.” Her first job in the U.S. was at a company that made ties, a job she left at the end of her first year there because they paid her $5.00 an hour, with no raise, no benefits, and no health insurance. She left that job for another factory job--one that made flags and banners
but one which offered better wages and benefits. After working at the latter place for just over two years she got laid off. It was after the lay off that she came to the six-month-long pre-vocational program which was just ending when I met her.¹

My husband ask me if you get lay off you go to Asia House pre-vocation skill program to start in some skill and then you can involve in office skill program.

The husband was not the only source of information about programs. The unemployment office at which she registered in order to collect her unemployment benefits had also directed her to job training programs. They asked if she wanted to learn English and suggested that she learn office skills if she wanted to find another job. “To find another job, learn more skills. Find another job.”

When I interviewed her, she was enrolled in the job skills training program which she said she liked very much because “the English teacher is good and so is the computer teacher.” The program was an office skills program where trainees learned word-processing, filing, answering the telephone, and continued learning English. She felt these were skills one could use in any office. Although she had applied to programs run at several other agencies and had been accepted, she decided to stay at Asia House because she knew the teachers and liked them and also at one of the other

¹ In excerpted interview data, I use parentheses to indicate conjectural reconstructions of unclear passages and square brackets for my comments.
agencies (City Services) there was a waiting list of clients that meant she would have to wait too long to get into a program.

Min was in this program, not just because she was laid off, but because she wanted to find a job to help "take care of my family, that’s important." She was hoping to find a job that would provide health insurance benefits. This was important because she had a young child and her husband’s job as a cook in a Chinese restaurant provided no benefits, nor, at $6.00 per hour, did it pay very well. In fact, one of the reasons for leaving the first job she had after she arrived was because of low wages and no benefits. The job from which she was laid off had provided a better wage and health insurance benefits—which she was able to continue for one year after her lay off. At the time I interviewed her, she was already half way through this year and was eager to find a job which would provide health insurance as soon as the program was over.

For Min, the training program offered the possibility of a chance of a better job, defined in terms of what that might mean for her family's well being. To do the training program also meant that she had to contend with what to do about her five year old child since the program is an all day program. As it turned out her child was being cared for by her mother in law: "My mother-in-law take care of him, I can come here. If my mother-in-law cannot take care of him I don’t have any place. I need someone to take care of my son so I can come here, start full-time." Since she could not afford day care, in the absence of her mother-in-law’s help, she would not be able
to take the program.

Although Min's immediate goal was to finish the program and find a job with benefits, her more long term plans were to go on to community college, to do more English, and study accounting. She already had a high school diploma from China. She envisioned herself going to college at night while she worked full time during the day. In the overall family picture, when her child is older her husband would work part time and go to school to learn English (something he has been unable to do because of having to work to care for his parents, and because his restaurant job involves long hours.)

In her story of coming to the United States, Min’s experiences of learning English and office skills, of working, and of obligations to family are echoed in the stories of the seven women clients of training programs I interviewed for this study. Aspects of her experiences are uniquely hers of course, but there are several themes which emerged in the stories told through the interview process.

**Coming to America**

All of the women I interviewed are immigrants and of Chinese ancestry though from a variety of places--Hong Kong (two), mainland China (four), Vietnam (one). While they have been in the United States for varying amounts of time--from about one year to seven years-- all but one had followed other family members to the U.S. In some cases, it was a husband:
K: What made you come to the U.S.?

Meizhu: Because my husband study here before I came. He came here in 1987. So we separated almost three years. After three years I came.

Meizhu like Min had followed her husband here. In addition, however, Meizhu had brought with her their three and a half year old daughter. Others, like Van and Tina, followed other relatives.

Van: I came with my parents and young brother. My older brother support us to come here. He was already in 1979. He came on a boat.

Tina: I came because all my family is here. My parents wanted me to come. They live in Malden. First one here was my second sister who has been here 25 years. My oldest sister has been here three years. My younger brother is studying at Northeastern [University].

Only one woman had not joined other family members here. She was here on a student visa and had come because there were friends here. This raised questions (which I will address later) about her presence in the employment training programs.

In their stories of coming to America, there are glimpses of the social relations they are entered into in the process of coming here. Most people do not simply decide
to come here and simply show up (though some do). Their coming is accomplished through a complex process of social organization involving the enactment and implementation of immigration legislation in the country to which they are headed and of emigration legislation (in some cases) of the country from which they come. The stories that they told suggest that, with the exception of Jenny, the women came under the family reunification category of the current immigration legislation. This meant that they were not selected for their occupational skills as some immigrants are. What significance would this have for their labor market work? Five of the seven were engaged in labor market work either prior to the employment training program or concurrently with the program.

**Work experiences**

All of these women had prior work experience in their home countries. Even Jenny, the student, did—she had worked in a hotel as a receptionist prior to first going to the Ukraine as a university student.

Tina: I was a manager of a jewelry store I worked eight hours a day but sometimes overtime. There were shifts but as shop manager I had to be available at special times for meeting clients.

Meizhu: I worked for a Japanese company—almost seven years.
K: What did you do?

M: Not only the secretary work. We went on business trips with Japanese customers and did contract negotiations. And we translate it from Chinese to Japanese and Japanese to Chinese.

K: Could you tell me some of the things you did in that job?

M: Yes, just like that negotiating and went on business trips.

K: This company you were working for, did they do trade with Japan?

M: Trading with China, I did shoes and clothes. . . . You know the Japan's customer shoe company--they wanted to make some shoe but in Japan the labor fee is very very high so that the Chinese labor do that. So I help them to connect with the Chinese labor. I took the business trip with them and went to the factory and translated for them and make the contract.

These two had jobs with perhaps the most responsibility. One other woman owned her own store in China where she sold toys, clothes, and shoes. Of the rest, two had worked in offices before--one as a receptionist in a hotel in Beijing (Jenny) and the other as a typist in Hong Kong. Min had had a supermarket job in China and Van seems to have helped out at a family owned store.

The fact that all of these women had working experience suggest that they all have a variety of skills to offer. How these skills are viewed in the context of American society is a question which needs to be addressed. In some cases the jobs
they held in the U.S. appeared to be lower level jobs or lower skilled jobs than the ones they had held in their home countries.

Meizhu, for instance, who had held the job she described as “contract negotiating” and included translation from “Japanese to Chinese,” was working as a cashier part time at a supermarket in the “mainstream” labor market (that is, a non-ethnic enclave market) while she went to school during the day. Lydia too worked as a supermarket cashier (in an Asian market in Chinatown) whereas she had run her own store in China. Soon after arriving in the U.S., Van had worked at a day care center at City Services. Bettie, who, of the seven women, had been in the U.S. the longest time (seven years) and the typist, had found that initially she could only find a waitressing job in a Chinese restaurant.

Bettie: In U.S. I didn’t have any work experience. I had a chance to be a waitress in a Chinese restaurant because I knew this guy. I never thought to be a waitress in Hong Kong because I finished high school and I would like to work in an office. . . . I had no choice here because a lot of Chinese work in restaurants and I had no other work experience here.

Later on, however she managed to find a job as a cashier, a temporary mail sorter, and then at a bank where she does “encoding” part time. Notice too that Bettie defines her problem as one of not having “U.S. work experience.”
Since the women all had job experiences the question of why they wanted or needed “job skills training” needs to be considered. What were the perceived advantages for them?

**Job Skills Training Program**

It was clear that for most of these women what they wanted and what the program provided was English language training and computer training. The question of speaking English is a recurrent theme in the stories of the women. The importance of English for a good job and for being able to speak to people and engage in the tasks of daily life was expressed in a number of ways.

Min, for example, pointed out that her husband who was working in a restaurant job “earns about $6:00 an hour because he doesn’t know English.” She herself found herself unable to understand what people said to her which is how she came to take ESL classes.

Tina, who had just been on a job interview when I spoke with her began talking about the job interview. The job training program she was in was focussed on training people in “medical office skills.” She thought the level of the job at a nearby hospital was too high for her in terms of the English competency.

I think it is too high because I am a foreigner--the English problem. When you go for interview you have to type fast and English fast and no mistakes. For
American people it's O.K. but for foreigner it's hard. Because if you don't follow and someone is waiting for your report and then they're going to CCU or you bring the blood to take the CPP test and then you have to know exactly the meaning. We learn that kind of word, we know it. After you pass the test, you may need to do dicta typing. If you answer the phone and someone asks about the test, medical test, and then you have to tell them you got anything wrong.

Foreigner has to deal with clients and it's hard for most people. But if one [speaks to people in their own language there is no problem]. And they have to follow four or five porters, not one. And then you have to work with at least 25 to 30 patients everyday--that's a lot of work. But if they give us the time to train us, there is no problem. But when you go for the interview they test you right away and you may need to pass all the tests. That's hard. So I can see over there they send most people, maybe not this school but another school or agencies, American people--not many Chinese, only one or two, I can see it. But they say they would hire any kind of people unless you don't qualify. If you qualify they hire you.

Later on when we were talking about the first day of class she explained the problem of English for people from China:

Some people from China don't have English well. Even the listening, they don't understand. So I try to help explain the meaning of that. In class, teachers explain the homework, what we have to do. And later on most people can catch up. But
still some China people don’t speak it well.

Bettie too, in looking for her first post training job, is keenly aware of the importance of the English for certain kinds of work.

If the company say they need people to answer the phone they’ll pick the person who speak English better. Native born people speak English very well so they will get those jobs. But they might type slow, [so] they can’t get typist job but they can get reception or secretary.

In at least one case, lack of appropriate English language skills had initially led to the rejection of one of the students from the training program. This was one of the intake interviews I had witnessed. When I interviewed Van, who it turned out was later accepted, I reminded her of the initial rejection. Here is her account of why they did not accept her:

Because Kate [the English teacher] said I didn’t like to speak. I am quiet in class. Now I speak more in class. Because I miss the chance because I did not speak English. Now I speak English all the time.

As Van’s experience illustrates, a certain level of competency in English was
required to be able to take the training program. All of the women, as it turned out, had had some training in English before entering the job skills training program. In some cases they had taken English classes through the schooling process in their countries of origin. One had found it necessary to speak English a little in her job in Hong Kong. But like Min most had taken ESL classes in the U.S.:

Jenny: In Beijing, I took 3 months of English training. . . . When I came to Boston, I went to Boston University to CELOP, an ESL program. So I had a year of English language training before I came to Asia House.

K: So did you also learn English in China?

Meizhu: Oh very very very little. So I couldn’t speak before I came here.

However, Meizhu had taken ESL and “computer” at an adult education center in the Chicago area where she lived after she first arrived in the U.S. Lydia, Min, and Van had spent time in the pre-vocational program at Asia House where they had been learning English. In addition Van and Min had spent time at other ESL programs.

As all of these women realized, the lack of good English language skills presented them with an obstacle to a “good” job, usually defined as an office job as opposed to a factory or restaurant job. But for the English, they might have had an office job since all of the women had finished at least high school. Two of them had
had university training. Lydia had a degree in horticulture from China and Meizhu had a B.A.—at the university she had studied Japanese. Jenny had been a university student in the Ukraine for a year and half prior to arriving in the U.S. As teachers and program co-ordinators at both community organizations pointed out it was not unusual to see in their programs people from Asia who were fairly well educated. One teacher/job counselor had said that many come with master’s degrees, some with Ph.D.s, and they have to start over. They cannot practice their professions they had held in their countries of origin. When they come to the classes at City Services they may find themselves in classes learning office skills with people who have barely passed their GED (General Equivalency Diploma—the credential that high school drop-outs earn). In the course of my research I met people (men and women, who declined to be interviewed) who had been teachers and nurses in their home countries and in one case an older man who had been a professor of biology at a university in China.

For some of these women pre-vocational classes had provided an opportunity to continue learning English. Such classes also served as a feeder into the job training programs. Both Van and Min had completed the pre-vocational classes at Asia House before entering the job skills training program. According to the rules established through the funding sources, going on to a job training program from a pre-vocational program is an acceptable outcome of the pre-vocational program. However, proceeding to another job training program from the job skills training program in
which one is enrolled is not acceptable. The expectation is that the participant is placed in a job at the end of training.

Although from the perspective of the community organization workers, the job skills training program is not primarily set up to teach people English speaking skills, English was taught. Indeed, from the perspective of the clients it provided a place where they could continue to work on their English competency. Bettie is quite clear about this:

I discussed with my husband the possibility of going to school because I had no chance [previously] of going to school over here. Because I am over 21 years old I can’t go to 12th grade. I learned some [English] in church. I came [to the class] to improve English and skills.

In a similar vein, Jenny saw the program she was in as providing “more formal English.” In the English class they learned as Meizhu put it, “how to make phone call, how to [have] conversation with people and especially the writing.”

Beyond the English which they continued to learn here, the other important part of the program they mentioned was what they typically referred to as “computer” and office skills

Jenny: General office skills, computer is a big part of this. English and computer
skills are being taught here.

Meizhu: I think we learn two big parts. One was English, one was computer. But in computer class we also learn typing. We also learn filing. Office skills.

The generic term “computer” means learning usually word processing skills--at the time they were learning Word perfect 5.1. Some mentioned the specific programs they were learning. Min for example mentioned Microsoft Works and Word Perfect. Two others, Bettie and Tina, who were in a medical office skills program also mentioned learning Lotus 123. In addition, the latter two had to learn medical terminology--which they found difficult.

Tina: [Kinds of things they were learning included] math--business math, computer--Word Perfect, Lotus 123, and the calculator. I did not have office skills before. Learned medical technology--that was the hardest especially for a foreigner. It is not just the English. It’s from Greek and Latin and Switzerland and you can’t find in English-Chinese dictionary.

What’s also striking here is this woman who was a manager of a jewelry shop can talk about herself as “not having office skills.” Interestingly too, although I came to find out that at Asia House other aspects of instruction included “proper dress” and
"interviewing," none of the clients mentioned these as skills they had to learn or were being provided with in the classroom. As part of the curriculum, they were offered instruction in what was appropriate and inappropriate dress for an office job and in how to interview for a job. Features of these kinds of instruction will be addressed in Chapter Nine when I examine the work the community organizations do.

In addition to the formal classroom training, Asia House built in internships as part of their program. This was mentioned by a few clients who mostly viewed it as a necessary way of gaining experience. Meizhu, who had just finished the classroom part of the program and who could speak Japanese was going to be interning at a Japanese real estate company.

M: They have a secretary there but she is going on vacation so they let me do six weeks. Actually the internship is only four weeks. But the boss let me stay two weeks more.

K: So do they pay you?

M: Just two weeks they will pay me. But during the internships, she said she cannot pay. I said, of course.

K: So you don't get paid for it at all?

M: I don't care about that. I think of the experience.

Even where internships were not a requirement of a program (such as the program at
City Services), the woman seems willing to volunteer to gain experience.

Bettie: My friend knows some people in the hospital. If they want volunteer, no money, I do. I just want some experience and also I serve the community.

Since all of these women have been in the work force in their home countries, work experience is not what these women lack. Some of them have also been working at jobs in the United States. What they may be missing is work experience in the particular line of work for which they are training. At the same time, as I pointed out earlier, they seem to formulate not having “American” work experience as problematic. As we shall see later the community organizations’ instructors also seem to treat lack of “American work experience” as a problem. Thus, it seems that the women’s definition of the situation coincide with that of the organizations.

Internships as a strategy of getting students experience, and their place in the programs in relation to what community organization workers refer to as “job development” will be discussed in the chapter on job placement and counseling.

**Getting into the Program**

Getting into the program involves a number of steps: learning that such programs exist, an application process which involves test taking and an interview with program directors (who may or may not be teachers in the program).
There were a variety of ways in which potential clients could learn about programs. Most of the women in my study found out about these through word of mouth, from connections in their networks of friends and relatives. Others learned about the programs through a bilingual newspaper or other community event. Only one, Min, had heard about the programs at Asia House, City Services, and other community organizations because the unemployment office (a government office) had directed her to them. As it turned out she also knew about programs through her husband. Thus, sometimes clients may have heard about the programs from multiple sources. Also some commented that “everyone” or “Chinese people” know about the particular community organization and what it offered. For example, Min, explaining that her husband knew about Asia House since he had once lived close by says:

Everybody knows about Asia House in Chinatown. Asia House, no problems, citizenship, ESL, office skills. Asians really need this Asia House. New immigrants here, people don’t know how to do anything. The agency helps. The immigrant doesn’t know where to find a job. Asia House helps them--fill out application forms.

Bettie who had taken the medical office skills training at City Services also said that

A lot of Chinese people know about City Services. Sometimes they can read the
bilingual newspaper and find out about City Services. I came to see if there was an opening.

Although Bettie had found out from a friend about the programs, she is aware that there are other ways--namely the bilingual newspaper--people can find out. Indeed Van had learned about the pre-vocational and office skills program from the bilingual newspaper she read. So too had Lydia and Jenny who had taken the office skills program at Asia House. Tina had found out through her sister who had at one time taken a program at City Services. Meizhu had another advertising source for her information--she had attended an event in Chinatown where flyers were handed out:

You know just last year one day in Chinatown they had a celebration so I went to hear and I got the flyer. In that time I didn't pay any attention because I got a lot of flyers. I just want to come home and read them. . . . Oh, I found out that they had secretary business office skills. 'Cause I was a secretary so I was interested in this program. So I immediately called the counselor Louise but she said the program already started. "If you want to [do] the next program, you can register for next year at this year, the beginning." And she put my name on her notebook. I said, "Okay, I'm really interested about this job." So before the program started, she called me and said if you want to take the program you have to take the test.
Once a person has found out about a program, she must then, as Meizhu points out, take a test. Although most of the women mentioned having to take a test, only one indicated that the test was in math and English. I learned most about the test clients had to take from the program director at Asia House. The test was a device used to screen clients into the programs. It was a test that is administered to everyone wishing to enter the skills training programs and is called the "TABE test" (Test of Adult Basic Education). The test measures grade level competencies in English and mathematics. I will discuss this test and the part it plays in these programs as it is told from the perspective of CBO workers in a subsequent chapter. The women know the results of the test in the sense of whether they have passed or not for the programs.

However, getting into the program is more than just a question of taking the test and passing at a particular level. Evidence of this is in some of the interview material with the women. At both CBOs once the test results are back, there are follow up interviews with the potential clients. Information on these interviews come from a variety of sources—my observation of an intake interview, and my interviews with the women clients, program directors, and other personnel in the CBO.

As Tina indicated at the post test interview, "they'll ask questions to see listening skills or how to speak English." Although the interview served this function, there were others as well. Tina says, "They asked how long here, was the exam hard for you, why interest in this program, why not choose another and asked do you know our school, how we got information about school?" They also asked about family:
Tina: Are you married, how many children, and if you go to school who takes care of the baby or something like that. Because they don’t want us to be absent, to miss class.

This interpretation is right on target and is confirmed by the interviews that I had with a variety of CBO personnel. Much lies behind the concern with being absent. The questions about the family and child care are related to the concern about absence. Diane at City Services made this quite clear to the potential students who showed up at an orientation meeting. She had indicated to them that if their child care was going to be a problem, they might think about putting off training until they had that settled. Absences from the program could result in termination from the program. And as both John and Cindy at Asia House pointed out, terminations from the programs for whatever reason would mean that the agency would lose some of its funding.

Meizhu’s experience offers other hurdles to getting into programs. In her pursuit of the office skills program at Asia House she discovers that there are a limited number of spots and that there are income guidelines.

I took the test and after the test I called a lot and I came here many many times because she said many many people, they wanted to take the program. They only accepted 10 students but maybe they had 40 or 50 students that wanted to come in so she said you’ll have to wait. And also the other problem was this program only
accepted people to--the income’s low. She said if your family's income is little bit high, maybe you have to pay something.

Meizhu is referring to the income eligibility guidelines that the legislation mandating the job training program requires. I was surprised at the fact she could come into the program despite the income problem since I had thought that the programs were only available to low income people. But she was able to come because she paid a fee but not before the organization received “clearance” from “the government”

K: So did you end up having to pay?
M: Yes. They said your test is good. But if you want to come you have to pay. I said Okay.
K: How many students in the class?
M: Thirteen.
K: After you did the test you had an interview?
M: I didn't because after the test I came many many times so Louise already know me and she think I really want to take the class. He really remembered me.
K: John?
Y: John I just meet him once. Right. Because he said even if you want to pay, the school cannot decide it. The school has to ask the government because all students don't pay you know. Then he said if the government says Okay we'll call you in. So when I got home, Louise called me and she said come.
K: They had to ask the government if you can be in even though you were paying?

M: Because the government pay a lot of money on the student.

As Meizhu's experience reveals, not everyone can get into the program. This raises questions about what criteria are used in selecting people for a limited number of slots and under what conditions are people refused, and what happens when they are refused? Refusal of entry into a program is not at all uncommon. Bettie, Min, and Van all experienced refusal at some places--for different reasons.

Min stated that she had been unable to get into programs because of a waiting list. Min had applied at four or five organizations and at least one, City Services, had denied her entry because of a long waiting list--she would have to wait another program cycle which was too long for her because she needed to have a job soon. Her experience thus confirmed the story Meizhu had told about limited slots. Bettie, on the other hand, had wanted to start in a different program at City Services:

I had wanted to start accounting program because I had learned something in Hong Kong already. . . but they told me it was for unemployed people who were laid off. So I picked this program [medical office skills].

Here Bettie reveals that the accounting program is targeted to a very different clientele,
and as someone who was currently employed part time—not someone who was "laid off"—she was ineligible.

Van’s experience is different from both these women. She is the only person in my sample who had initially been refused admission on the basis of her competency in English. In my observation of the “intake interview” with her, both the English teacher and program director explained that her test scores in English were a bit low and the English teacher gives further explanation of her classroom behavior. Van was viewed as quite hesitant in speaking up in class. Given this encounter and the refusal of admission which followed it, it was surprising to me to see Van in the program a few weeks later. Here is her recollection of it when I asked her what happened to change their minds?

Van: They said they didn’t have enough students so they called me.

K: When did they call?

Van: Second week school started.

K: What were you doing? Were you at home?

Van: Yes and I was very sad because I couldn’t get a job and cannot go to school. I was surprised that Kate called me second week. She didn’t say why. She just said do you want to come, we accept you.

Van experienced a reversal of fortunes brought on in part by a lack of enough students.
Thus, despite the difficulty they thought she might have in being successful in the program, the shortage of students for this organization worked in her favor. As it turned out one of the students who had been accepted the day I witnessed the interviews decided not to come into this program. It is also significant that she is called in the second week. As John, the program director at Asia House, explained to me they had a two week window in case a student dropped out. They can fill the slot with another student within that time frame. Beyond two weeks after the start of the program they are not permitted to do so. For this reason they try to file the enrollment forms with their funding source as late as possible to minimize the risk of losing funding.

The women’s stories contain fragments of information of how the programs are being funded. There is also some sense that there are many rules attached to getting in but that at the same time there is some maneuverability within the guidelines. Meizhu’s case shows that some persistence on her part--demonstrating, no doubt, a commitment to staying in the class--paid off in getting into the program even though she did not meet the income guidelines.

These examples show that getting into the program is more than just a matter of taking a test and passing it. Though it may not be clear to the individual women, the questions about family play an important role in determining whether they get into the programs. Some women, like Tina, seem to be aware of why the questions are asked--so that they do not miss classes--but the deeper issue of why that is important is not
articulated by her. Also noteworthy is that exceptions are made for those unqualified on the basis of test scores or competency in English when circumstances change, as in Van's case. Third, wanting to do a program is not enough. There has to be room and sometimes other criteria are involved. Even the kinds of tests students were being given came to be seen as problematic from the program personnel point of view. The women's experiences have an organizational basis that is not visible to them but aspects of that organization is apparent to the workers at the community agency. This is taken up in Chapter Nine.

School, Work, and Family

For Min, the job training program offered possibilities of a better job which was necessary to support her family. The importance of the job for the family's well being was a theme repeated by other women. Five of the seven were married and three of them had children, whose ages ranged from a few months to sixteen years. The women themselves ranged in age from their mid-twenties to mid-forties. For two of the women with children the economic well being of their families was uppermost.

Tina, a woman in her early forties, had three children, a baby, a three year old and a sixteen year old. The baby was born within the first year she arrived in the U.S. and had medical problems because she was premature. Explaining her likes and dislikes about the U.S., Tina said:
I don’t like here now—but I don’t hate it. Food is cheaper. Most important is how to support family. In Hong Kong land is higher, food is higher, but salary higher too, if you work hard.

[Side of tape ends. Her husband is working at Macdonald’s. She has been saying the salary her husband gets is not enough to support her family and I ask if he thinks that, both of them think that, or his coworkers.]

It’s what everybody says. When you pay rent for one family—two bedroom, one dining room and you have to pay something and then the baby food, bill for electricity, and phone. It’s not enough. The government is not willing to give the people from Hong Kong. Since we have been three years we can’t get any welfare from the government. But actually if we can find the job, we don’t want the welfare too, no need. If you got a job, you have money to support a family.

Even though her husband had a full time job at MacDonald’s, it was not enough for the family. He earned about $18,000 a year, a salary that was below the poverty level for a family of that size. He had only been earning this salary recently since he had been promoted to manager, a promotion she attributed to his performance and the fact that he had been a hotel manager (Holiday Inn) in Hong Kong. Beyond the low salary, the other economic problem was the family’s health care needs:
Before he was working part time. That time we were very poor because baby had to go to hospital. I had no job. My sister send help. Family couldn’t help with hospital bills so I apply to government. The social worker ask to apply for Medicaid. We did because the baby was born here. Now my husband works hard and boss says he is good and his hotel background. So he got the manager job. Good position and high pay but one person can’t support the family I think. Now (the baby) has Medicaid but every year we have to sign papers and fill in, have them check it again to see if they’ll let us continue or not. That money is not enough and for us we don’t have insurance. If we got sick we would die.

Although her husband’s workplace provided benefits for him, they did not provide health care insurance for the family. For Tina, supporting her family meant that she would, like Min, have to find a job with health care benefits.

Concern about benefits was also expressed by one of the other married women. All of these three women had husbands who worked in the restaurant business--two as cooks-- businesses in which salaries were not only low but benefits were non-existent. The importance of immigrant Chinese women’s contributions in terms of job benefits, in particular health insurance benefits, was first brought to my attention by an agency in Chinatown that had been formed to support immigrant women who had lost jobs after the garment industry in Massachusetts shrunk. It was a pattern that I saw being repeated here.
Meeting economic need was not the only possibility that the program and the potential job at the end of it offered. A concern expressed by several of the women was loneliness and boredom they felt without a job and friends.

Tina: I don’t really like it here. It’s boring because I have no friends, because no job. Only come to school and go home. Have to work hard. Maybe later on if I get a job and has friend here maybe I would like it. I don’t know.

Meizhu, who had stayed home with her daughter after she had first arrived in the U.S., expressed a desire to go back to China if she could not find a job at the end of the program. “Maybe if I can’t find a job I have to stay home. So my whole life maybe this way. Very Lonely. Lonely. It's very lonely.” Van too expressed a keen desire to get a job because she “is very sad about being at home.”

While caring for family members was important for these women, they experienced a social isolation in the confines of family. But though the job training classes provided (and the jobs promised) a social life outside of the family, for all of the women who lived with family members (six of them did) there was much juggling to do around their family responsibilities, school, and the homework it entailed, and for some a part-time job in addition. All of the married women reported having supportive husbands but they mostly all carried the household responsibilities and childcare if they had children.
For the women with children much of the childcare responsibility was theirs. As Min pointed out, she would be unable to attend class in the absence of her mother-in-law, who lived not with her but close to her, taking care of the child. No one else was available nor could she afford to pay someone. In addition, when I interviewed her, her husband was away in China so she was also without the little help he might provide. The childcare responsibilities also extended to making some decisions around the child’s schooling. Since our interview was late August and her child was kindergarten age, some of our discussions centered around the child attending school. She seemed confused about whether her child was eligible for school and we had a little discussion about this. Her responsibilities for housework and child care meant that she spent late nights doing her homework.

When I go home I finish my housework. About nine o’clock I do my homework till eleven o’clock. I get up at seven o’clock.

I had seen Min with shopping bags on the subway once after I had observed the intake interviews. She routinely shopped after class on the way home to “get some meat and vegetables and anything else to go home and cook.”

Tina’s schedule was even more hectic because of her baby. In addition she had two other children. She has found it difficult studying and caring for children, particularly the youngest who was a premature baby:
(I) found it difficult because of the baby. At 6:30 she has to be picked up and then baby goes to bed 9:30 to 10:00 and then I take shower and then got one or two hours, to practice and then when I go to bed she wake up all the night. Some babies sleep all the night but not she, so I have to wake up a few times at least. Sometimes every hour she wake up once, other times she will sleep and wake up 20 mins. I'm very tired but I want a good grade. I don't want government to give money for us to study and then I lose chance so I have to study hard. So I always wake up 4:30 every morning and I study to 7:00 and then baby wake up, and I have to bring her to sitter. So I work very hard.

Hers was the most rigorous of schedules that I heard from the women. In addition, she had a teenage son who it appeared had had some difficulty adjusting to the change from Hong Kong, the loss of friends, and feeling "ashamed" because he "couldn't understand English at all when he came." This manifested itself at school, a problem she had to sort out with the school:

He is afraid of the school and he is absent 15 days. He says he is absent because "I don't know anything." I talked to the school and they said they like to help him and put him in ESL. Now he can learn English very well. Before he got all Cs.

Her classes and study habits became a point of comparison for their respective
progress in school.

My son says, “Mommy you are luckier than me and you are easier because you know English so it’s easier for you.” But after explaining to him, “Look at my book, is anything English? No, right.” Then he says harder. He says, “You don’t have time to sleep and everyday you wake up to study. That’s why you get an A grade.” I say, “You have to try hard.”

Meizhu has one 7 year old daughter who goes to extended care after school is out. Because she sometimes works at night and weekends as a cashier at the supermarket, her husband cares for the child when she is at the job. She finds juggling all of this difficult particularly since she compares what she has to do now with the help she had in China when the child was younger, and she had a live in babysitter and her parents.

Not like now, everything I have to do by myself. It’s very hard. I have to come to school, to study. And I have a part time job that is three or two days week-days and week-end, and I have to take care of my daughter, and do the housework, and make dinner, and do laundry.

While her husband helps, she finds he is unable to provide the kind of care she does--especially when it comes to the child’s learning:
But he cannot do too many things like me, and the man always lose the patience. Especially how to teach my daughter—he always lose patience. . . . Sometimes he really wanted my daughter to do something but my daughter says, “No, I don’t want to do” so he says, “Okay, I don’t care. You can do anything you want.” But if I was home, I have to let her do mathematics or write some [unclear] or something. . . . You know if I don’t work all night, I spend a lot of time with her. With her reading or writing but my husband doesn’t do that.

As for other household responsibilities, although he helps her, she wishes he would do more.

Of course he can help me a little bit. Like every night there’s so many dishes over there. I really so disgusted I didn’t really want to do that so I leave there. But in the next day morning he washed it. . . . And Sunday I always go to work. So he doing the laundry.

K: So he does help you some?
M: A little (laughs). Not a lot.
K: Not a lot. You wish for more?
M: Right. He said, “Oh you’re busy, I’m busy too. You don’t [unclear] just watching TV and thinking.” [She emphasizes the word and laughs at the idea, I think, that one can watch TV and think]

Meizhu was the only one who expressed a desire for her husband to do more. With others it was simply resigned acceptance that the husband could not or would not help. For example, Min’s husband “helps sometimes. Sometimes it’s very [unclear] Sometimes when he goes to work no time to help me.” Bettie, who is married but has no children, talks about a distinct gendered division of household labor in which he takes care of the outside chores while she does indoor work. “Usually Chinese guy don’t want to--because in the Chinese culture you can’t do the housework ’cause if your friend knew it they’d be laughing at you. I usually do the vacuuming and laundry, but he cuts the grass and does other outside things. I take care of inside the house.”

Van, who lived with her family members including parents and a brother, also spoke of how her brother does no household work but she has to help her mother cook and clean. She also helps care for a nephew whose mother works.

In contrast to both of these however, Tina’s son takes a different path from the cultural expectations for men that both Van and Bettie identified.

[My son] is in high school. He helps me a lot. After school he helps me cook dinner and then I don’t need to allow a lot of time to cook. He’s really good boy and help me to do homework and help me to do cleaning. Husband helps too.

Thus although some women find help from some family members as they attempt to complete their programs, others find little. Not surprisingly, it is the women with
children who had the most challenging job of managing their various demands.

Meizhu, who with a paid job, school, a child, and no family apart from her husband to help, felt most keenly the strain of doing all three. Perhaps too, because of the supports (paid live-in sitter and parents) when she lived and worked in China the demands in the U.S. seemed more acute. Still, going out to a job was envisioned as a relief from the loneliness of the home so much so that she had decided that if she did not get a job at the end of the training, she might return to China.

**Beyond Training**

All of the clients I interviewed said they desired a job at the end of the training. In that respect their expressed goals coincided with what the agency workers repeatedly said was the “goal of training”—to get a job. However, all indicated they harbored other desires. While they wanted a job they saw the office job they might get at the end of the skills training program as a stopping off point to something else.

“The women are ambitious,” one program worker said to me. Elaborating this, she said that they come to the training program wanting a decent office job. Most of the women hoped to move on from general office skills. Min wanted to go on to accounting school at the community college when her child was a little older and she had a good day time job. Bettie, who had settled for the medical office skills program but had wanted to do accounting, thought that she too might go on to a “junior college” to do another course or program, “maybe on the weekend” also while she
holds a job. Lydia hoped to be able to eventually own her own business again as she had in China but, “It would be different than the shops in Chinatown.” She also planned to continue her education not only because she wanted to but because her husband, who graduated from a local college, “plan that I would get more education.” These women were all in their 20s. To some extent age seemed to make a difference in how they conceptualized their futures. Both somewhat older women, Meizhu who was 34, and Tina, 42 mentioned age as a factor in how they conceived of their futures. For example, Tina says, “I am 42. If I was younger I might study to be a doctor.” For the time being however, “I stay in this job field for a while. . . . I want to stay in this field and keep going and may have a chance in the future to get a higher position. I want to.” On the other hand, she also said, “One day I may want to change. . . . I may find an evening school to become a nurse. I like to help people. In Hong Kong I volunteered in a nursing home.” For now though she needed to find a job “so family could support itself--don’t want to beg government for welfare . . . because don’t want to stay home and take care of the baby. . . . A job first to build up house nice and everything settled and baby could have more education. Just like Hong Kong.” Thus, she appeared to trade off what she wanted in terms of a career for the more immediate needs of her family. Meizhu felt that she had wasted time in not pursuing schooling further after arriving in the U.S.

M: I stayed home two years to take care of my daughter 'cause she was little. She
couldn't go to day care or school.

K: You took care of her and after she went into schooling, is that when you started school?

M: Yeah. So I really waste many many times. I think I couldn't live that way anymore. You know the age is getting older and older.

She felt that her age combined with the fact that she lacked an "American" degree (she had a bachelor's degree from China) combined to make it difficult for her and others like her to find a good job with good pay.

I feel the difference between last year and this year. I'm getting so older. . . . I just wonder if you're 30 or close to 40. Especially if you have [unfinished sentence]

No, I mean if you [the interviewer] have some degree in America, maybe you can easy to find job. But gosh we don’t have American degree so it's hard to find job for us. . . . If you want to find a real good job, good pay you have to have the degree, master or something. You have to have the degree in here. [i.e., the United States].

For Meizhu, it was not simply a question of the time it took to care for her daughter but a combination of circumstances which in effect meant that she would have to work at a job that did not match her qualifications which, as she put it, "was not useful
for here.” Still, despite her protestations that she was “old,” she too thought that she might go to school at night and “work for income” during the day at some future point.

The ways in which the women conceptualized their futures as moving beyond office skills, and the function the classes served for them in permitting them to develop the English language skills, represented a departure from how personnel in the training organizations conceptualized both the classes and what the women would do after. This is because these organizations were focussed on the goals of the program as they were obligated to by the source from which they received funding. Indeed from the moment a potential client walked in the door, a key concern was whether the client would stay in the program and be able to get a job at the end of it. If there was a concern with the women’s families, it was linked to the issue of whether they could stay in the program, could do the homework, and so on. Though as one teacher said, “you can’t tell people when to have children because that would be violating their civil rights,” it was nevertheless clear that women who were planning to have children anytime soon were discouraged from joining. Nor did they necessarily want people to think of the program as a stopping off point to something else, like college. This was because the only acceptable outcome from the institutional viewpoint was getting a job.

The disjunctures between how these women perceived the place of these classes in their lives and futures, and how the training organization perceived them are explored further. Clearly these women felt that the programs were a way to learn
English and computer skills which they felt would position them to get better jobs than had been able to have thus far in their new society, but for many it was also clear that the kinds of programs that were offered fell short of the goals they had. In some ways it could be argued that they settled for this because it was available (without fees) and met one of the key needs they had (learning English) cheaply. It also offered an escape from loneliness. The latter is a feature of the women's experience that is of no official relevance to the training enterprise. The areas of convergence in how both clients and training personnel conceptualized job skills and work experience will be further explored and analyzed in the chapters that follow. These experiences need to be understood as arising out of the institutional processes through which these programs have been given shape and form and through which they are co-coordinated. Thus the rest of the thesis explicates how these women's experiences of getting into the program and, through it, being allocated to the labor market work they would eventually do, are shaped by the institutional complex into which they are drawn.

The previous chapter provided the framework for how JTPA was organized. A critical part of the project of doing an institutional ethnography is to explicate the role of a variety of texts in managing institutional courses of action. These courses of action give shape to the specific experiences women have (being rejected or accepted for the program on the basis of language skills, for example). The textual accountability built into the running of this complex organization is central in the coordinative work that actors situated in the different sites of the institutional complex
do. The next chapter takes up this feature of organization. This is followed by an examination of the process of funding, and the process of training from the perspective of the workers in the community-based organizations which offered such training.
Chapter Six

Texts and Accountability

Introduction

Smith has argued that contemporary forms of ruling are textually mediated. Texts are an essential feature of contemporary social organization. Governing, managing, and administering are dependent on the production of accounts in which the lived experiences of actual subjects are displaced by the standardized and generalized forms of knowledge required for coordination and exchange among the multiple sites within an institutional complex. Such is the case with the participant record produced in the administering of the job training programs. This is only one of many of the textual forms that are produced in the training enterprise. This chapter takes up some of the requirements for accountability that are built into the training system. The records of clients, the reports of their performance, and of the agencies' performance are among the texts which link the activities in one part of the institutional complex to those in another. The production of texts such as these allow for the comparability of performance across different sites, spatial and temporal, in the institutional complex.

In articulating the hierarchical character of positions within a ruling apparatus, Smith states, "Hierarchy isn't just internal to an organization: relations among professions in the same field are ordered hierarchically, and particular local sites of administrative, professional or managerial activity are tied in hierarchically to relations
operating at extra-local levels. The policy and decision making process at the central levels of organization depend on the socially organized work of producing accounts at the periphery” (1990a:93).

In Chapter Four I provided an account of the hierarchical structure of the institutional complex I analyze. In this chapter I provide an overview of the sorts of accounts that were required of the different parts of the enterprise of job training that helped shape decisions about the kinds of training and organizations to fund, and the kinds of clients to be served. The kinds of questions that were asked of the women clients either in the interview process or in the application forms they had to fill out oriented to producing the type of information demanded by a training enterprise focussed on the goals of “efficiency and performance.” Thus, for example, from an institutional standpoint no one is concerned that the classes and a job at the end of it might spell an end to the loneliness Meizhu faces in the U.S. This is not a matter of institutional relevance. There is, however, a concern with whether she has childcare, for that might interfere with her attendance and job holding prospects which, in turn, would influence an agency’s and SDA’s performance outcomes.

The framework for administration and oversight articulated in the Job Training Partnership Act provided for a system of reporting and accounting. This is not surprising given that the funding from these programs comes from tax dollars and that previous federal employment training programs had been the subject of complaints about the lack of accountability. In addition, the requirement under this legislation that
programs it funds are to be assessed on the basis of "the return on investment" provides another reason for the reporting mechanisms. For Title II-A programs, which funded the training for the women in this study, it means that the return has to be increased employment and earnings of program participants and reductions in welfare dependency (NCEP 1987:10). SDAs charged with responsibility for program delivery must demonstrate that they are meeting these requirements. Mandating that there be specific procedures for accounting and record keeping does not mean that such procedures necessarily "work." Indeed, federal workers I interviewed were particularly concerned about the "lack of accountability" there was under JTPA, signaling that the procedures in place were not adequate. From the point of view of CBO workers, too much paperwork was demanded of them. Because the stated goal of JTPA was to train participants in "competencies" and place them in non-governmental jobs, it is not surprising that much of my discussions with workers focussed on this aspect. However, different parts of the process seemed to be relevant to the people in the various layers of the enterprise. My concern is not so much whether these efforts at accountability worked well or not, but rather with their role in organizing programs at the local level including which clients were served. A prerequisite for understanding how these came to be significant is an understanding of the kinds of records that were to be kept.
Reporting and Record keeping

JTPA legislation requires that anyone receiving funds should maintain records and reports, and collect information regarding program performance, as the Secretary of Labor requires. Thus, each state, SDA and other fund recipient has to establish a system that will be able to provide program and financial data by state and SDA. These are to be used for reporting, monitoring and evaluating programs, and to determine whether performance standards have been met. The system of record keeping and reporting is a hierarchically organized one, with each level of the structure for delivery of programs having specific requirements for the kinds of records that are to be kept and the data that need to be reported back. At the bottom of this hierarchy are the agencies that directly provide training services to clients. The degree and quantity of paperwork varies at the different levels of the structure.

The reporting requirements of the state to the Federal Department of Labor (DOL) was supposed to be kept to a minimum because under the old employment training system (CETA) it was felt that reporting requirements were too "burdensome." A federal fieldworker pointed out that a typical question that the Federal Department of Labor might ask when it makes changes to the requirements for reporting and record keeping is "what kind of burden" it would impose. Initially the DOL only collected information in summary form from the states. The JTPA Annual Status Report (JASR) for Title II-A programs provides summary data on total participants and outcomes (terminations) for the participants—examples of outcomes
include “entered unsubsidized employment” or entered some “non-Title II training.”

There are also other demographic characteristics of the participant population measured. These include age groups, gender groups, education status, family status, race, and whether they are on Aid to Families with Dependent Children and are assembled under “performance measures.” In addition, starting in July of 1986, states were to submit a semi-annual status report which was to collect information on total expenditures by title and other information on some of the set aside funding which the legislation called for (described in the next chapter on funding). These reports served as two of three central vehicles for providing for accountability in the programs--that is for the federal government to determine whether the goals of the legislation were being met. The third source of information came from longitudinal surveys that were conducted by the Bureau of the Census. The Census Bureau information and the kinds of information that were being provided on participants and outcomes have been the subject of concern to the federal government. They claimed they were not able to extract the kind of information they needed from these devices. For example, on the basis of the information that was being collected from some states, they could not determine post program outcomes such as whether there was increased employment and income for welfare recipients (NCEP 1987:23). This has led to different tools for collecting data, one of which was the construction of a new participant record during the time I did my fieldwork. The federal workers in my study were optimistic about the new record’s potential for getting better data and as to the question of “burden,”
one opined that he did not think

that the burden will be that great because any SDA worth its salt would be
collecting that. You need to collect data like this if you are to manage a program
well. You need to know a lot about who is going in, what combination of
programs and services are best for particular groups, etcetera.

**Service Delivery Area  Responsibilities**

In order for the state to provide data to the federal government, it must collect
data from the SDAs since they are the entities charged with running program activities.
The legislation, however, also required that states bear direct responsibility for
developing their information systems and tracking. While this has meant that there is a
diversity of ways in which information is gathered, in Massachusetts, the Department
of Employment and Training issues planning specifications to the SDAs which include
the forms that the SDA is required to file to the state. Below is a description of the
forms that are called for from the SDA. These forms which are to be submitted along
with a narrative report provide information on a range of topics including the
“industrial and occupational structure of the area, changes in the economy over the
past and next two years, industries in decline and how JTPA can make a difference”
and program participant characteristics and outcomes (DET 1992). All of these forms
involve a “historical component” so that the state can assess patterns, deviations, and
inconsistency from one funding period to the next. The following is a list of the forms the state requires the SDA to submit.

1. A chart which lists the ten fastest growing occupations and the ten most in decline in the local labor market area that require less than a college degree to practice and pay entry level wages at least equal to the SDA's FY '93 wage.
2. A chart on "trends, needs and goals" for populations to receive service, divided into a number of demographic groups including race, age, sex, education status, people with disabilities, welfare recipients, "limited English," UI (unemployment insurance) claimants, and UI exhaustees.
3. A chart on the kinds of services (such as English as a Second Language or Adult Basic Education, occupational training) and training related activities that funds have been allocated to in the immediate two years past and will be allocated to in the coming year. This chart also includes a budget summary of total funds, and how much is to be spent on administration, support to participants, and training, and a summary budget by individual training activities.
4. A chart on the trends and goals of occupational training emphases, listing the top ten training occupations in terms of enrollment and to say what percent of the total training is represented by those occupations. This again is done to provide the history and projections for the next year.
5. Finally the SDA must provide forms which provide data on "performance objectives and accountabilities" which include information on a number of measures of participant employment (for example, "adult entered employment rate," "adult follow-up employment rate"), wages, and other outcomes. An annual participant summary of activities must also be completed. These all have a three year time span consisting of the prior two years and the projections for the coming year.

Many of the pieces of the information thus generated became the basis for the issuance of "Requests for proposals" to provide training services which SDAs routinely issue and they also became standards against which the proposals could be judged or evaluated and contracts awarded. The fact that the service delivery area must generate these "accountabilities" for the state makes these forms exceedingly consequential--they are not just bits of information. In the institutional ethnographic approach to studying social organization, the importance of texts such as these forms is crucial. Smith (1987, 1990a) directs attention to the centrality of texts in coordinating relations of ruling in contemporary societies. They are integral to the work of managing, governing, and administering. Texts such as the ones described here are put to use in the coordinative work of planning, funding, and delivering training programs. In the next chapter, I begin to map how the accountabilities mentioned here entered into how funding decisions were made. Ultimately, as Chapter Nine
demonstrates, such texts also shape the work community agencies do in recruiting and counseling clients. Thus, the histories of performance that the forms above requested become significant for the community organizations and the clients they serve.

**Community Organizations' Responsibilities**

In order to submit many of the pieces of information that are required by the state, the SDA passed on some of that responsibility to the agencies which actually run the programs. A list of what the SDA calls administrative requirements related to client tracking is provided in the request for proposals (RFP) that the Private Industry Council issues. Thus, the RFP explains “client tracking” and announces that this will be a required course of action for fundees. Tracking clients would involve the agency in completing a range of forms. These included:

1. an application form for the participant in order to determine eligibility
2. a participant eligibility cover sheet which is submitted along with the application and is used to document eligibility
3. the eligible applicant intake record/employability development plan used to assess the needs of each participant and to develop an employment plan
4. client referral/enrollment record. Used to record participant enrollment information
5. client completion/placement notice
In addition to these series of forms having to do with client tracking, the SDA requires
the agency to submit a monthly validation report listing specific information on
participant status and also a monthly narrative report. They must also submit a
“Positive Outcome Verification” sheet listing outcomes and attaching appropriate
documentation.

These requirements draw the community organizations into a documentary
relationship with the state, since they are required to show that they are producing
appropriate groups of people as commodities for the labor market as the funding
requirement intended. These are the documents which stand as records of the work
that employees in the agencies do in recruiting, training, and counseling, and placing
clients. They make visible the success or lack of success of the agency in fulfilling
their obligations according to the funding protocol. As we shall see in Chapter Nine,
the agency personnel sought in many ways to ensure that they could produce an
account of their activities such that they could demonstrate their success in meeting
training goals, including, for example, delaying as much as they could the time frame
for when client forms were due.

**Textual Accountability**

Such “textual accountability” is an integral part of how ruling is accomplished
and in the long run has an effect on who gets served in the program and where they
end up in the labor market. Every aspect of this documentary process is articulated to
the ability to verify that the activities are being conducted within the parameters specified in the JTPA legislation. Diane, who was a program co-ordinator at City Services, one of the community organizations offering training programs, gave a list of the reports the agency must provide and why.

Diane: After you write the proposal--you have to send EDIC monthly reports, you have to have your facility accessible for EDIC to do site visits and then about a dozen or so points they would monitor on a site visit. They would be sure that you--one thing they’d do is pull client folders randomly to make sure that an application exists on a client and they signed it. They’d be sure that the client has signed a grievance procedure form which is a form saying “I know how to complain if I’m discriminated against.” They’d look in the folder to be sure that the person had the proper support documentation to see that they are eligible for a program. In the case of JTPA it’d be proof of income, proof of legal residence, of address, of selective service registration and EDIC publishes something I call a “red book.” It’s a forms completions manual. It outlines all these points you need to have in case of an audit. So they would check clients’ folders, teacher-student ratio valid, that student have text books because you put them in your budget, you’d better have bought them. It’s a monthly narrative thing, it’s being accessible for site visits, it’s really the only communication I have with EDIC.

The SDA attempted to facilitate record keeping and to standardize the reporting
through providing computer equipment. Still, the requirements for record keeping and reporting often prove to be an additional burden that imposes on community organization workers' other responsibilities. John, a worker at Asia House gave a sense of the imposition on time.

Sure, there's so much involved in that that I had actually developed a computerized format to make it easier to process my load. And also EDIC has recognized that there is a lot of paperwork involved, they've actually given us two computers. All CBOs get two computers with modems to be able to use. In fact, they even hired a special programmer to write programs for us to be able to track and bring clients in and record the information and send it to them by telephone lines because of the reporting requirements are really you know, as far as I'm concerned, is a lot. Especially when you're teaching. I'm really the main teacher for this program and I teach basically from 8:30 to 2 and my other staff teaches from 2:00 to 2:30. From 2:00 to 2:30, I have to do all my program coordinating and it’s not easy. There are a lot of forms to fill out.

Thus, agencies' acceptance of training contracts involves them in reporting requirements that they may view as "burdensome."

Part of the routine work of those who are involved in the employment training enterprise at the different governmental levels is to also be engaged in developing
better means of being able to assess whether programs meet the requirements. Thus, for example, the development of the new participant record was an outcome of questions raised by Congress and from reports issued by the General Accounting Office and Office of the Inspector General. The kind of information that they were seeking could not be drawn from the records that the Department of Labor got from the states. One of the federal field workers I interviewed stated that the kind of data provided in the form is inadequate to manage the program or evaluate it. Referring to the GAO report which showed that minorities were not well served, he said some people argued that blacks could not get the better jobs because they lack the skills or competencies. He said that on the basis of the information they collect, "you don't have the data to make those kind of arguments." The new participant record they were developing, however, might be able to have that data. For the Department of Labor, too, part of their routine work seems to be to conduct periodic reviews of different aspects of the how the system is working. Such reviews often rely heavily on examining the records of the state and SDA. For example, at the time of my field work they had conducted what they called a "procurement review"--which was a review of how SDAs were awarding contracts to agencies for delivery of programs. In the following excerpt a federal fieldworker talks about some of what they did.

Bill: Some SDAs contract out services some run them in house and some have combinations. The choices of who they serve, choices of programs they offer
hinges on procurement. An SDA might say here's our plan, here is our population, here are its characteristics, needs, and we want to serve them in these particular ways. We are going to run these programs in these ways, run these programs ourselves to serve those people and meet those needs, here are the programs we are going to contract out, we are going to issue an RFP [request for proposals] and seek competition. We looked at that plan, whether the choice of running it in-house was justified? Could someone else run it better? Is the RFP consistent with the plan? If they did this analysis of need does the RFP reflect need, does the RFP reflect that? If you said that these were the kind of people who needed assistance, does the RFP ask for people to come back with proposals to serve those types of people, and are the ways you suggested that they needed to be served in the plan, ways consistent with the plan.

At the state level, a JTPA liaison officer provided an account of the routine monitoring of activities of the service delivery areas that they do. Her comments echo the search for consistency between the SDA plan and the activities the SDA engages in.

Sara: I usually take three weeks to a month per SDA to do each SDA and review their files in order to certify their system. To make sure they have procedures and see if they are following their procedures. So for the past three months I have been visiting all of the SDAs being in their offices, administrative offices looking at client files, interviewing staff, observing classrooms and making sure that they have
people in those programs, and that they are spending money the way they should be and they are actually doing what they had planned to do for the year.

S: . . . Another part of my job is to review those (SDA) plans to make sure they are both in compliance with JTPA and that they take into account past performance problems, that they make sense in terms of a good match of the kinds of services and the target populations, the demographics of the people in need in that region. So its a qualitative review and also a compliance review. So all of us have different areas of expertise that we bring to the plan review and it’s a joint planning review process where everybody has input and makes comments on the quality of the plan.

Even with the routine work that the state engaged in to monitor programs, in response to the procurement reviews, or “wave reviews” as they called them (since there was a series of reviews over a period of time), they had begun the process of trying to develop better “monitoring tools” (Interview, Sara, DET).

“Procurement practices” were viewed as ultimately having an effect on the “quality of services that people have.” Thus, these reviews opened up to scrutiny the kinds of curricula that were proposed for programs. In that sense this review had “programmatic influence” because, the fieldworker argued, who the program serves hinges on procurement. Sometimes a review of one aspect of the process might lead
to reviewing curricula more directly. For example, in reviewing "fixed unit performance based contracts" they were able to look at curricula to see whether people were getting "real educational or employment" competencies rather than contractors being paid to have someone sit in a class until they get paid at 30 days and then again at 60 days (Interview, Bill, DOL).

Bill's comments point to some of the seeming contradictory tendencies in this system. On the one hand, there seems to be concern to provide people with "real skills" and competencies. On the other it seems that the legislation's emphasis on "efficiency and performance" meant that the goal of skill building might not be realized.

The measure of "efficiency and performance" was to be in increased employment and earnings, and decreased welfare dependency of trainees through the adoption of performance standards established by the Secretary of Labor and either accepted or modified by state Governors (NCEP 1987). The bind that the employees at the federal level identified was that they were supposed to be less involved in the oversight of programs than they used to be under the previous CETA legislation, but at the same time they must have the means to produce the data necessary to demonstrate that the programs are effective, and that the money for JTPA is being appropriately spent especially when they are called upon to do so by elected officials. How tax dollars are spent has been an ongoing preoccupation in this society with both print and broadcast media weekly producing stories about how taxpayer's money is being spent
or wasted—for example, ABC’s national news program features a segment on “Your Money” which is focused on how the government spends tax dollars, and usually centered on “waste and abuse.” When I conducted my fieldwork there was also a focus on welfare reform—with a particular interest in getting people off welfare and into work. In conjunction with welfare reform, the recession in the early 1990s, and the downsizing that has been talked about, there has been public discussion about getting people retrained for work. Not surprisingly then, there has been some interest in JTPA and how it has been working. It consumes a considerable sum of money because of its magnitude. During the recession this sum grew because of the way in which this program is funded on the basis of unemployment figures.

In sum then, the funds for job training which flow to the service delivery areas are based on a formula taking into account rates of unemployment and levels of poverty. The sequencing of appropriation and allocation has meant that service delivery areas can find themselves with large amounts of funding at just the moment that the labor market is shrinking, which is indeed what happened at the time I did my fieldwork. By the same token, they can find themselves with small amounts just at the time the labor market grows. Ironically, this means that when conditions are ripe for them to be able to demonstrate good “performance” by being able to fill available jobs, they have less money with which to run programs.

Because of the emphasis on “efficiency and performance,” as measured by placing people in jobs where there was an “enhancement of wages,” the shrinking
labor market posed significant problems for the agencies in placing the workers they trained, as we shall see. This emphasis came to be important for how the agency reconstituted its work with potential clients, including recruiting them. At the same time this emphasis also had to be balanced against the requirement that the training programs demonstrate that participants were being trained in "real competencies or skills." These were the primary aspects of the contractual obligations faced by agencies who were awarded contracts to provide training services but there were many more as will be discussed in subsequent chapters. These infiltrated the work the community organizations did in recruiting, training, and placing clients in jobs. Moreover, they engendered at times somewhat antagonistic relations between the clients and community workers, as the latter saw the actions of the former as having impact on their own economic survival.

The focus on "efficiency and performance" that was the new organizing principle in the articulation of JTPA under Reagan was transposed into the kinds of data that CBOs, SDAs and the state were required to collect. In her account of restructuring in Ontario colleges, McCoy looks at the role of accounting in shaping managerial practices in the colleges. Accounting records, she argues, sets the terms in which organizational activities can be discussed and evaluated, are oriented to managerial relevances, and realizes "at the local level, abstract concepts (such as "efficiency") drawn from the theories of neo-classical economics" (1998:397).

McCoy further identifies the result of such practices as an example of what Smith has
called an "ideological circle." Smith's explication of ideological circles identifies them as properties of organization itself and of "institutionalized relationships among professional discourse and the local sites of professional activity" (1990a:103).

In her discussion of ideological processes, Smith argues that ideological practices include

methods of creating accounts of the world that treat it selectively in terms of a predetermined conceptual framework. The categories structuring data collection are already organized by a predetermined schema; the data produced becomes the reality intended by the schema; the schema interprets the data. Any questions bearing on the facticity of statements based on the intersection of data and interpretive schema (such as issues of accuracy, reliability, and the like) may be raised without breaking the ideological circularity of the procedure. . . . Issues, questions, and experiences that do not fit the framework and the intercalated relation of categories and schemata simply do not get entry to the process, do not become part of the textual realities governing decision-making processes.

(1990a:93-94)

The kinds of data that the SDA was required to submit to the state clearly were oriented to demonstrating that the activities that were undertaken produced the outcomes of increased efficiency (measured by increased wages for program
participants) and performance (measured by ability of programs to place people in jobs at or above the standards set by the state). The kinds of information requested at the different levels or parts of the enterprise hook into each other. Thus, there can be no SDA chart on "Annual Participant Summary/Activities" which included data on "terminations"—such as "entered employment"—without a participant record completed by the community organization, which could draw on the client application form data on the client's prior positions and wages. The latter would be necessary to demonstrate that there is "wage enhancement" from training. All of these documents become tools for enabling comparisons across SDAs and across programs at the community organization level, as both Sara at the state office, and Bill in the federal department revealed. Such texts also shape what people do in the different sites within the institutional complex. In the next chapter, I take a closer look at the funding process and how many of the texts mentioned here enter into decision-making about funding.
Chapter Seven
The Funding Process: Developing Training Plans

Introduction

In order to provide employment training programs, community based organizations seek funds from government sources. Both City Services and Asia House were non-profit community organizations which depended on funds sought from these sources to offer the programs in which the women I interviewed participated. The funding process begins with the congressional allocation of funds to the Department of Labor which is the federal government arm charged with overseeing the Job Training Partnership Act. These funds are allocated to states and eventually the service delivery areas (SDA) on the basis of very specific formula outlined in the legislation. A community based organization seeking these funds engages most directly with the SDA. In essence, to receive funding for programs a community organization bids for a contract from the SDA to provide training services. This chapter and the next explore the organization of the funding process on which community organizations rely in order to offer employment and training programs. Unfolding this process brings into view the elaborate mechanisms through which business increasingly came to be drawn into a more central role in training program development. Moreover, as I shall show in Chapter Nine, it brings into view how the work that the community organizations undertook in selecting the kinds of programs to
offer. the clients to whom they were offered, counseling practices, and the placement practices are articulated to the contractual requirements they enter into with the SDA when they accept a contract to provide services.

My understanding of the funding process comes from a variety of sources. These include interviews with the program co-ordinators in the CBO, employment training personnel at the SDA level, personnel in the state department charged with overseeing aspects of the Job Training Partnership planning and funding, and an examination of a number of documents produced by the state and the SDA. One woman I interviewed, Candace, was an assistant director in the “Jobs and Community Services” arm of the Boston SDA, the part of the organization which was responsible for issuing requests for proposals (referred to by all workers as RFPs) for funds that they receive and manage, such as the Job Training Partnership Act money. Another was a grant manager, Elaine, at the Cambridge SDA which also contracted with City Services to run some programs.

In what follows, I begin by describing the funding formula that is established by the legislation. I then describe how agencies access funding, and how SDAs develop training plans which serve as the basis for the issuance of requests for proposals to which community organizations respond.
The Funding Formula

The funding for JTPA comes from the federal government and is channeled through the state and local government to community organizations. Congress appropriates funds from the national level as part of the annual appropriation for the U.S. Department of Labor. In keeping with the "blocks grants" concept, the funds are then allocated to the states based on a formula specified in the legislation. That formula provides funds to the states on the basis of the state's unemployment rates and poverty figures in the previous year. The states are guaranteed through the legislation that they will receive no less than 90% of their previous fiscal year's allocation of Title IIA funds. Of the funds allocated one third is for the relative number of unemployed residing in areas of substantial unemployment; one third for relative excess (over 4.5%) number of unemployed persons residing in each state; one third for relative number of disadvantaged (a euphemism for poverty) within the state. Thus, a state must be able to provide data on unemployment and the economically disadvantaged, each of which has "official definitions." The funds appropriated in a given fiscal year (Oct 1 - Sept 30) are for programs in the following program year (Jul 1 - Jun 30). As noted previously, states have the authority to decide which entity would be responsible for administering JTPA at the state level. That entity in Massachusetts is the Department of Employment and Training. The JTPA legislation specifies that 78% of the federal funds be allocated to "training" while the other 22% of the funds, referred to as "set-asides," are required to be set aside or used for specific purposes such as
state administration (5%), technical assistance and incentive awards for SDAs (6%),
state educational services, and to facilitate coordination between education and
training (8%), and older worker programs (3%). The state then has to allocate funding
on the basis of a similar formula to the SDAs which it has established. Since 1986, the
SDAs have also been guaranteed at least 90% of the average share of funds during the
two previous fiscal years (NCEP 1987:8).

The formula is understood and used by the staff at the state level who write the
planning instructions for the service delivery areas to follow (Interview, Geoff, DET).
At the community organization level, however, the understanding of these formula are
more rudimentary and indeed some workers express the sense that there are
“administrative costs” which use up resources as revealed in the following segment.

Accessing Funds: Community Agencies’ Process

Diane, a program co-ordinator at City Services, provided a succinct description
of how agencies get funds to run programs.

Diane: Generally how this goes is that City Services bids on federal grants and
congressional initiatives to get money to provide job training for certain client
populations. Generally we work with three client populations. The AFDC client
population, generally single women, although we had had men who have custody
of their children; the JTPA funding which is low income and public assistance
recipients; and the TAG funded, these are refugees funded under the targeted assistant grant of the federal government.

K: Like the REEP program? [Refugee Employment and Education Program—another federally funded program]

D: Exactly. REEPs. Although the REEP has changed around a little bit for this fiscal year. So those are the three kinds of skills training program that we run, three kinds of monies that we bid on. So each, I think they are twice a year, once a year, once a fiscal year, sometimes twice, we write a proposal for this money and we are awarded money through the city agency which is the EDIC of Boston. And actually, generally all cities have some sort of private company that actually watches out for this money. I guess it's a kind of conflict of interest thing and also they get a large administrative portion of the money for really not doing anything except distributing the money.

Diane refers to the administrative structure with which the agency engages most directly in their search for funding. EDIC (Economic Development Industrial Corporation) that she mentions is the entity, a corporation, that serves as the service delivery area (SDA) for the city of Boston. It is a complex organization in which the oversight of employment and training programs is only one function.

The "Request for Proposals" (RFP) is a document the service delivery area routinely produces which is made available to those seeking contracts to provide
training services. Just as students have to become aware of the availability of employment training programs, agencies wishing to run these have to become aware of how to get them funded. The CBOs that I studied had already been applying for money for some time and were thus already, as Elaine pointed out, "in the loop" for being informed that proposals were being sought. For those who might want to bid for an initial contract there are many obstacles.

There are meetings called "bidders conferences." They publish them in the paper and they have mailing lists that they send out. So people get the notice about this but if you are new, if you're trying to break into the system, how do you get on that mailing list? Suppose you are a social service agency for Asian women and you thought well maybe we'd like to get on employment and training, it would be so hard to be aware of the meeting, the deadlines, the processes to get in the loop which is hard to begin with (Elaine, SDA2).

The request for proposals was part of the formal process through which organizations seek and gain funding for programs. An organization bids for a contract by responding to this request—that is, writing a proposal. The document, however, is the outcome of a planning process which is elaborated below. Once an agency applies for funds, their proposals are evaluated through criteria which are themselves made available in the RFP.
The proposal request is a fairly thick document which announces who the
document is from, the services being requested, the target population for the services,
guidelines for designing the program, special initiatives that the SDA is undertaking, a
twenty-seven page "proposal questionnaire," budget forms the service provider is to
fill in for cost of running programs for which funding is being sought, and a section on
contract terms and conditions. This document is peppered with references to the
legislation governing the services for which the proposals are being requested. While
the proposal covers other state funded programs it is very specific about what is
required for each program, including JTPA. Agencies wishing to apply for funds must
therefore follow a very structured format in writing proposals.

This document is only one among hundreds that are produced in the course of
the administration of JTPA. The work it does in the organization of training programs
and, in the long run, of organizing the lives of the clients the programs turn away or
turn out is critical. A CBO's act of submitting the completed document enters them
into a relationship with the state whereby the state influences various aspects of the
agency's structure. For example, an agency without a board of directors which
includes members of private industry would be unlikely to be funded. Reading
through this document one can find traces of others--for example, economic and labor
market forecasts, demographic reports, policy directives, legislation, etc. Thus, the
organization of training is accomplished in and through texts such as these and the
RFP is at a critical juncture in the relationship between the community agency and the
local service delivery area.

The processes involved in taking in clients into the training programs are coordinated in relation to this funding process. Therefore the requirements of the proposal writing and fund seeking process are integral to understanding how training works. The work of the service delivery area is to administer and coordinate training at the local level by developing plans in conjunction with local employers, academics, and others which identify occupations for which employees are to be trained, and by bringing together employers and training organizations to develop training programs. Below, I describe this process in more detail beginning with the development of the "employment and training plans" which are generated at the level of the SDA and to which the RFP is responsive.

The Development of Training Plans

The issuance of the request for proposals is the end product of a planning process which involves most directly the service delivery area (SDA). The legislation mandating JTPA allocated authority to the state to establish service delivery areas. The SDAs, in turn, were given responsibility under the aegis of the Private Industry Councils (also referred to as regional employment boards in Massachusetts) to develop training plans. This was a structure set up to provide for "local authority" over employment and training. However, the plans developed by the SDA respond to policy and instructions developed by the state under the direction of the MassJobs
Council (See Chapter Four).

The document, "Planning and Budgeting Instructions," issued to the SDAs lists broad goals for SDAs established by the MassJobs Council, and then provides a series of instructions for how plans are to be written up, including a number of charts for the SDA to complete. As one might expect, the training plans I reviewed from the SDAs are responsive to the instructions specified by the state. For example, the MassJobs Council document identified several priorities for fiscal year 1993, including "strengthening the training system's customer focus by identifying the training needs of local businesses, job seekers and workers . . . ," focussing "resources on training geared to support industries that have the greatest expansion potential," and "increasing accountability for results by applying market principles to the job training system" by, for example, encouraging "increased competition for funds among providers," and by measuring "programs through uniform, simple and valid indicators of performance" (DET 1992:1-2). The SDA plan developed in accordance with these instructions announces its customer driven focus, and claims that it will be developing initiatives to increase employability of "disadvantaged" individuals by "tailoring training to needs of employers, by carefully targeting industries which show signs of growth . . ." (SDA Plan:1). In relation to the question of "increasing accountability,"--wherein accountability refers to the service area being able to show that its training programs were effective as measured by the ability to meet the performance standards set by the state and federal government, and are in accordance with the regional
board's policy priorities--the SDA plan lists several ways in which it will ensure accountability beyond the JTPA mandated measures of performance. For example, the SDA plan announced that “the principles of a competitive marketplace are reflected in open and competitive requests for proposals being issued regularly” and as a further development for the fiscal year 1993 it was planning to hold “employer round tables” which would foster competition by “inviting all potential vendors in the city, whether or not they currently hold a contract” (SDA Plan:22). These statements clearly reflect a response to the instructions and priorities as set by Massachusetts. Indeed, on the basis of my data gathering, I surmised that the state’s response was itself the outcome of the “wave reviews” which had been undertaken by the federal government and which, as a federal worker informed me, had brought into focus the lack of competitive procurement practices (Interview, Bill, DOL). Indeed, an interview with a JTPA liaison at the state level revealed that the reviews had begun to transform how they monitor the SDAs and how they expect the SDAs to monitor training providers.

Sara: We have just issued a new policy with a new standards for program monitoring that list the type of things each SDA would have to check when they go on a site visit. . . . It’s a new policy that replaces an old one from 1987. We have monitoring tools that relate back to the 1987 policy but haven’t developed new monitoring tools. So if you want to see monitoring tools, they won’t correspond exactly to the new policy but they are close.
K: Are the changes significant?

S: Yes. We have added an entire set of standards related to intake, referral, assessment, and assignment to programs.

K: Are these coming out in relation to wave reviews?

S: Yes.

K: Would you say that those reviews have had quite an impact on how you are now going to do your monitoring and your compliance reviews and so on?

S: Yes, absolutely.

This state worker had also provided an account of how her work process involved ensuring that the plan developed by the SDA was both “in compliance with JTPA” and made sense in terms of “the kinds of services and target populations.”

Given that the SDA plan must demonstrate a fit between the objectives set by the state, the work processes of SDA staff in meeting these objectives are of particular interest in this study. Elements of that planning process were made available to me by staffers at the SDAs.

Candace: Specifically for the JTPA money, I participate in the planning process. We put together a committee of people made up of (assistant director of planning) and we put together a committee made up of people from our various funding sources so that a couple of people from DET, one from Department of Public Welfare, the Private Industry Council has a representative, and there are two
representatives from adult skills training, and education providers are also involved
. . . that participates in the development of the two year plan, and in the plan you
need to talk about who you are going to target the services to, what kind of areas
you will target for vocational training, occupational areas and why and the like,
and out of that process comes the request for proposals that are let out. And I'm
involved and different members of the program management team that are
involved in that process.

Candace begins to provide more information about who and what planning entails
beyond what is available for anyone to see in the document that is called the
"Employment and Training Plan," the two year plan required of all SDAs by the state.
Although the private industry council has authority over the two year plan, it is clear
that other members of the larger community were involved in the formation of plans.
Such aspects of planning are not clearly visible in the plans themselves. It is my
interviews that provided for a deeper understanding of this process. I began to be able
to have a better sense of how the planning documents derived from a work process
that brought in employers, a range of experts including economists and other social
scientists, the reports they develop, and representatives from "funding sources."

The request for proposals (RFP) is a document that comes out of this planning
process too. It, in turn, is articulated to the two year plan. That is, the RFP has to be
read as fulfilling the objectives identified by the plan. The plan, like the RFP, focuses
on two significant components of employment training: 1) the occupational areas--the kinds of occupations for which the training is designed; and 2) the client population to whom the training is going to be targeted. Because I was provided a copy of an RFP, I could see that there was much more that was required of agencies apart from target population and occupational areas. They also had to address questions concerning a) accessibility (for example, Is it accessible to the disabled? Are staff bilingual and in what languages? Are there resources for assisting clients with child care needs and is there proximity to public transportation?), b) the curriculum and competencies that it would produce, c) recruitment strategies, d) intake and assessment, e) information on staff, f) teaching methods, g) counseling, internships, and job placement and development activities. Agencies that had previously been funded are asked to give a history of their past performance which included enrollment, terminations, average wage at placement, minimum wage at placement and cost per placement. Agencies are also asked for projected performance for the fiscal year for which funding is being sought. In this way the proposal reader could see a three year performance record of the agency. New applicants have to explain why they would be an effective provider of service. Finally, agencies are required to submit a budget and a host of other documents including their status as non-profits, if they are, and a list of their board of directors and the board members’ affiliations.

Each category of the questionnaire is awarded a certain number of points. For many of the categories there are questions which ask the applicant to address any
departure from the parameters set in the RFP. Thus for example, if the agency's proposed training program departs from the occupational priorities set by the SDA, they must explain why.

In sum these documents, the state planning instructions, the SDA two year plan and the request for proposals that the SDA issues are three key documents through which the state, local government, and the community organizations which provide the training are linked in the training nexus. These are some of the central documents which provide for accounting for how resources are used in relation to occupational areas and potential client populations, and for whether the standards of performance are being met. In the next two sub-sections, I discuss the process of how occupational priorities are decided and target populations identified. The discussion begins to reveal the increasing integration of employers into the decision making process.

**Identifying Occupational Priorities**

The occupational priorities that the SDA identifies as part of its planning process are listed in the RFP. Candace and Elaine gave descriptions of how those occupational priorities were identified by SDAs.

K: A couple of questions--vocational areas you are talking about, are you talking about kinds of skills, jobs, or geographic areas you are going to target?

Candace: I'm talking about the industry area [her emphasis] whether you're
training people to be secretaries or lab technicians, or computer operators. What we do is gather whatever labor market information that we have. One of the things we did this year for first time—I’ve been here almost two years and it’s the first time, didn’t put down anything like this and I’ve been doing this for almost 20 years and worked for the predecessor agency to EDIC and I don’t remember a process like this. But one of the things that we did is that the private industry council, PIC, gave us authorization to work with half dozen or so employers who represented specific segments of industry areas, so we had a representative from banking industry, a couple from hospital, another person from hotel and hospitality and another person from the union. And the purpose of that group was to help us zero in on a) are there jobs in your industry, b) what type of jobs might there be, and what kinds of skills do people need to have? When people come to you for a job interview looking for a job, what kinds of skills are you looking for? . . . So that when we made our funding decisions, we did not fund . . . [She trails off.]
The RFP, for example, we identified some occupational training—hospital, medical, secretarial, lab work, that kind of thing, and there were industry we shied away from, like construction for example, although there are some jobs which seems to be opening up—third harbor tunnel and couple of other projects coming up. That’s not where the real focus is. Right now the real focus seems to be hospitality and in medical field and so proposals that came in, for example, if someone decided they wanted to train someone in a construction-related field they had to provide us with labor market analysis that demonstrated that the jobs not only are there today, but
that they will be there for the individual so that they don’t get a job and then thirty
days later they are out on the street again.

Candace reiterates the occupational priorities that are listed in the RFP and also
specifically mentioned in the plan—medical and hospital industry—but also identifies
the kinds of occupations they are staying away from. She also reveals that they rely on
“labor market analysis” which included a meeting with several employers in a range of
“industry areas” in the city the SDA serves. The planning process of establishing
“occupational priorities” involved not only many levels of government but also
academic institutions (area universities and the economists and labor market analysts
in them) and “business” as well.

Elaine at the SDA 2 gave an example of the involvement of the state
government and academics in the development of the plan through which
industry areas would be identified for funding. Like SDA1, they too drew upon the
resources of employers through the use of “focus groups.”

Elaine: . . . I actually ended up spending most of my time writing the blueprint—I
don’t know if you heard of the blueprint that every SDA wrote for their workforce
development for the future.

K: Workforce 2000? [This is actually a document produced by a private think
tank, “The Hudson Institute” but funded through a federal grant from the
Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor, the same department that oversees job training. It contains a foreword by the assistant secretary of labor at the time it was published, 1987.

Elaine: Yeah, well not really, but sort of. Mass Jobs Council required every SDA to come up with something like that and gave a lot of money. We hired a consultant and I worked with the consultant. We did all these interviews with Cambridge area employers. We try to cluster industry take on things and . . .

K: Tell me more. Were they trying to get you to do a market, job market, economic profile, projection analysis?

Elaine: Right. You were supposed to take some what are called clusters. I don’t know if you are familiar with Porter, Michael Porter at Harvard, who has the idea that economic development should proceed not so much industry by industry, or company by company, but by clusters. Clusters are geographically segmented--it may include--for example Cambridge is a big knowledge cluster, so you have universities that produce knowledge. It might be a health care cluster so it’s not just jobs, companies--private or public. It includes the public sector which is kind of interesting. And Mass Jobs Council liked Porter’s stuff and wanted each SDA to identify its main clusters and then look within them at what jobs they thought would be growing in the future--which would be growing, which would be declining--and so we did focus groups with industry people to come up with this information. This was interesting. In fact I have some of the raw data if you ever need it or anything. There was very little attention given to who the needy people
were--the employees. Much more driven by what kind of jobs that are going to be out there and who can provide the training, who is capable.

The language of "industry clusters" appears in the RFP put out by the Boston SDA: "Services requested include training programs which respond to the employment needs and requirements of growing industry clusters which include . . . health care, etc. . . ." (EDIC 1992:ix).

Despite the attempts to predict areas of job growth and tailor training programs accordingly, there were unforeseen political and economic developments which appeared to have an effect on the availability of jobs which had been identified as occupational priorities. For example, John, a program director at Asia House, had linked their difficulty in placing their trainees in medical office skills to the "health care crisis" which occurred in the early to mid 1990s as President Clinton embarked on an effort to reform the system for health care insurance and delivery.

J: . . . Also last year [1993] we didn't figure with the Clinton health care crisis there were a lot of cutbacks at hospitals because they weren't sure what was going to happen so there was a lot of hiring freezes and we didn't factor that in and we started the program. After we started the program all of this stuff started to snowball and the freezes came and we found it very difficult to get people in the hospitals. Although we did find two slots in a hospital which was great. Actually
three if you count the person who got the job and it was too late.

When I had asked an SDA manager about this problem with the health care jobs, she asserted that the problem lay in the organization of a training system which cannot respond quickly enough to such changes.

Elaine: Yeah--but the system couldn’t react quickly enough to acknowledge it. One, as I said before, I think it’s a very insulated system so they don’t believe the data they get about downsizing or if they even get it. And secondly, it’s just so cumbersome—you have to do these plans one or two years in advance you have these long RFP process with the vendors, you have to respond and you have to have legal guidelines about who has to know and meetings and all this other stuff. It just isn’t quick enough. So when you hear from Washington, they want to simplify this system, it does make sense. If it were simplified it could perhaps be more responsive. I don’t know.

Still, trying to predict growth areas seems to be a routine part of the planning process. Also contained in the RFP document, in bold print, is the acknowledged commitment to “industry involvement” in planning programs:

It is a high priority of this RFP that proposals demonstrate industry involvement in the design and implementation of programs and the demand for trained people in
an industry/occupation. Relationships with employers are critical for the design of relevant, current curriculum, innovative programs and successful placements. In order to facilitate collaborations between vendors and employers in emerging industries EDIC has established a formal process in which vendors are encouraged to participate. . . . (EDIC 1992:1)

Both Elaine and Candace’s remarks about the development of “occupational priorities” identify a complex process through which employers come to be integrated into decision making about the occupational areas in which training will be offered. Indeed, the employers had in a sense come to be defined as “clients” of the training programs on somewhat different terms than the people who needed training and/or jobs. In a planning document for JTPA issued by the state, one of the priorities identified for the “Regional Employment Boards” was to “strengthen the training system’s customer focus, by identifying the training needs of local businesses, job seekers and workers. . . .” (DET 1992:1). This document also made clear that the planning specifications for the coming fiscal year was to “result in products that are centered on identifying and addressing the needs of the ES (employment services) and JTPA systems’ end users: Massachusetts businesses and residents seeking training or placement assistance” (p. 2). Workers at the state level had also adopted the use of “customer driven system.” In response to my question, “What’s customer driven? Is that trainees?” a state worker replied, “Yes, or employers who need trained employees.
As opposed to the institutions deciding for the customers what it is that’s needed” (Interview, Sara. DET). For both SDAs in my study this seemed to have translated into bringing employers into the decision-making process about training priorities. Trainees were left out altogether and while there were efforts directed towards bringing the providers of services into the process, it was in a way that they would be responsive to the needs of business. Candace provided an example of this in her description of the “employer round table” the SDA held:

Candace: One of the things we did, and it was a recommendation that came out of working with small employers group. There was interest expressed by couple of them as well as a couple of other businesses because, as I said, on the economic development side we work with businesses who are in trouble, they want to expand or relocate to Boston. So we are doing some work with employers over here, and trying to generate some potential employees over here, and so we put together an employer round table and we invited a manufacturing company, energy conservation, couple of hospitals, maybe hospitality, who accepted our invitation to the round table. We also invited executive directors from community based organizations and the employers gave presentations on their companies, information on their work force, type of jobs they have, and made some projections for the next year or two: these are the number of jobs we are looking to fill in the following areas, and these are the kinds of skills and qualifications we will be looking for, and we had prepped them because they knew we weren't
talking about college graduates, weren't talking about people who could come in at a high level. We were talking about people who would be coming in pretty much entry level and maybe a little higher.

The CBOS had an opportunity to listen to the presentations, ask questions to clarify, and then the CBO directors went off on their own and wrote a concept paper, identifying which employer, just based on what they heard in that meeting, they would be interested in working with. Proposal concepts came in. I and two other people read the papers, scored them, selected three and we have been working. Next step was to have them write a full proposal and in order to do that it meant that both the employer and the community based organization had to get together--now it was ok for them to get together--to together develop the training curriculum, together to identify the entrance criteria, together to identify the competencies of the individuals needed and design the program. [Emphasis hers]

At the SDA level then, we see increasingly the ways in which staff charged with responsibility for overseeing federal grants come to be instrumental in coordinating the relationship between federal and state grants with the interests of local and regional capital. In the round table process that the SDA was establishing, we see a redefined and deeper involvement of business in the development of training programs. The SDA mediates a relation between employers and the training providers through which the training providers, using state funds, directly train or "skill" workers for particular employers. The round table process that Candace described seemed to
me to cross the line into what might more accurately be called “on the job training” wherein employers directly hire and train job seekers using state funds. In the ways in which the process works, in Elaine’s view, the “needs of the people” are overlooked. The SDAs for which Elaine and Candace worked play “management and delivery roles” in which their responsibilities are to manage training programs at the local level and supervise training vendors on behalf of state agencies. In a number of instances, they also deliver training programs through instructional facilities they operate themselves. (Mass Jobs Council 1990:9)

As I sifted through my data on the descriptions of the process offered by CBO and SDA personnel as well as the various planning documents available to me, two threads emerged in the decision making process regarding “occupational areas”: one was that there was an elaborate planning process essentially involving academics, business, and the state articulating where the growth areas were going to be; the second was that local communities knew best how to do employment training. But just what constituted the “local community that knew best” is itself interesting. From the service providers’ point of view, their ideas and perspectives were unheeded by the SDAs (and there seemed to be some support for this view from Elaine, a manager at SDA2). Many of the documents seem to imply that the employers were the critical
component of that "local community." Thus, "the best defense against the difficult economy was strong linkages with employers in the development of curriculum and competencies" (EDIC RFP:1). Candace's comments about the employer round tables also is indicative of the significance of employers in this process. Finally, from the federal level, the National Commission on Employment Policy's (1987) document describing JTPA also declared the importance of private sector employers in this process. Since a principle guiding the overhaul of the job training process was that the private sector knew best, it is not surprising that the system increasingly became structured to ensure employers' interests were represented.

Identifying Target Populations

The second crucial focus of the plans was to identify the populations to receive services. As mentioned previously, JTPA programs were fashioned to serve the "economically disadvantaged." While the same people who were involved in developing the plan with respect to "industry and occupations" priorities were also involved in discussions about target populations, I have less information in my interviews about how the target populations were determined. The plan and RFP, however, refer to external studies establishing which demographic groups are among the poor. For example, the plan for Boston refers to a "Boston Foundation (a private philanthropic organization) study which indicated that 46% of Hispanics live below 125% of the federal definition of poverty" (SDA Plan, p. 7). It also refers to census
data establishing that “neighborhoods with the highest percentages of Hispanics are also those with the lowest incomes overall. . . .” (p. 7). Hispanics are among the populations targeted for services. What constitutes economic disadvantage is specified in the Act (NCEP 1987) and iterated in the contract which forms part of the RFP document.

Economically Disadvantaged: An individual 1) whose income is at or below the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) poverty level or seventy percent (70%) of the Lower Living Standard Income level (LLSIL) whichever is higher; or 2) who is receiving or is a member of a family which is receiving welfare payments; or 3) who is a foster child on whose behalf state or local government payments are made; or 4) who is handicapped individual and whose income meets seventy percent (70%) of the LLSIL or OMB guidelines if the individual is considered a family of one, or whose family meets seventy percent (70%) of LLSIL or OMB guidelines if the individual is considered a member of a family. (EDIC, RFP)

In Boston, all clients have to be city of Boston residents for the programs funded by that city’s SDA. However, during the period when data for this study was collected, the city had identified several “target populations” as priorities for service. As part of the proposal, agencies seeking funds for the variety of programs (ES, JTPA, MassJobs, pre-vocational programs etcetera) identified in the RFP, could earn a few points for
serving a targeted population. According to the RFP issued by the Boston SDA those targeted included:

- **Welfare clients**
  - Linguistic minorities. Available services to linguistic minorities have decreased as the population and its needs continue to increase. The city of Boston must ensure that the diversity represented in its population is also represented in the employment and training system.
  - Hispanics have among the highest poverty rates of all linguistic minorities.
  - Services to Hispanics are a priority for this RFP
  - People without a high school diploma.
  - Boston Housing Authority Residents.
  - People with Disabilities.

- **Economically Disadvantaged Minority Men.** The decade long shift from federally funded programs like JTPA to state funded programs like ET Choices/MassJobs has resulted in a greater emphasis on programs that serve predominantly women.
  - While women make up the majority of the economically disadvantaged, economic opportunities must be provided for poor minority men.

- **Single Heads of Household.** The recent study on poverty in Boston by Paul Osterman revealed that linguistic minority single female parents have an over 75% chance of being poor.

- **Non-traditional jobs for women.** The JTPA was recently amended to require that
occupational opportunities for women be expanded. Recruitment of women into training for occupations which have been predominantly occupied by men is a priority of this RFP.

(Request For Proposals, EDIC, Emphases theirs)

The creation of some of these targeted groups are linked to specific pieces of legislation: either legislation amending JTPA (such as non-traditional occupations for women), or legislation which may bear upon a variety of services generally (for example, government funded programs have to demonstrate compliance with civil rights, anti-discrimination legislation, or the Americans with Disabilities Act). In some instances, these “targets” and the amendments to legislation may have been triggered by pressure from various interest groups—e.g. economically disadvantaged minority men, or Hispanics, or non-traditional jobs for women. For example, in its report “Job Training Partnership Act: Racial and Gender Disparities in Services,” issued to Congress in 1991, the General Accounting Office specifically mentions the work that was done by organizations such as the Chicago Urban League and the Women’s Action Alliance identifying “disparities in services to some minorities and women.” In many respects the list seems to more precisely identify populations which may meet the overarching eligibility requirements—“poor or economically disadvantaged.” Linguistic minorities, especially Hispanics, are identified as a segment of the population who have extremely high rates of poverty. In the chart that
the Boston SDA submitted to the state as part of its plan, Hispanics are shown as having a "22% incidence in the JTPA population," and a planned service level of 29% for Fiscal Year 1993. Asians on the other hand are shown as having a "20% incidence in The JTPA population" and a planned service level for Fiscal Year 93 of 15%. Though Asians are recognized as a linguistic minority needing service, the plan does not single them out for service as it does Hispanics (SDA Planning document, 1992). I find this disparity interesting and although more data is needed, I suspect that these differences are linked to a political climate in which Asians have not either been vocal enough in making their needs known, or been heard when they have since they lack electoral clout given the way city districts are carved up, and because of a perception, based in large part on the census data, which lump a very diverse group together and which tend to show, on various measures of equality/inequality, that among race-ethnic minority groups Asians fare very well--thus they have a lower poverty rate, higher median incomes, and higher median levels of education than other race/ethnic minorities. It is the kind of data that are also used to exclude Asians from affirmative action programs. Thus, poor Asians, to the extent that they are targeted for services at a lower rate than is warranted by their experiences of poverty, become the unwitting victims of the politics of proportional representation.

Beyond the goal of reducing "economic disadvantage," employment training programs, in targeting the populations that they do, also have as a key goal the reduction of reliance on government assistance. Thus, welfare recipients, most of
whom are single female parents, Boston Housing Authority residents, and persons with disabilities (since they may be receiving disability benefits) become targets for service.

These aspects of employment training--occupational priorities and target populations--delineated in the SDA's two year plan and subsequently in the request for proposals the SDA issues are not discrete as they might first appear. Data from both the SDA and the community organizations offering programs suggest that the two components are conjoined in decisions regarding program offerings. Indeed, the link between occupations and types of potential trainees are prefigured in Candace's remarks about the "employer round tables" cited earlier:

these are the number of jobs we are looking to fill in the following areas and these are the kinds of skills and qualifications we will be looking for and we had prepped them because they knew we weren't talking about college graduates, weren't talking about people who could come in at a high level. We were talking about people who would be coming in pretty much entry level and maybe a little higher.

The SDA then was attentive to the fit between occupations and trainees. This was also true of the community organizations offering training. The CBOs had to be concerned with whether their clients could learn the skills and do the jobs for which they were being trained especially since the awarding of contracts depended on demonstrating
that the organization could meet the performance standards set by the state. Both CBO and SDA attention to the fit between trainees and occupations came through more strongly in my discussions around how proposals were developed and evaluated. The next chapter examines the process of proposal development and evaluation with the intention of unraveling how "performance accountabilities" structured the employment training process.
Chapter Eight
Proposal Development and Evaluation

Introduction

Agencies seeking to run training programs write proposals in response to the request for proposals that are issued by the service delivery area. Proposal development is part of the ongoing work of training organizations and one which has to be done on a yearly basis. While the official plans of the various government agencies provide due dates for completion of different parts of the process, in actuality it is not a chronologically linear process. For agencies already offering training programs, the cycles of funding and various due dates are familiar. Thus they begin the search for funding before one cycle is over. Entailed in this search are also attempts to garner information about important aspects of funding, such as the occupational priorities, that they know from past experience that the SDA will establish. They may rely on the networks they have built up over a period of time to get information or sometimes to “guess” what the SDA priorities are going to be. They also develop connections on their own with local employers in an effort to uncover the labor market positions that are becoming available. Below, I discuss the ways in which agencies decided the kinds of training programs they would offer. This includes their views about and use of the technical assistance they were permitted from the SDA. Proposal development is influenced by criteria for their evaluation. Thus,
this chapter also considers how evaluation is done. This leads to a discussion of the performance standard which serves as a key element in proposal evaluation for agencies which have had funding in the past. My main task here is to show how proposal development is organized in relation to getting funded which in turn lays the groundwork for demonstrating how this funding process is critical to the organization of a female immigrant work force.

**Developing proposals**

In making decisions about the programs they would offer, agencies consider many factors. Diane from City Services provided an example.

K: When you decide you're going to offer a medical office tech program, how do you decide what it is you are going to offer?

D: What we do is we take into account what is our ability? What is our ability to serve the population about? Do we have computers and typewriters and stuff? For example we can't do a phlebotomy program because we don't have [unclear]. Also "Workforce 2000," DET's publications about labor market. Also our private sector contracts. I could call up "Children's Hospital" and say, "Do you think you can hire a few people, you think you're laying off, you think you have jobs open?" Things like that. And actually City also, internally ourselves, we keep track of walk in and phone in queries. People call up and say, "I want a clerical training
program. Do you have one?"

K: Clients?

D: Potential participants. So the community has an input on what we want to do of course. We don't offer horse grooming, you know, nobody wants it. So a combination of labor market survey by DET, our contacts in the private sector, and also community interest.

Funding of a program depends upon an agency being able to identify the kinds of occupational training that the SDA will fund. Although the SDA announces its funding priorities in terms of occupations in their request for proposals, as Diane points out, the kinds of occupational training programs an agency might apply to run is dependent on a) the resources the agency has, b) their sense of the "labor market" culled from the publications of the state office of employment training, c) their own connections with potential employers who might give some indication of the availability of jobs in a particular occupation, and d) inquiries from potential clients which they use as a guide in determining what the "public" wants. In addition, an agency might look closely at what their potential client population might be willing to do--the suitability of the occupations for their client population. For example, at Asia House, Cindy had stated that they would specifically not offer some of the non-traditional occupational training for their female clients because these were not jobs that the women's families might want or the women might themselves want to do. In
answer to my query about a new attempt by JTPA to get women into non-traditional occupations, she replied,

Well I think that on the whole it doesn’t really work for our population especially. For example, one of the areas they’re targeting is like women in the building trades for example. It’s not happening. There’s no job either through the central artery tunnel project--there’s no job for them. And there’s limited training out there, there’s really no training out there and the nature of the job itself is not stable. It’s simply would not be very, for our population anyway, a suitable kind of thing you know. It has to do also with cultural values too. I don’t think, if they are married I don't think their husband would all . . . want their wives working in the field or what they consider as dangerous and it is mainly a kind of work that is not for women.

Thus, there are multiple elements which enter into the agency’s decision making process about program offerings. In many ways these considerations appear to be linked to the possibility for placing people in jobs at the end of training. But Cindy’s announcement that Asian men would simply not want their wives in non-traditional occupations (I should note that she self-corrected possibly “allow” here) meant that these women would be locked out of more lucrative job opportunities by virtue of their gender. This was ironic given that a recent General Accounting Office (GAO)
report had resulted in the federal government developing strategies to get more women entering job training programs into non-traditional occupations. (The 1991 GAO report was also linked to pressure brought to bear by women’s groups for better paying job opportunities for women.)

However, it is also clear that an overriding feature of the funding process is the ability to run a program in the kinds of occupational areas that the SDA identifies for funding. While CBOs can sometimes run programs for occupations not identified as priorities by the SDA, they have to offer some justification for doing so. For example, they can argue that there are jobs that will be available with a particular employer for the clients they are training.

For their fiscal year 1993, the Boston SDA listed the following “occupational priorities”:

- health care, including nursing aides and assistants, lab assistants, surgical technicians and bio-technicians;
- computerized and technical office training, including accounting, medical secretary and other business skills. All programs must emphasize strong customer service skills;
- hospitality, also with emphasis on customer service;
- environmental occupations such as recycling, energy conservation, asbestos and lead paint removal;
growing manufacturing fields, including medical and environmental instruments manufacturing;
miscellaneous blue collar, including equipment repair, building service, cable installation. (EDIC RFP.ix)

For the most part CBOs do write proposals within the parameters, including occupational areas, determined by the SDA. In her account of how Asia House personnel decide what they are going to run Cindy indicated that it is not so much that they depend on the guidelines set by the SDA but that they have “ways of finding out” what the developments in the labor market are. They found that the EDIC guidelines on occupational growth areas were “very general.” “They would, in the beginning, issue very general statements that this is the trend of what EDIC intends to do, you know, collaborating with this and that industry. But in terms of specific and concrete help there’s very little.” She insisted however that even with the little help they provided,

... we probably would have found out on our own anyway, so not anything very specific. We know that the trend now is to go with any kind of paramedical stuff or medical secretary. Everyone is doing that. So at one point they would say it’s accounting. Everyone would do accounting. So now it’s the health field and so everyone is doing that.
She mentioned two ways through which they would find out about developments in the labor market: 1) “We have an employment advisory board and through the years we make connections with companies who have been hiring our students. That's how we build up the network.” 2) In calling up employers about possible jobs for their clients, they would find about not only “the consolidation of skills for jobs” but also about the competition for the jobs. For example, an employer might say, “We had 200 applicants for this one position.” Still, specific proposals had to be justified.

We have to justify why we provide training in a certain area. We have to justify it by saying that there's a market out there that we can place the students, the particular students that we are training in those kinds of positions. But since we are in the same economy and same job market, everyone will probably see, you know, through their own experience, you know where those jobs are.

(Interview, Cindy, Asia House)

Diane had also remarked that in her work as a “community liaison,” she was in contact with many people in the business of employment and training which meant that they became friends and were able to use the network to help figure out “what was going on.” She had also referred to a network of training organizations called the “Job Training Alliance” which meets regularly (every six to eight weeks) to discuss a variety of employment training related issues, including changes they might want the
service delivery area to make. They also might strategize about what the service delivery area might fund:

Together we sit back and think what did EDIC fund last year? What they funded, what they liked in the response to your proposal. What did they like about your proposal last year? Well, they liked the fact that we are tapping into the labor market. . .

In developing proposals agencies also find that they have to perform a balancing act between taking into account their clients’ particular needs and the service delivery area’s labor market priorities. This is a particularly acute problem for CBOs like Asia House which service linguistic minority clients. In the following excerpt, Cindy and I were discussing whether they were going to offer programs in the areas identified by the RFP and whether there was going to be a labor market for their clients.

K: So now they're [EDIC] are telling you health/biotech etc. Everyone goes and does those kinds of programs. What happens if all of these people . . .[she interrupts my question].

C: I don’t know if there’s a job market for those things out there yet. We don’t know.
K: Are you thinking of providing those kinds of training if EDIC is going to fund those kinds of programs?

C: I think there's a dilemma for us. We have to also consider the needs of our clients. We have to. Because if we just upgrade everything and just go with the flow . . . [pauses] Actually there’s a balance. But, yet, our clients skills are not up there yet or they don't have those types of transferable skills then there’s still a big gap and there’s a mismatch of what we provide in terms of training and what they come with in terms of their skills and interests. So there is a delicate balance in terms of how much we should react to what's required of us--how much we should meet the clients' needs. Because we don't want to leave behind a whole lot of them who just come with entry level skills and only have the capability to get up to that level within a short period of time for training. So it is [her emphasis] a big dilemma.

The question of client skills and labor market needs also arose in the evaluation process and I return to the issue there and again in the next chapter as I examine how agencies addressed the dilemma.

In developing the proposal an agency is permitted "technical assistance" from the SDA in the form of asking clarifying questions about requirements from designated SDA staff. Agencies can also attend the bidders' conferences that are organized by the SDA. Though this is not mandatory, it is a venue for agencies to obtain "supplemental information." Although such assistance is available to any
agency applying for funds, in practice how that help is allocated may not be equitable.

Elaine, a grant manager at the SDA2, pointed to how inequity develops out of the “coaching” that happens in providing “technical assistance” even when “the system” builds in measures to ensure fairness.

Elaine: Well you can call a grant manager and say, “Should I say it this way or that way, would it more persuasive to have stats to this effect or not, should I emphasize this group or not?” The grant manager is supposed to be giving technical assistance, so you are supposed to help them figure out ways to help them get funds but you can do that differently depending on if you think that someone deserves to be funded for whatever reason.

For Asia House, even the little technical assistance the SDA offered was not useful partly because they felt that the “monitors” the SDA hired changed so frequently that community organization personnel who have been in the “training system” longer are better positioned to know what is happening.

Cindy: But in terms of specific and concrete help there’s very little. In fact the agency (the SDA) itself is undergoing a lot of changes. I’m sure, as you know, internal structural change, that we haven’t had a lot of direction or monitoring from the agency. Our monitor, our program monitor changed three times during the year. We, you know, it’s very hard to get straight answers from them.
This frequent turnover of monitors at the SDA had also been pointed out by Diane from City Services. This meant that monitors who “need time to catch up with what’s going on . . . probably know less about the program than we do” (Cindy, Asia House).

The relationship with the SDA seemed to be different for the two agencies--at least that is what came through in the talk with agency personnel. Asia House had lost substantial funding from the SDA for what Asia House co-coordinators said they were told was “failure to meet performance standards.” At the time I interviewed Diane, City Services had not lost funding but was refused a grant for another program that the agency tried to get funded. Among Asia House workers, there seemed to be some frustration with the SDA for not fully understanding the needs of their clients and the challenges they faced.

**Evaluating Proposals**

The proposals submitted by CBOs are subjected to a review process determined by the SDA. There seems to be some variation by SDA. Both Elaine and Candace described their processes.

Candace: Once proposals come in we have outside readers to read the proposals and score them against the RFP. Members of my staff who are responsible for monitoring the programs are also readers and they’re scoring them against the RFP and that’s the first part. We have a wrap up session but their real input is based
upon their knowledge, their first hand knowledge of the programs.

Elaine: Now hopefully in an agency you have diverse groups of people making these decisions [grant] and they try to structure that into the process as well. They try to make it so that it wasn't just the grant manager reading the grant, that the PIC [Private Industry Council] has to sign off on it. They really try to take this stuff out but it's impossible. I would read grants and when I didn't, I would be training other people like direct care staff to read grants, and you think well, that's great, they are participating in the process. These are the folks really working with the people. But they were trained by us to begin with, so we told them what we wanted them to look for, so we are already biasing the process. And secondly, their opinions are not really given the credence that you would think. They can be overridden by the grant manager, by the SDA head, or by the PIC. So there are lots of ways in which the system just doesn't allow much variation to come through . . .

While Candace's organization utilized outsiders (people who do not work for the SDA) and insiders (SDA staff) as readers of proposals, Elaine's seemed to rely on insiders. Elaine was also much more critical of the process which, in her view, precluded the possibility of "variation" in programming, a suggestion then that new ideas were unlikely to be funded. Elaine's last remark here seemed to concur with the assessment made by a federal fieldworker that the procurement of contracts by SDAs
was not as open and competitive a process as it could be. Indeed, an outcome of the “wave reviews” was to provide a series of guidelines for better procurement practices.

Diane, a program coordinator at City Services, also seemed to suggest yet another way in which more established trainers were able to reproduce their funding. She had indicated that there was an informal process of grant reading such that their program was advantaged over others.

Diane: Actually after you write a proposal you get a response sheet from readers. It’s funny, readers are supposed to be anonymous but readers are people from the community who I know. . . . Someone in the community says “Diane I read your proposal.” They know it’s me but he acts as if it’s this big secret thing even though we know each other.

. . . EDIC has a list of people they consider readers and one of them is a director of something over at X hospital and he actually wrote a support letter for my program. And he says “You know I was reading this proposal and I saw my support letter at the back. You are not supposed to read a proposal that you write a support letter for, but I did, and I graded it, it was no problem.” You know, I know he read mine, he knows that he read his own. It’s funny. We know all each other and do referrals.

Thus, in another way, the networking that Diane had talked about earlier paid off for their agency. In itself, however, such networking is not always sufficient.
SDAs do seem to have to balance a variety of criteria in making decisions about what to fund. Indeed, City Services had had an instance in which one of the proposals they had submitted was rejected on the grounds that there was no job market for the kind of training that they had proposed. Diane was showing me a brochure of the kinds of programs they offered:

K: What kind of skills program are they [students] getting?
D: We have automated accounting/fund management. I can give you a brochure.
[She gives me the brochure.] This is about the whole CEJEC. So it has education in there. And medical office training. Those are the two we are running right now. Now City of Boston, EDIC, only funded the medical office skills training.
K: Do you know why?
Boston Company has sold to American Express. American Express bought the Boston Company who sold the Shearson Lehman division. I mean a lot of things like that. . . .
K: This kind of accounting stuff--isn’t it transferable to all kinds of institutions? Any office place has accounting?
D: That’s what I thought when I wrote the proposal. But you have to remember EDIC receives twenty or thirty proposals for one or two programs they could fund. You know someone else in the city may have got it, who knows? But they only funded our medical program.
K: And basically the reason for not funding was these developments?

D: Marketability.

Although Diane had been told that it was the lack of a job market for accounting that resulted in the rejection, she also speculated that someone else may have got a contract to do that training. In her account is a sense of the effects of economic restructuring that has been taking place—mergers and acquisitions on the part of large corporations—and the impact on the labor market. Hinted at here too is a role the SDA plays in managing the labor market supply for a particular occupation. In addition, there is a sense of the competitive character of the job training industry: the CBOs know that there are a limited number of contracts that are awarded and limited funding for programs.

Diane: Nobody tells what they are asking, how much you are asking for (from EDIC). That's the competition, who can do it the cheapest, that's the best generally. But you are dealing with the same ball park figure and everyone knows what everyone else is running.

In evaluating proposals an SDA is also judging what Elaine called the “credibility” of the agency to carry out the program. According to Elaine, gaining credibility was a multifaceted process that went beyond merely a formal response to
the proposal. She disclosed how her organization evaluated credibility.

Elaine: Once you’re in you have to get credibility. We kept track of who went to the vendor conferences, bidders conferences. People sort of had to put up a sort of good faith answer, it was a power thing they had to be subservient to the SDA, I thought, so they can get more help so they could get funded. So if you came to the conference, if you are very helpful and believed that we were the gods, that we knew, we had the money, we were gonna divvy it up, and you sucked up basically and then you wrote, and maybe you called us a few more times to find out, and you weren’t hostile on the phone and you weren’t complaining on the phone, and then you wrote what you were supposed to write, and maybe let us see draft then you’d probably get funded. So it was almost an attitude as much as the content which, again I might be oversimplifying it, overstating it, and the process isn’t so biased and terrible, but I think that really does go on.

The notion that the awarding was less than an objective, competitive process was also implied by the federal worker who had been involved in reviewing the procurement practices of SDAs when he pointed out that “there were crazy relationships between contractors (of services) and the SDA” because of what he termed “political influence.” One contracting relationship, in particular, he felt needed attention was that between City Services and its SDA. (He and other fieldworkers at the federal level stated, on several occasions, how the system is politicized—a feature
of employment training organization that I have raised earlier.)

At the Boston SDA, it became clear also that an important element in proposal evaluation was the degree to which employers would be involved in the process. Candace discussed criteria for creative proposals from the community agencies which had been part of the "employer round tables."

That they have stated in their concept paper their willingness and their understanding that the employer needs to be involved in the development of the curriculum and that they need to be involved in determining the criteria that will be used to select the people for the program, but within reason. But that it is a partnership drawing on the strengths of both: The CBO knowledge of the people they serve and how to deliver those services and the employer community's knowledge of what they need in order to hire somebody. That had to come through. It had to show that there were places where the employer would have specific involvement in the process.

As our discussion of "creative proposals" proceeded it also became clear that the target population in relation to the program that was being offered was important. In other words, just as the CBO had to do the "balancing act" of managing their client needs with SDA requirements, the SDA judged the proposed program in relation to clientele.
K: How would they, CBOs, know what you would consider creative? How would they know the kinds of things you are looking for?

C: First a willingness to work with employers. Two, an understanding that came out in the concept paper--wasn't any longer than five pages--it was important to involve the employer all along the way. That they were working as partners and not to approach it with a mind set that we are this job training organization that we know better how to do our work, what do the employers know. But to come in with something that said that this is the population we work with and that they are appropriate for this type of job. That makes you know that they heard the employer when they gave their presentation, that if somebody is, if a job requires a lot of contact with the public, communicating a lot with the public, that they are not talking about working with someone who is a recent immigrant who has no English speaking ability or is just beginning an ESL program. So that they have some awareness of what the employer is looking for. [Emphasis is mine.]

For linguistic minorities, English speaking ability played a role in the kinds of occupations that the SDA saw as appropriate for them. Thus, for an agency to target that population in its proposal was one thing, but to get funding they would have to demonstrate that they were training in an occupation commensurate with the clients' language competency. Candace's comments indicate that the elements of the proposal are read in relation to each other--target population, and the pre-training skills they have in relation to occupational areas. The striking implications of these remarks is
the elimination of potential job opportunities for linguistic minority immigrants. In particular, the remarks suggest shutting off access to jobs in the service sector—the largest growing sector according to economists—and, as such, has serious implications for the jobs that such people might be relegated to. Also striking is the authority that employers wield in this process. The focus in Candace’s (the SDA program manager) remarks are on the needs of the employer but in Cindy’s (Asia House) there is more clearly a concern with the needs of trainees. The dilemma that training program coordinators like Cindy were caught in, between meeting the needs of the immigrant clients they sought to service and the need to get funded, was produced by the demands for accountability in the training system. An important means for establishing accountability was the record of performance.

A feature of the evaluation process that was specifically mentioned by program coordinators at the training organizations was the “history” or the past performance of the agencies in providing training and placing their clients. I had previously stated that an organization which has secured funding in the past has to provide a two year history of its performance outcomes to the funding agency. Diane put the issue succinctly.

Diane, City Service: Of course, I couldn’t train everybody and not get jobs and get funded next year. It just wouldn’t work that way. So you are refunding your whole, your agency’s history in the community and your role and your outreach and how many jobs you got and how good you are and how many minority. All
that interplay when you are going to get refunded. But the unspoken rule is that if you don’t get jobs, you don’t get money.

When I interviewed personnel at Asia house, they had just lost funding because of their inability to place enough students in jobs.

Cindy: Oh well everything is based on performance. . . .(we did not get funded) because last year we didn’t meet performance standards in terms of placing students into jobs.

The “performance standard” is a significant feature, as it turns out, in the evaluation process. “Efficiency and performance” was a stated goal in the legislation mandating JTPA. How these were determined, the consequences they have for programming, and the sorts of opportunities made available to training program clients necessitate closer scrutiny.

The Performance Standard

Perhaps of all of the items that potential providers of service must address in the proposals, the one, from the provider’s point of view, that is most troublesome is the “performance standard.” The legislation governing JTPA had “efficiency and performance” as a keystone. This emphasis is repeated in policy directives issued by
the state (see for example, Policy Directive 92-05, State Department of Employment and Training). Not surprisingly, then, it appears as an important piece of the proposal and comes to be significant for the awarding of contracts to provide programs. Thus, the RFP instructs the applicant to provide a two year history of their record in placing clients in jobs at the end of training (entered employment), the average placement wage, the minimum wage, the cost per placement. Also to be provided are the performance prospects for the program year for which funding is being requested.

Elsewhere in the proposal, the performance standards for the year are provided. For JTPA skills training in the program year 1993, the standards were

1. Entered employment rate of 70%
2. Wage at placement: $8.23/hour
3. Adult entered employment rate of 62% at 90 day follow-up
4. A weekly wage of $329 at 90 day follow-up

(EDIC RFP 1992:xiii)

However, it is also noted that these goals are subjected to change. The first item was “adjusted for economic conditions,” described as recessionary over previous years. The standard means that there has been a goal established that 70% of the participants have to be in a job at the end of training. However, the RFP noted that it was possible that for FY '93 the standard might be less. Wage outcomes represented a “system
wide average" and were recognized to vary depending on the population being served and the industry they were placed in. The follow-ups at 90 days were linked to the move towards "long term outcomes for clients" (EDIC RFP 1992:x). Interestingly, for JTPA clients who were on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)—a welfare program—the standards for items 3 and 4 were less (60% and $313 respectively). These standards which appeared in the request for proposals matched exactly the standards issued in the state's policy directive 92-05 for fiscal year 1993. In addition to these standards, it turns out that "placement" has a specific and legally binding meaning in this context. In an addendum of the legislation governing JTPA, the RFP defines placement:

**Placement** - For the purpose of this Agreement the term Placement shall be defined as follows:

1. Participant's placement in unsubsidized employment in a training related job (as further defined herein) within ninety (90) days of completion of the applicable training components of the program funded by this agreement at a minimum hourly wage of ______ per hour, including salary and tips calculated over the course of the Participant's pay period; and

2. Participant is retained in the unsubsidized training related job for a period of thirty (30) days following the completion of training; and

3. The placement of the participant in unsubsidized employment in a training
related job is verified by EDIC.

A training related job for placement purposes, as well as the minimum acceptable hourly wage rate, shall be a job in occupational fields identified by but not restricted to the list of job titles attached to this agreement. (EDIC RFP 1992:2-3)

Thus, for performance standards to be met, the placement has to be not only in an unsubsidized training related job but also within a specific period after training. In addition, this placement has to go through a verification process by the SDA.

The importance of these standards were brought home to both CBOs because they both had the experience of losing funding, and in both cases the loss was attributed to lack of performance. Cindy made it clear that Asia House had lost their program for one cycle because they were told they had not met the performance standard in terms of placing people in jobs. Her co-worker, John, had said that although they were funded in the next cycle, it was reduced because of prior performance.

J: Normally we used to, I don’t remember the exact figure, I think it was anywhere between 30-32 slots. We would be funded 32-35 slots by JTPA through EDIC. During the last two years we were cut back to basically half that amount, sixteen. We are funded for 16 slots the new fiscal year starting in July and we’ll probably use all 16 slots during the first cycle which runs from July through
December. And we can accommodate between 16-18 students. The reason we are not funded anymore double that amount, which is normal, is because (of) performance based.

And though Asia House had been able to meet and even exceed performance standards for the sixteen slots they had received. by 1994 they still had not reverted to the thirty-two they used to have.

J: But I did manage to work it out so we did have a 100% placement. But it still wasn’t enough for the EDIC funders. They had seen our performance in the past, and this may have been a fluke. So they just kept us at the half slots since then. Instead of our 30 or 32 normal slots we are only getting 16. Then this program, this agency suffered for one cycle because there weren’t any slots available from anywhere. So for the second part of the 1993 fiscal year there wasn’t an office skills training program here at Asia House. It was only one cycle and subsequently we were laid off—the staff of the office skills.

At the time I interviewed workers at City Services, they had not experienced loss of funding or a reduction in funds. It was only in a subsequent interview with Khanh, who had moved from City Services to Asia House, that I learned that City had lost funding:
She had worked at City Services as a job developer and math teacher when I interviewed Diane there in 1993. Soon after she and one other person lost their job. She says because they were losing funding. That the agency’s budget in 1989-90 was sixty-six million dollars (not just the employment training piece but all of it). By ’92 they had gone to forty-four million. They lost refugee funding (REEP programs). After she left in ’93, seven jobs were lost by December that year. The summer was a busy time but she heard the story after the firing, how one day Jack had come and told all the teachers and workers in the program that they were out of a job because there was no funding. One day he comes at 9:30 a.m. and says they have to be out by five o’ clock. (Interview Notes)

For service agencies, meeting performance standards or having a good performance history in terms of job placement was critical to getting funded. Whole segments of the agency and many jobs in the agencies depended on it. To agency workers, it seemed somehow unfair that standards were what they described as inflexible, particularly with the state of the job market at the time. John had several examples of how they got penalized because of the inflexibility of rules governing performance.

J: Our contract with EDIC stipulates that 75% job placement. And a certain amount of dollars per hour plus benefits, they have to receive benefits, plus they must be working 30 hours at least. And those stipulations make it kind of difficult
in this particular economic climate.

K: What's the rate now?

J: $8.30 an hour. They must have health benefits and it must be a minimum of 30, no wait, 35 hours a week--a full time job. And after graduation they must be on that job for about 90 days--three months.

John gave an example of the agency losing money because a client went back to his job from which he had been laid off, but which was unrelated to the training he had received:

J: One had returned to his job because he was on layoff. He was collecting unemployment insurance. A requirement to continue those payments is to enter a training program. When the training program ended, he got called back to his job, to his non-training related job, and we get penalized for that.

K: You do get penalized for that?

J: Yes, you cannot get placed in a non-training related job, even if it's full time and you are making 100 dollars an hour. That's the rules. There are many rules under the EDIC commitment. There are rules for who gets into the program and rules for how we get paid at the end of the program. There's a lot.

There are penalties if clients are not in the jobs for at least 90 days or in inadequately compensated jobs.
J: Everybody will tell you a different story up front to get into the program. But by the end of the program you start seeing things develop. . . . They don’t get the jobs and benefits from learning and we get penalized because of what’s happened.

K: Because you’re supposed to have that placement? Because you’re [client] supposed to be in the job?

J: Right exactly.

K: Because really money comes out of your [agency] pocket?

J: Right.

K: Because you get back the rest of the money at the end?

J: Right. We get a certain percent as we go along and a percent for placement and when they don’t get placed we lose that percent. We lose a percent if the person doesn’t get a job, or if a person is placed in a non-training related job whether by us or themselves, or going back to a job they came from. We get penalized, I believe, if they don’t stay in the job for 90 days. We get penalized if they don’t meet the requirements for x amt of dollars per hour or the benefits situation. Sometimes they are a little flexible with that, benefits. They would not look that way, but according to the rules they are supposed to take that into account and penalize us for that.

In the above excerpt, John concedes that at least in terms of one criterion for placement there might be a little flexibility—-the benefits aspect of the job. It was the
only area in which there seemed to be flexibility for, as he also explained, the agency is punished if the client does not get a job within the time frame prescribed by the SDA as well as if the client is working in less than a full time job.

J: We had three full time training related job placements. We had two part-time job training related placements that didn’t qualify [as a placement] because it was 25 hours instead of 35. Even though the person was working two half-time jobs it doesn’t qualify. We had 1 non-training related job placement where the student went back to school. One student got a job two days after the deadline and we got penalized for that. . . .

K: So do you think EDIC, like the two days after the deadline, don’t they provide any leeway at all? From what you’re saying it’s no [speaking over me J says it is no].

J: Right, it would seem that they could bend a little bit. Thirty-five hours a week, oh okay let’s go down to twenty-five. It’s more than one-half time. It’s a good start. Let’s instead of paying 100% of the remaining part of the placement, let’s pay 50% because this person got a half-time job. It’s zero percent. You don’t get paid at all.

K: So you find they are not offering leeway at all for these situations?

J: The standards are the same as they would be when the job market was excellent. They established the criteria, and then when the job market went down, the criteria stayed the same, and it got harder and harder to reach.
These standards requiring that agencies deliver what they contract to do—place people in training related jobs at specified wages, with specified benefits within a certain time frame exerted tremendous pressure on the agencies to perform. Past performance was a tool that was used in the evaluation of proposals process that held agencies accountable for what they would deliver, as these agencies painfully found out. This is one way in which the work of community organizations was extra-locally organized. But John’s comment relating to the job market and the standards also identifies other aspects of how the agencies’ work with training clients were contingent upon extra-local forms of organization, namely conditions in the labor market.

In the next chapter I explore in detail the ways in which the agencies’ employment training work was shaped by the requirements of a funding system geared to holding the agencies accountable to demonstrating performance as it was defined in the funding protocol. Every stage of this work from recruitment, to decisions regarding programs to offer, to job counseling and placement was articulated to this process. As I shall show, the pressures of performance were strong enough to exert influence on how recruitment became modified to ensure the selection of clients who would be most likely to be placed.
Chapter Nine

Producing Labor: Community Organizations’ Work

Introduction

In order to demonstrate how extra-local forms of organization entered and structured the work practices of personnel in the community agencies offering job training programs, this chapter focuses on the various components of job training as they were carried out in two agencies. Running training programs involve at minimum four components—getting funded to run the programs, recruiting students into the program, teaching students, and helping students find a job at the end of it. These are interrelated rather than discrete components of the process. Furthermore, the activities workers engaged in were oriented to fulfilling the requirements for delivering the product they contracted with the state to do—that is producing job ready clients for the labor market. Attention to these requirements shaped their work from the moment a client entered the agency seeking training.

In Chapter Five, I presented an account of the women clients’ search for training programs, and their immediate and long term agenda in seeking training. In this section, I address some of the themes that were raised by the women clients but now from the perspective of the CBO. Proceeding in this way reveals aspects of the work of training which are not visible to the clients in the program but which nevertheless impinged on their experiences—for example shaping the kinds of
questions they might be asked in the recruitment stage. For example, students are unaware of the exigencies of getting funded to run the programs, and significant aspects of what it takes to get them jobs at the end of training. In addition, proceeding in this way also brings into view some important points of disjuncture between the stories as told by the clients and the perspective agency workers had about their clients. There were also interesting areas of convergence in their accounts—for example, a consensus that English was a necessary but missing skill. These will be analyzed below.

An essential part of the agencies work processes was the use of a variety of documents at every stage of the training program. These included an application form, assessment tools for recruitment, outcomes forms, and narrative reports that the agency had to submit to their funding source. Thus the production of these women into labor market commodities was mediated through these documentary processes. In the account of the agencies’ work discussed here, I aim to explore the ways in which such documents were used in the training process with a view to displaying the extended set of social relations with the state that the agency was entered into and which were consequential for the organization of these women into the lower level white collar jobs they ended up in.

The account of the agencies’ work begins with an overview of the agencies, their locations, and programs. Subsequent sections of this chapter take up recruitment and selection of students and the job counseling and job placement process. In this
process. English competency emerges as a salient feature of training, from recruitment to placement, shaping the relations between community organizations and the state, between clients and the organizations, and between employers and organizations.

Agency overview

The employment training programs that the women I interviewed took were offered by two multi-service agencies, referred to as CBOs (community based organizations), one located in Chinatown (Asia House) and the other (City Services) on the borders of Chinatown. Asia House was an agency which served a largely Asian immigrant population--mostly Chinese, but increasingly some Vietnamese as well. City Services is an agency serving a more diverse and also largely urban population including immigrants and U.S. born clients. It is a large organization, one of the “community action programs” which were founded during the Johnson administration as part of their anti-poverty strategies. They run Head Start and other programs.

Employment training is a small part of what they do--“one of the smallest budgets,” the employment training coordinator said. However, the majority of women in the class that my subjects came from were Asian. The interviews with organization personnel focussed on various aspects of the business of running their job training programs--the recruitment process, the kinds of programs they offered, the clients they served, and the funding of programs. Most of the interviews were done at Asia House but I have included some of the material gathered from City Services because it
provides some important areas of similarities and contrast. One woman I interviewed had held a similar position at both agencies.

The program that was offered at Asia House was a general office skills program. At City Services the program that the women were in was a more specialized program in medical office skills. City Services also offered other training programs. This was confirmed by the coordinator of the skills training program as I noted the presence of other students who milled around the basement lobby of the building on their way to and from classes. I spoke to a few of these people, some who, like myself, were from the West Indies and who were in programs that were funded from other sources. (For example, there has been a project underway to build a major roadway through the city and some students were being trained for positions related to this project.) I also noted that there were time cards organized by programs for students to clock in and out. City Services was also a larger organization which served not only people in the city but also clientele from other nearby towns and cities. However, the women I interviewed were in a program funded through the federal government’s legislation the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). This was the same source for the women in the Asia House program.

The programs

Both the occupational areas in which the agencies provided training programs and the duration (hours per day and number of months) of the programs were, not
surprisingly, within the parameters established in the request for proposals from the service delivery area. When I had initially approached Asia House to find out about their job training programs, to my surprise, I was told that there were no programs for immigrant women. Further prodding on my part resulted in the admission that most of the people in the job training program they offered were women. Moreover, all were immigrant and Asian. In a subsequent interview the same program coordinator said that they had lost funding for programs for men—to whom they used to offer a drafting program. When I had initially contacted Asia House they were offering a general office skills program. The women clients I interviewed at Asia House were participants in this program. Some of these women had just finished the program which began in January 1994 and some were starting the same program in July 1994.

Office skills work, either general or specialized, is still heavily female dominated. My data from these two agencies show that they contribute to and continue this process of gender segregation. At City Services there were no men in the office skills program. At Asia House there were a very few but, though they were being trained in the same basic sets of skills, they were being placed in very different job tracks. The presence of these few men seemed to be way of managing the loss of funding for more traditionally male jobs.

In this office skills program at Asia House they basically taught English and computer skills—word processing in Word Perfect, Microsoft Works, and Lotus 123. “English” and “computer” were the classes most frequently mentioned by the clients.
Although the agency also indicated that they taught job interview skills and how to
dress, these were not "skills" that were mentioned by the clients when I asked them.
In addition, Asia House had recently instituted an internship program where students
would have to work without pay at offices where this had been arranged (Interview
with Job Developer).

At City Services, in the medical skills office program they offered, English,
computer skills, and medical terminology were taught. Job counseling skills included
job search strategies and interview skills. They were not at the time requiring
internships. Instead students had to find a job at the end of a training.

The training programs at both agencies are typically run for about six months.
The workers refer to these as training cycles. At both organizations there were cycles
that began in July and January--they are funded on a fiscal year basis with the fiscal
year beginning in July, so fiscal year 1994 would begin in July 1993. The classes ran
all day--from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

In recruiting and selecting students to fill these programs, the agencies had, as I
shall show, to take into account the skills their students brought with them or recruit
students with the kinds of skills that they believed would be required for successful
placement at the end of training. The agencies devised several strategies for doing so.
These were strategies that also were designed to demonstrate to the service delivery
area that they, the agencies, were operating within the requirements established by the
state.
Recruiting and Selecting Students

The recruitment process was a multi-stage process involving advertising the program, having potential clients apply to the programs, informational interviews, test taking, and an intake interview. The organizations had to ensure they were able to secure the kinds of clients the SDA had targeted. To the extent that they were located in communities with large race-ethnic minority populations, the agencies were well situated to service the populations that the SDA had targeted. Location was not itself sufficient, however. The agencies also had to ensure that they got clients who would be seen as suitable on a number of grounds for the training programs they offered. This meant, for example, that they had to attract as large a pool as possible. This would permit them to have a wide pool of candidates to draw from who might be successful in their programs. The different stages of the recruitment came to be designed to ensure this and simultaneously reduce the burden of paperwork the agency would have to complete. Because “accountability” was demanded at every stage, agency workers were attuned to the need for record keeping but also sought to minimize it.

One way Asia House tried to attract a larger pool of potential candidates was to advertise even though many clients came through “word-of-mouth.” The clients’ accounts of how they heard about the programs and the process that got them there mirrored to some extent the accounts given by the workers in the CBO of how they recruit students.
John (Asia House): A lot is word of mouth. A lot is. We have our own newspaper, the New Moon (a bilingual newspaper) which is pretty famous. And there is another newspaper too. I don’t remember the name of it. But we have articles that get placed in there. We got a lot of results from that. We have word of mouth from former students. We have posters that we post in different areas. We have information sheets that we fax to several agencies, a lot of agencies, to get the word out that way, welfare offices, whatever. We do a lot of work on our own.

Both agencies offered what Asia House called an “informational interview” and City Services called an “orientation” session. Asia House held such a session in what was called the “recruitment stage” which John saw as an initial screening device.

John: Actually I do an informational interview but I invite everybody in like at four times during the recruitment stage. I did one informational interview this past month. Maybe fifteen students came--I shouldn’t say fifteen students. Fifteen prospective clients came and listened to me talk about the program and listened to me tell them what they would be learning, what the requirements were, fielding questions from them and anyone who is interested, I call for a quick break. They could leave the room, refresh themselves, or whatever. Anybody who is interested in what I have to say could come back and fill out an application. If they decide to
leave at the break and not come back they could do that too. So I call for a break specifically to help further in the screening. 'Cause if somebody heard something they didn’t like and they filled out an application just because they didn’t want to see my [unclear] and then we have to have that application follow up on it. It’s a pain for us so I call for a break, a five minute break. If you like what I said, come back and fill an application. So that works pretty well too, so that helps in the screening. It helps to give them the information that they need.

The orientation sessions at City Services delivered much of the same information. In my observation there, the co-ordinator, Diane, provided an overview of the classes and their requirements and left the students. She mentioned technical requirements and conditions for getting in which included a commitment of time everyday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Specifically, she warned,

not five after nine or ten after nine or three thirty, for twenty-eight weeks. There are no special arrangements. If you have some sort of problem with your child’s bus or day care, you might want to discuss that with your E.T. [employment training] worker or if it’s something you can’t solve in the next few weeks you might want to consider starting a training program when your children are older.

(Orientation, City Services)

From the earliest stages of recruitment, then, agencies are interested in screening out
those candidates who will not be able to follow through in the program, and in keeping paperwork at a minimum. As soon as a potential client fills out an application, they have to be accounted for to the funding agency.

John indicated fifteen people had shown up for an orientation. About the same number had shown up for Diane's orientation. Though this seemed small to me given the sixteen program slots Asia House had available, I had been told by another program coordinator that "depending on the [training] cycle, sometimes we have more than a hundred, sometimes more than seventy who apply for the skills program."

Usually too, they can take in only about a third of the people who apply and "sometimes it's greater in terms of the ratio of people who apply" (Interview, Cindy). At City Services the ratio appeared even greater--"hundreds of candidates for every twenty slots"--although only a few showed up to the orientation sessions Diane held every Tuesday or Thursday. The sessions at both agencies were designed to attract the initial pools from which potential candidates would be chosen.

Once people learn about the programs, if they want to apply they must fill out an application form and take a test. As John indicated, as soon as clients fill out an application they have to be "followed up." Follow up includes an assessment test. Both agencies use the same test, the "Test of Adult Basic Education." This seems to be a standard test that is administered to training clients as it is mentioned in the request for proposals document.
John: She’s [the person called the job developer] administering an intense, what’s called TABE [test of adult basic education] test. It’s a seven, actually eight part test. The TABE itself is seven parts. She is giving an extra test which is a twenty minute essay. What we want to do is to gauge what kind of level they’re at as far as English communication skills go, as far as their math abilities, logical thinking abilities, and some other things like vocabulary and spelling. The TABE test is a major multiple choice, major series of tests, a battery of tests, seven tests. They have to fill in the blank but the whole test is in English. And there are four kinds of TABE levels. One is beginner, medium, difficult, and advanced.

City Services had a minimum requirement of a grade seven reading level for clients to be eligible for their programs. According to Diane, “Seventh grade is the GED passing score because it’s the highest level competency for high school grads in Boston, that’s why we chose seventh grade.”

While the testing was a screening device it was not the only one nor was it entirely separate from the next stage of the process, the intake interview. The application form itself could be used to screen people in terms of their family circumstances (for example, whether they had children, and access to day care), their work history, and their plans after training. The intake interview could be used to further verify the claims that were made on forms and to assess English speaking skills among others.
Intake: Assessing Eligibility versus Suitability

At both agencies, workers were concerned with getting the “right kind of people” into the programs. Both co-ordinators spoke of the interview process as a way of culling people for their programs in order to ensure agency and client success.

We’re trying to get as many people in as possible. To interview. We want to interview people for this program. We want to interview the right kind of people. One of the ways in which we can help ensure success is by securing the right kinds of people up front. And the way to do that is to get as many people in as possible for interviewing. In fact today our job developer is also doubling as our testing administrator. She’s doing an all day test on our third floor. (John, Asia House. Emphasis mine.)

The City Services coordinator framed the problem in terms of a distinction between “suitability and eligibility” of potential clients for training slots. Suitability encompassed a range of characteristics and competencies which agency workers took to be indicative of whether the clients would be able to commit to the program, complete it, and be placed in a job. Suitability could include English competency, training skills in relation to program applied for, family responsibilities, gender, age, motivations, and work history. Below, I consider how each of these characteristics were entered into the selection process.
English competency

In the intake interviews that I observed at Asia House, the test results were a beginning point for the discussion around the qualification of the individuals for the program. According to the staff, usually while the competency, as measured by the test results, were very good in math (a document of scores was given to me) the results in English competency were not. The test results were taken to be an indicator of whether the potential client would be the "right type" of client. But the test results and how they are treated are less straightforward than at first suggested above by Diane. She said,

When we write the contract with [the SDA--the organization which funds the program] we’ll say we’ll be testing for literacy with TABE and we say we are testing for seventh grade competency but we also say we can waive it if the other indicators, if their oral or verbal, stuff like that, and we say we can waive the speaking ability if they demonstrate other abilities. So if the comprehension is really high but if the spoken English is still stilted, I’ll take them. (City Services)

At Asia House, the test they had been giving was subjected to an in-house review. In an effort to further draw the "right type" efforts were being made to recruit candidates with higher levels of competency, especially in English, than had been recruited in the past.
John: We've always been giving medium [level of the TABE he had previously described] and found that people don't have so much of a problem especially as far as the math is concerned. This cycle, for the new cycle, this time we are switching to "difficult" which is higher level TABE and we are hoping that that would yield more precise results as far as what we're looking for, to see where exactly the student's academic level is. And that coupled with the twenty minute essay should give us some pretty good insight into what the student's academic level is.

The third stage of recruitment, the interview, also provided a context for assessing language skills, permitting the interviewer to assess speaking and listening skills.

... which is where we get to speak with the student one on one. We get to communicate with them to see how well they hear us or how well they are listening to us and how well they respond to our questions. (John, Asia House)

**Work history and motivation**

In distinguishing between eligibility and the suitability of potential clients Diane, the coordinator at City Services, drew attention to students' motivation, work history and "support services."

About a month before the training program begins, I have them come in and talk to
them. Kind of like a brief interview, to find their motivation and work history behavior, to see if they are suitable for the training program. *Suitable is different than eligible.* You can be eligible for the program if you are a Boston area resident who's a low income. But if you are suitable for the program that depends on your motivation, your support services that you have or don't have in place, and your prior work behavior, and your work history in the field you are interested in participating in training in. We had a JTPA training program that was for nursing assistant and someone said I have been a nursing assistant for ten years. I said well you are certainly eligible but you are not suitable. You should be able to find a job on your own. (Emphasis is mine.)

Securing the “right kinds of people” is a component of the training process tied to success defined in terms of not only client success but agency success. This arises several times in our discussions--particularly at Asia House. Furthermore, in this process workers attempt to ensure that they do not train someone who is already skilled in the area in which they provide training--such as the nursing assistant Diane mentions. They must demonstrate that they are developing “real competencies” as the federal worker had pointed out, and not getting paid for people who already had the skills specified by the particular job.

The interview is also an arena in which they can gauge the level of interest the students have in the program and try to assess students’ commitment to following
through the program. This will then be used in screening out potentially “unsuitable candidates”:

But at the same time it [the interview] also helps us to develop some sort of a rapport with them so that they can understand what the program really involves and what the program really is, the goals of the program. Just like I said before, the goal is to get a job. And that’s what we want to emphasize also during the oral interview. Once that’s complete again we have to screen to make sure they follow [the SDA] guidelines. (John, Asia House)

As Meizhu had found out, her persistence had been read as serious interest and commitment and she was let in. As the City Services coordinator said too, in a situation where there are many bodies for a few slots, the decision is difficult and often might just involve choosing the person who seems to show “initiative.”

Diane: We use the term “most in need.” That’s extremely subjective, I admit it, and we had people who have written to [Senator] Kennedy and said “I was refused admittance to a program, I really needed it” but because “most in need” is one of our list of criteria on our application, no one can sue us for not taking them. But it is very difficult, and often times it comes down to the person who follows through the most, shows the most initiative about a program. It’s never an easy decision to
tell someone they're in and the other person is out. It's really bad. People cry and it's amazing.

Thus, the agency finds that "most in need" is a sufficiently vague term that gives them some flexibility in terms of their decision making about which clients to admit such that they can escape the possibility of a law suit by a rejected applicant. It is interesting that the agency uses "most in need" in this particular way for it seems to be at odds with the way in which the term is used in discussions of the legislation which mandated JTPA--a point to which I will return.

**Family Responsibilities**

Clients' family responsibilities including their "support services" was another critical concern that agency workers raised regarding client suitability for programs. From the context in which "family responsibilities" emerged as an issue, it was clear that it was viewed as a problem that women clients, in particular, had, given that it is women who have been and are largely responsible for childrearing. Agencies ask questions about women's family responsibilities in many ways. The application form at Asia House, for example, asked clients about their child care arrangements and about their availability to study for several hours a week. In the intake interview the clients are also asked questions about the family situation, and family responsibilities--potential and actual. Not only did I observe this in the intake interview at Asia House,
but I also was told so by the program coordinators. This was also standard practice at City Services. Family responsibilities were raised both in the follow up interview after the test results were in and the orientation process. In the latter situation Diane encouraged people to

    take a look at their social context before making their decision--what is your family going to say about you joining the program. I mean anybody’s families has tremendous influence on their lives whether they like it or not. It may be the way they treat you after joining the program.

Diane refused my request to observe intake interviews at City Services, suggesting that it might be problematic because of the confidential nature of the matters that arose. Contrasting the possibility of such an observation with my observation of a site visit by the SDA monitor she said,

    But me telling someone you know, “Are you on Norplant?” ’cause you can’t have any kids if you are in the program, which you are not supposed to say, and just observing a site visit are two different things, you know what I mean.

Her statement implied that they do ask people about their plans for having children, even though they know they are not supposed to ask.
At Asia House, a pre-vocational program coordinator who had described the pre-vocational program as a stepping stone into the job training program had said that they “take into account whether students are planning to have children or not” in bringing them in. On their application form for the programs there was a question, “Do you plan to have a baby within the next two years?” which they had subsequently crossed out. In our discussions after the intake interviews were over, a teacher expressed concern with “telling people they can’t have children” since she was concerned about violating people’s civil rights. It is not that the staff did not want people to have children. Rather, there was an ongoing concern at the agencies that those who plan to have children are not good candidates for the slot because of the commitment of time, and the job placement that the programs require.

Although in the statement above John does not explicitly mention family circumstances as a concern in the recruitment process, it is implied in his statement about “the goals of the program.” Earlier in the interview we had had a discussion about job placement and women clients who did not take a job—which, as he says repeatedly during our interview, is the goal of the program—because they became pregnant. In the intake interview with Min, after he and the English teacher have a discussion about test scores and tell her that they would like to recommend her for the program, he asks the English instructor to read Min “the riot act.” This consists in explaining how the program is funded through the government, and how the government does not pay if the student does not get a job after the program is ended.
“For whatever reason—going to China, having a family, and so on.” They make a similar statement to the other two students they interview in the session I observed, taking a slightly different tack:

It’s important for people to stay in the program and get a job. It hurts us, future students. If students don’t, we could lose the program. Agencies give us money to run the program, and they expect something in return. If a student gets sick, they don’t care. If a student wants to go to China or Vietnam, if they get pregnant, they don’t care. If you want to travel, have a family do it now, then come into the program in one or two years. (Field notes)

As it turns out this was the first time, according to them, that they have been up front about this with the clients. And the reason is clear: the ability of the program to run is dependent on the student fulfilling their “responsibility,” as they put it, of staying in and getting a job. For this agency, the intake interview became a point at which the client is made aware of other features of the organization of the programs.

Having children did not automatically mean that women were excluded, but they had to be able to show that they had someone else to look after their children so that the women could attend school full time and then hold a job. City Services had a multi-ethnic clientele, and during a discussion of who their clients in the JTPA funded programs were, Diane resorted to a “cultural” explanation for the presence of certain
groups of immigrant women in the JTPA funded programs:

But of those JTPA women who come for training, you have your native speaker and your ESL. Native speaker women who are single heads of household. As I said, many of them, married JTPA women, tend to live on husband’s income and tend not to come to program--so the women in JTPA are generally single. After their unemployment runs out, they can go on welfare so they become welfare mothers. And then there are the ESL population who again, you know, other cultures, as well. You know, American society doesn’t really have a family culture, whereas Asians, Hispanics, Haitians have strong family culture. They have day care, they have support services where they can finish the training regardless of the financial resources. So what I find is that, as far as the JTPA slot, not a lot of women, and the women who go through many of them become welfare mothers half way through. The ones who don’t are from another culture, have the support of the families, and don’t need to go on welfare.

There is of course a great deal of irony in these remarks. The women who need assistance for child care to enable them to attend training are viewed as simply lacking a family culture, rather than being shortchanged by the ways in which training programs are organized and funded. The coordinator recognizes that there is a problem with financial resources for all these women who come to training programs but she resorts to a widespread view in U.S. society that Asians have a strong “family
culture” to explain their presence in the JTPA funded program. It seems, then, that it is a view which can work to Asian women’s benefit when they seek entry into programs.

At both agencies workers were aware of the legal limits of asking questions about women’s family responsibilities. Yet, because their past experience was that these responsibilities posed a threat to agency success in terms of ensuring program completion and job placement, the agencies sought to circumnavigate the problem by speaking to the potential clients about it, and thereby avoiding any documentary record of the information they received and used.

Age and Gender

The other side of getting the “right people in” is keeping out the wrong sorts. Program personnel are willing to acknowledge that they do this, sometimes consciously, sometimes not. The program coordinator of the pre-vocational program, Cindy, had also told me that they screen out people from those programs--people who would have to end up in the job training programs--at an “unconscious level on the basis of age and looks” because of their unlikelihood of getting placed in jobs. The average age of people in the programs is in their late twenties to early thirties. It was her sense that older women--a woman in her fifties, say, who did not wear make-up, or did not dress appropriately would be unlikely to get placed and hence she would not be selected. (Field notes)
At City Services there were older women in the class from which I was invited to seek interview candidates. For example, there was a woman in her fifties who had been a math teacher and had two grown children (in their twenties). And even at Asia House, in one of the classes I observed, there was an older man, a marine biologist, in his sixties. (It was also interesting that in a general office skills program—a field of work that is typically female—there were several Asian men at Asia House. This is in itself worthy of study. Remarks in passing suggest that they take this because it is all that is available to them. The pre-vocational coordinator had indicated that they used to have a drafting program for men, but that had been cut some time ago. The lack of training programs for Asian men was seen as seriously affecting their employability. At the same time, they did somewhat different types of work with the training they received—e.g. doing data entry as opposed to reception work.)

The agencies thus developed a number of strategies for selecting suitable clients in an effort to ensure their programs' success. They also had to ensure that clients were eligible for the programs and they had to provide documentary evidence of eligibility. But even here there were stories of rule-bending, often in an effort to limit agency losses.

**Eligibility and Rule Bending**

Eligibility criteria were established by the legislation mandating JTPA. These included age, income, and residency requirements.
John: They have to be over twenty-two years of age, they have to be low income. They’re certain figures that have been set for one person, two person family as far as monies that they can be making. We have to verify that, we have to see proof of income. They have to have a green card. There are three other requirements--oh yeah, they have to live in Boston, they can’t live elsewhere. There are two other requirements I just can’t remember. We have to screen them for that. Then we sit down, and as a staff we make a decision as to which of the sixteen we think would be best suited for the job. Who seems more enthusiastic about the training. I shouldn’t say which students are best for the job . . . which students are best for the training, and which ones are most enthusiastic.

Here John alludes to the documentation that is required in determining eligibility. But as we have seen, and as John re-iterates, eligibility in itself is not enough. Nor is ineligibility necessarily a reason to keep someone out. Clearly there are students in the program who do not meet these requirements as Meizhu, who did not meet the income guidelines but was allowed in for a fee, attests. Thus, there seems to be ways around such requirements. Bending the rules, or at least getting permission to bend them, seems to be a routine feature of both CBOs’ operations. Diane, at City Services, had already given an indication of that when she spoke about setting a grade seven literacy level but then bending it a little in some circumstances. Here we are discussing people’s troubles in finding programs.
Diane: That's the thing too about JTPA funded programs, a high level of subjectivity when you get down to CBO level. You know, with my welfare contracts you know, you are not supposed to ask someone if they're pregnant. You need to know on a practical level.

K: I'm kind of interested in those things--working on a practical level.

D: What if... [pauses] There's income eligibility guidelines to be in JTPA. What if I have someone who makes ten thousand and one dollar? Well they let you waive so many people but what if I have five people who make ten thousand and one dollar. Do I tell them they are not eligible? Because I have got someone over here who makes nine thousand, but she lives with a boyfriend who's selling drugs, and she's making twenty grand a year. So who do you pick? SDA will say pick the woman who's under income. My instinct is telling me pick somebody who's just making it, deserving poor, and try to give her a shot.

It is not only characteristics of the students themselves (whether it is their enthusiasm or whether they are "undeserving") which might lead to a bending of rules but other organizational contingencies which might lead to the organization bending their criteria a bit. Meizhu’s class had only thirteen students in it but they had been funded for sixteen. Some students had left shortly after the program started. The departure of students in the initial stages of a program is not unusual, as John indicates:

And of the sixteen, if we have extra left over that didn’t make the sixteen we
reserve that for a pool . . . We tell them that you haven’t been selected but if something should happen within the next two weeks to one of the students--if they decide to drop out or whatever--we would call you to come in and quickly fill that slot. [The SDA] gives us a two week buffer at the beginning of the program. If someone drops out we can slip someone else in there. After two weeks, papers have to be filed on every single person in the program. Then they become solidly part of the program. If they leave after two weeks, then we lose the slot totally. We cannot have it filled. And some of them do that.

As it turns out, Van, the woman who was initially rejected for the program because of her lack of competency in English, was later called in. Someone had dropped out and rather than lose the slot totally, they risked calling Van in, taking a chance on her successfully completing the program.

While it may first seem curious they have to resort to taking in what they initially deemed a risky, poor quality candidate, especially when they say hundreds of people apply for a slot, when viewed in the context of the demands of the performance standard it seems understandable. Shortages of more “suitable” candidates result from all sorts of occurrences--partly people are referred to other programs, maybe people find a job, maybe they give up, maybe they are more serious problems.

At the time I did my fieldwork, retention was a problem for Asia House. It was a significant enough problem for the workers to address the issue in the recruitment
process. In the following segment John gives an example of the retention problem and its consequences. He begins telling about the problem of recruiting late because of a layoff they had experienced as a result of their contract with the SDA not being renewed:

In fact last year, we started late last year because of the layoff. We began recruiting after July first instead of before June first. We had to start the program late. People coming into our program were sort of like searching. They said maybe, well, we're going to this training program and if Bunker Hill Community College calls us in September, we'll start the September semester. A number of the students left for that reason. They went to other schools. They were just here to see what it was like. They didn't realize that they were occupying a slot that could have gone to someone else. Then they decided to leave. We lost the whole money. We didn't have any retention. I think we got 25 percent of the monies because of enrollment. We lost 25 percent for retention, 25 percent for graduation, and 25 percent for placement.

In their efforts to get the right sorts of persons in, they were not always successful, and they have little control over people leaving for whatever reason. The consequences of loss of bodies meant some other student was denied and that the CBO lost part of its funding. The response to this involved two strategies. The first was to “work on the
students’ conscience” by “telling them the whole situation” at the outset and thus raising their awareness of the larger organization of the programs.

John: This is not “let me come in there and search. See if I like it. I’ve nothing to do for the month of August so I’m going to school in September but I won’t tell them that. I’ll stay for the month of August, learn a couple of skills and then I’ll just leave.” We have to impress upon them that . . . actually we have to work on their guilt, make them feel guilty, work on their conscience. Tell that, “You know, if you do that, someone who needed this training more than you did will lose out. We’ll lose out.”

From the students’ point of view of course, they are looking for what best fit their needs and what they can get into. They will simply go to the program that best fit their needs or sometimes, as happened with Jenny, take the next best thing. For agency personnel what they had was a scarce set of resources—namely training slots—in a competitive market, which, if not appropriately allocated, could threaten the agency and indeed the workers themselves.

The second strategy designed to stem the outflow of funds was to file the paperwork with the funding organization as late as possible.

John: Dropouts are counted and they won’t allow us to replace them after two
weeks. Once the papers are filed—so that’s why I tell my job developer, please file any [SDA] papers as late as possible. We have to buy the time because they are not going to give us the time.

Much of the discussion about the agencies’ recruiting or screening in practices was oriented towards the issue of whether the student would get placed in a job or would stay in the training and take a job at the end of it. The emphasis was on getting a job. For example, at an orientation session at City Services, Diane says to the prospective students,

A training program is just a means to the end point of getting a job. A lot of people come here, get revved up about typing sixty words per minute and getting “As” in every subject. They forget why they’re typing sixty words per minute and getting “As” in every subject---to get a job. And getting a job is more your responsibility than ours.

It is this focus on getting a job which infiltrates every aspect of the organizations’ work with training clients—from the recruitment to the placement. At both agencies, people called job developers held chief responsibility for helping clients get jobs. Job counseling and job placement were also critical components of the training enterprise. Asian clients, as linguistic minorities, were part of the targeted
groups of the service delivery area but their lack of facility in English posed a
challenge for them in terms of finding jobs. There seemed to be an inherent
contradiction in the ways in which the programs were organized or worked for
linguistic minorities, particularly since English was not counted as a training skill.
Indeed, Asia House, which was started to help new immigrants, found itself
confronting a dilemma in having to deal with state mandates while fulfilling its
original mission. The next sections take up the issue of English as a component of the
training enterprise.

**Identifying English as a missing skill**

Just as the clients recognized that they are handicapped in their job prospects
by lack of facility in English, so did the agency workers, particularly those at Asia
House. But while the clients viewed the programs as a way of learning more English,
agency workers wanted to combat the view among its potential clients that the
program was simply another avenue for learning English or as preparation for higher
education.

John: I just want to make sure that they understand what the purpose of the
training program is cause sometimes people come into the program thinking well
this is a good way to practice your English, get more English skills especially for
the Asian population because they are so unsure about their English. They are
willing to go anywhere to learn more English. They'll see this as maybe a vehicle for learning more English. And I tell them, although you will be learning English here, it's not a stepping stone to higher education. The purpose of this is to prepare you for a job. So we communicate that to them and suggest that if that's not what they are looking for, there are other types of educational situations that they can get themselves involved in. They could go strictly to Berlitz school for language, pay extra money and although they'll have to pay money then it's well worth it if that's what they're really looking for. But we try to let them know and hopefully their honor will judge their conscience as far as what they're going to do. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

In several contexts John and Cindy spoke to me about the problem of English for their clients.

J: One student we have now from China is actually a marine biologist. He's sixty-two and his English just isn't there. He's not going to be able to find anything near his line of work, what he was trained for in China, in this country because of the language problem. So a lot of people when they come from other countries, they have to abandon it totally and take you know, I don't want to say lower level, as far as they are concerned it's lower level from what they have been doing.

The English problem emerged most acutely for this CBO when they tried to run a
medical office skills program.

John: Last cycle we did medical office skills. I don’t think we’re going to do that again because that was sort of a mistake because of the fact that the year before that we had received some special funding to train ten students as medical secretaries. The program was successful. We had to recruit for extremely high level students. The Asian students who came in spoke English very well and there was very little problems with English communication, and although the problems were still there with English communication but not as severe as you would normally find in the regular skills training program dealing with regular Asian population. These people are more Americanized. They are more familiar with the language. We decided to try a watered down version of the medical secretary program called medical office skills. The problem was that the lower level candidates that we had for the program that we were required to have because of the funding sources, they just couldn’t do the medical terminology very well. It was a big mistake. It took away a lot from the program although it didn’t really hinder them from finding a job. People still found jobs, they were still able to function very well. This time around we figured forget the medical part. We’re dealing with students who need more English so we focussed on English skills, especially this cycle. So there’s a heavy duty concentrating on English communication skills, and general office that would be required broadly.
Comparing the clients they get to other agencies clients, he says,

The clients they have don’t have so much of an English communication problem as the clients we do, and when you go for medical office skills training you have to learn another language, you have to learn medical terminology. If you don’t have a good base in English, not only is it a hard climb but the retention is not there. It just is so much more difficult to teach and so much more difficult to retain if English is not your primary language or at least if you don’t have an excellent command of English as the students that we did train for the medical secretary program did. So it didn’t serve our purposes or didn’t serve our population very well to do medical office skills. It does serve us to do broad based office tasks.

Experiences like the one with the medical office skills program led the agency to recruit for higher level English skills in the “Test of Adult Basic Education” (TABE) test they had administered that day. Such experiences also force them to rethink not only how they recruit but also what kinds of programs they are going to provide given the kinds of clientele they get or serve. Unlike City Services where a variety of ethnic groups, including native speakers of English, were served, Asia House served largely a population of recent Asian immigrants, and thus faced more acute problems around the language skills their clients had.

Despite the shared perspective of both clients and the agency that what clients
need is English language skills, apparently English does not get treated as a “training skill,” according to John. We had been speaking of the “hurdles” that many immigrants face in getting into comparable labor market jobs as the ones they had in their home countries and John pointed out that they have “addressed” the issue of English facility.

J: Sure, it’s the biggest biggest thing. This cycle is our first cycle where we have addressed that issue. But we have addressed it in a very intense way.

K: Within this organization? Or have you sort of addressed it within [the SDA] too?

J: No, just within this organization. We feel that they [the SDA] look at skills training as being typing, computer work or anything that’s mechanical. I see skills training as English also. They don’t see that. A lot of organizations wouldn’t see that but when English is not your primary language, then it becomes a skill.

John’s view was that unless non-English speakers are immersed in English then they are not “getting the right kinds of skills training.” However, he said that “they’ve [the funders] removed it from skills and put it into a separate category by itself.” The lack of recognition of English as a “training skill” put their students at a distinct disadvantage. Their unfamiliarity with English affects their ability to get a job.
affecting their confidence. If you're petrified of answering the phone on the job, they wouldn't want to go into an internship or to a job where they have to be part time receptionist. Or even covering the 'phones for lunch.

John repeatedly raised the concern about the unavailability of programs to give their clients the kind of language training he feels they need. Thus, while both clients and agency workers may view English as a skill they need for the jobs they want to have, English is viewed as a "pre-training" skill from the point of view of the funders of programs. For example, Candace at the funding organization (the SDA) had indicated as much when I had asked about whether they had been able to fund more programs because of the increase in funds she said they had had for the new fiscal year.

With JTPA we are able to fund pre-vocational programs--these are not basic education, but not skills training. It's sort of a bridge between the two so that a person in it--it's someone who is between an eighth and tenth grade--someone who has the basic skills but who has not been involved in training program but just needs to brush up on math and English or typing skills so that when you get into the skills training, retention is not as much of a problem, and the success rate of actually completing the program, and actually getting a job would be better. And that was something we had in the system years ago when I was in it, and last year, we re-introduced it, and this year we were able to fund more programs to do it. And it's especially important when you are working with a linguistic minority
population--Asian, Latino or Haitian or whatever population. So we use more of the money to do that.

The "problem of English" is not as straightforward as it may seem on the surface. On the one hand is the problem of whether it is treated as a skill or not. On the other hand, there was a question of how a client's English facility was treated in relation to the jobs in the labor market, and the nature of the economy. The program coordinators at Asia House and City Services drew attention to the problem of the economy and jobs in relation to their clients. The next section considers the problem of the job market from their perspective.

English in Context: The Economy, the market for labor, and discrimination

At the time I interviewed the Asia House personnel, they had had some difficulty placing clients in jobs at the end of the previous cycle (1993). In this segment John is explaining why they were not able to place students and relates it to their English competency in the context of the current labor market.

Large hurdles that would be no problem if the economy is great but when you are talking about Asian students whose English is not their primary language to get them into a situation where it's an employer's market, you're competing against someone who speaks perfect English. Sometimes you don't have a chance and it's
unfortunate for the students but these are barriers that are built up. . . .

Cindy, in explaining their difficulty in placing students compared with other agencies, said.

Overall, they all have the same complaint because the economy is tough, and there's been a lot of competition because there's been a lot of layoffs from other companies. So especially in terms of linguistic minorities, it's a more difficult time, and other people who are native speakers in the training programs, they'd have better time of getting a job.

Elaborating, as we discuss the kinds of industries that their clients are hired into, and whether the language skills are more or less of a barrier, she said,

Any one of the industries the general requirements are up because they combined so many job tasks together so it's no longer that you can find just a position as pure data entry or just a clerk/typist. So they combine them all. Sometimes it may require dealing with customers or talking on the phone. So it's a lot more skills that they require.

K: Do they give you any warning that they are going to be consolidating or combining skills for these jobs?

A: They don't give you warning but you find out when you call to see if There are
openings and whether your student is qualified. If you’re skilled, they might be able to have no problem finding a job. They have different entry level positions but now they combine those positions, they would tell you. But it is much tougher now. They’d tell you, “Well, this position we have 200 applicants.” So you’ll find out what the competition is.

In what was described as a tough economy or a “soured job market,” the shrinking of the number of jobs available went hand in hand with the consolidation of skills which put people who were weak in English speaking skills at a disadvantage. No longer could they be hired just to do data entry or to type. Cindy spoke of the bank which used to hire their trainees and what happened when it merged with another:

C: So that in that merge they eliminated a lot of positions.
K: Low level positions?
C: Yeah or even higher level manager positions. So that’s a lot of consolidation.
And it’s been Shawmut and Provident been one, they’ve been you know our local contact anyway. So we have people from Boston Five or Shawmut on our advisory [board] and they told us that basically you know, “We are not hiring.” Or even if they are hiring, they require bank tellers and stuff like that, and if they don’t work at the local branch, they are not required to have bilingual skills. Then, if they have to go out [outside the community], then their communication skills would have to be much much higher.
K: Much better English language skills which place the population that you are serving at a disadvantage or? For those kinds of jobs?

C: I think so because language barriers have always been the main problem.

On the other hand the problem of not speaking English is fused with the question of prejudice, particularly on the part of potential employers.

John: That's the primary thing for any immigrant whose first language is non-English, the primary thing is English. There's no way around that—to learn English. And that's so important too with office skills. Just knowing English names, which name is a first name and which a last—is John a first or a last name you know, and different things like that. How do you pronounce these names: John, is it Jopan or something like that? It's very very important. English is so important, I can't stress enough how vital it is in this agency. It's not an issue at for example, Jewish Vocational Services necessarily or OYC in Roxbury or any of these other places. The important thing is here. In Officina Hispana, it's important because... probably they cater to a lot of Hispanic clients. Here, it's important also because we cater to people whose primary language is not English. So for us it becomes an over-riding big issue. Because that's one of the reasons why our people do not get placed. Because of the prejudice. . . .You have employers who are willing to give a chance to clients when they go into the interview the language is just not perfect, or near perfect. The employer says, "Am I doing the right
thing? Will this person be a burden to this organization or more than a help?” So there’s an element of prejudice there. Sometimes it’s not just prejudice. Sometimes it’s concern, “Can this person answer the phone? Will our clients understand this person or will we scare our clients away? Will they go elsewhere?” You know.

The difficulty of placing students whose English speaking skills are not usually well developed is raised repeatedly at this agency. However, the problem of placing people in jobs— the goal of training— rests not only on developing the skills in students but also on what the labor market is doing at any particular moment, and also on the willingness of employers to risk hiring people whose language skills are perceived as inadequate. Given all of these problems, what could the agency do?

One strategy they adopted was to shift their recruiting practices to be able to bring in the “right kind of student,” those with better English language skills. According to Cindy, in the boom times they used to recruit people with grade five or six reading level in English. In the “tough” economy they upgraded their standards. City Services had already a higher standard for entry. At Asia House, they also decided they would have to intensify the English training component of their program. They also began employing a new strategy for helping people get placed in jobs—an internship program as part of the job counseling and placement process.
Job Counseling and Job Placement

The goal of job training, as all the program co-ordinators indicated, is placement in a job at the end of the training. Not only was the training program not to be used as pathway to higher education, it was not to be used as a pathway to another training program as the pre-vocational skills training program which was offered at Asia House could. But as the coordinators stated, there are times when not all of their students are placed in jobs. In this section, I examine the kinds of strategies the community organizations used in helping students get placed in jobs.

Placing a client in a job is an outcome of several processes. One is the product of the training program itself--i.e., the participant (as the clients are referred to)--are they adequately prepared in the skills they are being trained in and do they want to work? In economists’ terms, this would constitute the “human capital skills” that the workers bring. A second is the state of the labor market that the client is being trained for--what kinds of jobs are there and how many of those jobs are there? A third is the work the organization does in helping clients connect with potential employers--preparing the clients in how to do a job search, interviewing skills, and developing connections with employers who might hire their students. A fourth is how the employers respond to the students they are sent--do they hire them or are they hesitant to?

I have already considered some of the concern with English skills for these students--as opposed to the technical competence in computer skills. In terms of the
second aspect of the process, both the kinds of jobs and how many are available are part of a complex process involving economic and political change, including technological developments, tax, and trade policies. From the point of view of job training organizations looking to train people for jobs, the question is how do they come to know what jobs are going to be there? This is important because to fulfill the goal of training the CBO has to have some sense of the jobs that are going to become available sometime in advance of when they write the proposals to get funded for the programs they want to offer.

In relation to the third part of the process of placing students, both agencies offered interview skills training and job counseling—helping students develop strategies for finding jobs. In addition, Asia House had instituted internships. At both organizations the responsibility for job counseling and placement rested with someone called the “job developer.” I first noticed the term as it was used by John at Asia House while he was explaining why they had had a problem with placing students in recent cycles of training. He thought the “job developer is one of the most important components of these training programs.” Explaining what it involved he stated,

Job development is important because it’s not a matter of someone sitting in an office and letting the economy work for him. Where there is an abundance of jobs, just look in the paper I’ll just put some things together and I’ll send you out. A job developer has to do just that--he or she has to develop jobs. That involves
coordinating activities to meet with employers and calling employers trying to develop working situations, strategies for employment. Digging into the industry to squeeze out jobs that might ordinarily not come about. That involves a lot of interaction between the job developer and the industry itself. And there are a variety of techniques the job developer could use in order to develop those jobs.

Thus developing jobs is more than simply putting together clients with advertised jobs, something that is not difficult when the economy is good and there are many jobs available. It involves rather an active engagement with employers so that jobs can be "squeezed out" even when the labor market appears to have dried up. At City Services, in the brief conversation we have about job development, the coordinator also spoke of the long term relationships with employers over the years that their job developers have worked hard at establishing. For example, she indicated how one of the ways they might decide to run a program would be to call up one of their private contacts. "I could call up Children's Hospital and say, 'Do you think you can hire a few people, are you thinking of laying off, you think you have jobs open?' Things like that." Sometimes too, the job development strategy involved making "cold calls" to employers with whom they did not have a relationship.

At Asia House, however, this coordinator attributed the failure to place students despite the tough economy, to the weakness in the two job developers they had in succession.
John: Now in this economy here, it’s a terrible job economy, climate. We had a lot of problems with developing jobs. Primarily, I feel that the problem was with [pauses] not primarily, but it was a big part, it was with the job developer. The first developer we had when I came on board here late 1990, early 1991, was someone who depended on the economy to develop new jobs. That person left and we got another job developer who really wasn’t a job developer. She was actually applying for an ESL teaching job and they said, well, we have an opening for a job developer. I don’t think it was a wonderful decision at all that she should be given this particular job. I think you need to have a background in developing jobs or at least a background in personnel management or career development or something like that. She didn’t have it and she turned out to be, I don’t want to criticize anybody, but she didn’t know how to develop jobs at all. As a result we had very very poor placement. Between the first individual I knew when I came here and her we had very very bad placement. She left late in '92 before one of our cycles ended which was very inconvenient because our students were waiting for the job developer to help them out, and she just pulled out at the end of the program.

K: So she left before, at the point where . . . [he interrupts]

John: At the point where the job developer goes into action, real action. I had to take over. Two jobs at once. Actually just to keep my job going. Because of the cutbacks from [SDA] we only had one cycle left. The first cycle of 1992, I
developed jobs. For some reason we pulled through and got 100% placement. Because I had job developing before, many years ago. But I really wasn’t a job developer. That isn’t really my career path. But I did manage to work it out so we did have a 100 percent placement.

His co-worker, Cindy, had been more inclined to attribute the difficulty of placing students to a combination of the “consolidation of skills” for jobs, competition for jobs because of layoffs from other companies and therefore a climate in which it became more difficult for “linguistic minorities.” John’s own experience seemed to strengthen his conviction that even when the economy is tough, one can aggressively pursue jobs for one’s clients and be successful. Thus both seem to, though in different ways, accept the notion that a job in the labor market is dependent on having the right sort of skills—the essence of the ideology guiding the development of training programs.

Given these experiences with placement, Asia House had instituted internships as part of the process of getting students job ready and of finding them employment. The students were placed with employers for a four week period where they would work a regular work day. These were unpaid positions. The responsibility for making these arrangements lay with the job developer. At Asia House I interviewed two job developers in two different fiscal years and also observed a classroom situation in which the first developer, Louise, debriefed students about their internships. The second developer, Khanh, had served as job developer at City Services when I had
initially visited there and had come into the position at Asia House after Louise left. Khanh was herself an immigrant from Vietnam.

The job developer's role in the agencies encompassed a variety of activities including job counseling and overseeing test taking and teaching (Khanh had taught math at City Services on occasion.) Of the two job developers I interviewed, Khanh turned out to be more informative about the counseling process, and the work she did prior to the point of actually getting people placed in internships and jobs. In her view Counseling is important part of the job because retention is critical. She says she sometimes likens what they do as babysitting jobs, i.e., have to act as sitters for many of the clients, making sure they are attending, that they are there on time, they are fulfilling their responsibilities.

As Diane and John had pointed out, the clients could be terminated if they were absent too often or if they were too often tardy. Termination of clients would result in the agency losing at least part of its funding. Thus, it was in the interests of all concerned to monitor the performance of the clients in this respect. Khanh provides a further description of the kinds of work she does in counseling. Early on in the training cycle, she begins teaching something she calls "cultural integration" in the first four weeks:
What it’s like to be a worker, what a boss wants. She asks the students about pride and independence. She asks people individually about where they come from, what people are like there, whether they made friends, how they feel about other people. On the basis of their responses she might say, “there’s a big gap between American society and where they come from.” She asks about what they see and what they want from this country. Usually they say they want a job, permanent good job. By good job they usually mean good money (first thing) satisfaction, and family. Sometimes they will talk about a big job—sitting at a desk, well dressed. She says she has to bring them down to where they are, not what they dream of, and this is painful. She might also say to them, “Such and such job pay lots of money but not happy, you want that?” (Interview notes)

Thus, early on in the process she wants to make them aware of the demands of the American workplace and to do a “reality check” between what the clients might dream of and what might actually be available to them. This, she realizes, is painful but was an indispensable part of the process.

A painful process to take people from well educated wealthy family—but can’t type, afraid of phone—not because of the phone but because of the language. Good trainer has to open heart and show the benefit and opportunity and benefit of differences, not just the obstacles.
In addition to teaching "cultural integration," she teaches job search skills as part of this counseling process. Job search skills include everything from writing a résumé, and how to dress to expectations of employers as well as responsibilities, and rights of employees. In teaching such skills Khanh said she

focuses on the working environment. What boss expects, responsibility of employee and rights of employee--I would say to them, "Are you ready for this? If not, go back, leave program." Hair do, clothes, how to dress. Tells them, "'dress make the man'--people respond to you according to how you dress. Never eat with food in your mouth, it's gross, and talk to people. You represent the agency. Not telling you this because I don't like you but because you represent the agency [you're working for]. You lose clients, you lose the job." Teach also résumé writing, job interview skills, networking for jobs. I made connections for jobs with employer, set up the interview and evaluate the interview by asking the client to come back and talk about the interview. I tell them, "If the employer talks about what a wonderful dinner she had last night or something else unrelated to the job--you know they are not that interested in you. If they're really interested in you they take you through the job. Take you on a tour." (Interview notes)

Although Louise told me little about what she did with students before she actually sent them on interviews, she had informed me she held "mock interviews" with students, where she may instruct them in how to dress.
Before they go out on interviews, we have mock interviews and they dress as if they were going to an interview, and then I talk to each one of them separately, and tell them, "Oh you dress very nice for an interview," but some of them tend, when they are going for an interview, tend to wear dressy materials like silk which is inappropriate, and I nicely tell them without offending them that it wasn't appropriate dress.

In coaching the students through job interview skills, Khanh said she found that they have a tendency to give vague answers. For example, sometimes some of the clients have engaged in family run businesses back in their homelands, and might want to say "they did everything." She drills them in giving specific answers to questions, and in putting a positive spin on their weak areas.

She tells them to not give vague answers about experience--e.g. "I have done it before" [is] not good enough. Instead, "I can type 55 words per minute, I can file, answer telephone." She wants them to be specific. Not just, "Okay or a little." Even when their skills are not good she tells them that they need to say, "Well typing is not my cup of tea but when I do it I'm very accurate." So the employer sees you can admit something but willing to work and it may be that accuracy over speed is what is valued. . . . She tells them to answer specifically to questions about what they learn--they don't have to say negative things like, "I type terribly." but "It's not my cup of tea but I could type without error--make sure it's accurate,
I'm careful.” (Interview Notes)

Finally, Khanh tells the clients that they must always follow up an interview with a thank you letter, and in it review what might have been missed in the interview.

The goal of these activities is to get clients an interview and hopefully help them land a job. Khanh prefers to send her strongest and weakest student out first in an effort to see what the problems are. Louise mentions no such preferences. In addition to preparing the student, the job developers must help students search for jobs. At Asia House the job developers also searched for internships for the students.

Louise, the job developer at Asia House talked about how she develops internships—a job she says is difficult because some companies do not want to make them available because they feel they might have to provide jobs at the end of it. This is also a problem raised by Khanh but her approach is to let employers know that they have no obligation to provide a job at the end of an internship:

She has lived here long enough and is very Americanized and good in interpersonal relationship. She goes to site to visit employers’ human resources department. Invite them to do office visit and internship. She makes it clear that there is no obligation to her—doesn’t have to give the student a job. Only two things she asks of them: open up the door and give opportunity, and then give me a report about the student—dress, attendance, follow up, complete job on time or not, team work
spirit, sit and eat with other people. (Interview notes)

Both job developers arranged internships through networking. Louise said she is able to do so through memberships in many professional associations where she “uses contacts in those social settings.” In addition, she uses the employment advisory board members at the agency. I noticed that Khanh kept a long list of contacts. I was added to the list after our interview. On the basis of this, and at least three stories she told me, one involving guest lecturing in a class for a colleague of mine, and one involving making a phone call to another contact and getting some computer equipment donated to the agency. I gathered that she aggressively used her contacts.

In placing people, both try to fit the person with the positions. However, in doing her matching Khanh seemed more focussed on skills.

Louise: I match the woman or man to the position. For instance if they are interested in the medical, I try to match them in a hospital. Or one girl in this program was interested in flowers so I try to put her in Mass Horticultural Society.

She likes to match people and their skills to positions. Perhaps you become a file clerk if you can’t speak English, type, or do dicta. She finds most people can read it [English] okay but speaking is the problem. If you’re good at math, maybe you can be an accounting assistant. She likes to assess people one on one and in
Sometimes the internship does not work out. Louise mentioned a case in which the student was perceived to lack sufficient English skills.

Yes, one person and that was at a leading hospital in Boston. The person rejected the woman I sent over, and the person from the hospital said to me that the student did not have good English skills, and she was very upset that the girl didn’t have good speaking skills, and it wouldn’t work out well in the hospital. The girl, I feel, felt very embarrassed and rejected. But fortunately that same girl got a full time job at another company so I was happy about that.

On other occasions, the intern has been successful enough for an employer to request the CBO to send more. This may, though not usually, turn into real jobs.

Louise: Sometimes I’m going to send one intern, and like Children’s Hospital said that they could use more. Last time I sent two or three people to Children’s Hospital, and two people I sent were offered jobs at the end of the internship so I was very pleased about that.

Since the internships do not necessarily result in jobs, the job developer has to continue helping the student find a job.
Louise: The ones that weren't offered jobs, I continue to help them look. I get materials that come for me through the mail addressed to Asia House and everyday I look to see if there are openings in companies in Boston. I look at the classified ads. I refer them to the Department of Employment. Also there's a multicultural employment center in Quincy. I ask them to register there. The Women's Educational and Vocational Union has openings listed there so I refer them to there. So I tell them that they should look aggressively for jobs themselves but I would assist them, and I will be there to support them.

This version of doing job development sounds much like what John had criticized as being inadequate in the tight economy. Khanh, who took the job after Louise left, specifically criticized Louise's performance, saying she believes she was let go because of poor performance.

Louise had a 45 percent placement rate, and that wasn't good enough. Also Louise told the students to look in Boston Globe for jobs. But you can't tell them that--people who are not familiar enough with English far less for the abbreviations that the ads use. . . . Louise almost lost the program with only a 45 percent rate. Louise didn't motivate the people. She used to say to them, "You are late, not supposed to be late." She didn't ask them why they were late. [Here Khanh indicates that this is an inappropriate way to speak to students.] (Interview notes)
Although the internships might not always result in jobs, Louise felt, as did the students, that these offered important work experience—especially American work experience.

I just wanted to say that the internship gives them working experience. It gives them the feel of working in an American office. It builds their confidence like in the last training session I had one bright woman who was very hesitant to go into the internship. She was a little bit scared and insecure but after she had worked there a few days she became more confident, and was very happy.

As part of the internship process, Louise holds a class where she discusses with students their experiences at their intern sites. The one I observed included three of the women I interviewed. The students seemed to have been placed in a variety of situations, many in medical settings, one in real estate, one in a college library. The session consisted in Louise going around the room asking students what they were doing in their jobs, whether they are using the skills learned (some are and some not), whether they are making friends, speaking English, and developing confidence. The ones who have repetitive jobs—like the woman typing library cards—seem a bit bored by the job. Meizhu is doing well at her internship at a Japanese real estate company but is disappointed that she is not using her English much, but mostly Japanese.
Louise also opens up the discussion for the students where most say very little but she gives them a "pep talk" that they are learning, these are new experiences, and that it will boost their confidence. She promises to visit them at their sites.

Louise said she routinely visits the sites where her students are interning and observes them working. In addition, she asks the supervisor at the workplace to comment on the student's work performance. She keeps this on file and speaks to the student about it. Most reports are excellent she says but there was an occasion in which she had to "speak to a student who had a tendency not to be punctual." As Khanh had previously said, she too requires interns' supervisors' reports on her students. Khanh too has had what she considered a failure but in the interview process for a job, not the internship. This had happened when she was a counselor/job developer at City Services. She usually required students to come back after an interview and discuss with her how it went, what was said. On this occasion her student failed to show up for the follow up interview.

Only time she had a "failure" at City Services in terms of the follow up was that she made an arrangement for an interview for a young American, "young strong woman." She didn't come back to evaluate the interview. So Khanh says she calls up the human resource person at the company, wanting to know what happened. The employer said that the young woman showed up for the interview with a motorcycle helmet, water bottle, pink panty hose and 15 minutes late.
point Khanh laughs.) "Guess she wasn't very interested in the job." [She says all these things to indicate the impropriety involved. As if to drive home the point of the difficulty with some clients she speaks of Puerto Rican clients who] "wear too much make up and fingernails painted different colors" and are loud and contrasts these to the quiet Asian women in the classes. (Interview notes)

These experiences with students that job counselors/developers described reveal that getting a job is much more than knowing technical skills and having facility in English. Getting a job also involves how one presents oneself. Showing up on time, dressing appropriately for these kinds of jobs, not speaking while eating, and being able to demonstrate social skills involved in teamwork or "making friends" by sitting and eating together are all components of what are deemed "job skills." Those people who are on the frontlines of training clients find that they need to help clients master such skills if they are to get a job. Such skills were also noted by the program manager, Candace, at the SDA which funded these community organizations. She had indicated that employers they had invited to the "employer roundtables" to discuss the kinds of jobs that were going to be available and what skills people needed, had said to them that from the employers' point of view, the skills people needed most were English and math ability, and "workplace skills, work maturity, workplace knowledge, to know you have to be in at nine and if you were not you had to call in, etc." Whether and how CBOs took these into account factored into the decision about whether they
would get funding. Insisting that people show up for classes on time was a way of inculcating these work habits through the training process.

Placing students, especially those weak in English language skills, seemed to require an extraordinary effort in a “tight economy.” But even in a “tight economy” City Services sometimes seemed to enjoy being in the enviable position of having an employer come to them looking for qualified help. This event happened during my interview with the program coordinator, Diane. Our interview was interrupted by a person who apparently was a job developer who had come in to announce that a drug store chain was opening up a store nearby, and had called to say they were going to have several openings. The woman indicates she tells him they will hand deliver fifty resumes, but needed full-time jobs that had to be $325. (I surmised that this was per week.) These were before the postings were out and they were promised whatever they could use first. According to Louise, the job developer at Asia House, this was not an event that ever happened with them.

Notable in this exchange I witnessed were the wage and time requirements of the jobs that the agency needed. Just as there were requirements for eligibility, there were requirements which related to the placements that had to be made. John, expressing some frustration with their difficulty in placing people:

And our contract with EDIC stipulates that 75% job placement. And a certain amount of dollars per hour plus benefits. They have to receive benefits plus they
must be working 30 hours at least. And those kind of stipulations make it kind of
difficult in this particular economic climate.

K: What’s the rate now?

J: $8.30 an hour. They must have health benefits and it must be a minimum of 30,
wait 35 hours per week—a full-time job. And after graduation, they must be on
that job for about 90 days—three months.

Furthermore, the rules required that the client be placed in a training related job.

John: Yes, you cannot get placed in a non-training related job, even if it’s full time
and you are making a hundred dollars an hour. That’s the rules. There are many
rules under the [SDA] commitment. There are rules for who gets into the
program, and rules for how we get paid at the end of the program. There’s a lot.
On the other hand the central artery tunnel project we have the same, they pay the
same amount of money per slot but the rules are tremendously relaxed.

Thus, when job developers help clients in their search, they must ensure that the clients
are placed in jobs meeting the requirements as established by the SDA. Failing to do
so results in loss of some of their funds at minimum.

John: We get a certain percent as we go along, and a percent for placement, and
when they don’t get placed, we lose that percent. We lose a percent if the person
doesn't get a job, or if a person is placed in a non-training related job whether by
us or themselves, or going back to a job they came from. We get penalized, I
believe, if they don’t stay in the job for 90 days. We get penalized if they don’t
meet the requirements for X amount of dollars per hour or the benefits situation.
Sometimes they are a little flexible with that [benefits]. They would not look that
way but according to the rules they are supposed to take that into account and
penalize us for that.

Conclusion

Clearly job placement is a critical piece of the organization’s work. All of the
students I interviewed want a job and view the unpaid internship as a welcome
opportunity to gain experience and maybe even a job, if they like the place well
enough. It is also true that most of these students, except for the oldest, see themselves
as doing this kind of work only in the short term. Some have larger plans of going on
to college at some point, or training for something else, or having their own business.
To the extent that they want to move further ahead, these goals compete with the goals
of the agency. It is not that agency personnel wish to discourage people from further
education, but they do want the students who come in to fulfill the goal of the
program. If clients cannot follow through to that goal because they have other plans,
and if agency personnel could determine this at the application stage, then the student
will be refused admission. The agencies developed a number of strategies to help
them, as far as possible, weed out candidates who could not or would not be placed. A number of questions on the application form regarding plans after training, and follow up questions in the interview are designed to address those concerns. Every aspect of the training process from application to counseling is articulated to the issue of placement. In this enterprise the work that was being done once the "right kinds of people" were selected was that which improved the human and cultural capital skills of the client. This would not be so remarkable except that this was so even when agency personnel themselves recognized that the market for labor, at the time I interviewed them, was weak. A response at Asia House to that weak market was to increase the entry level skills for applicants. That this left some of their potential clients out in the cold was not lost on some. For example, in answer to my question about what they are doing for clients who have the lower level competencies in English, Cindy says,

We are doing everything. We’re doing everything. On the one hand we try to provide more services in language skills training, and the language training component is integrated with a lot of our training programs. But the problem is, like I said, we cannot totally disengage ourselves from those people who, if they come with certain skills, that’s where we have to start with. We have to pick them up first before we can move them around. On the other hand we don’t want to just track people into certain professions or in an area with more or less dead end
jobs you know. There's no opportunity for moving up. So we are trying to do a lot of things together but it is taking time to develop.

Since CBO personnel felt there was little they could do about the "rules" established by the SDA, they attempted to exercise some control over the parts of the process that they could—the quality of the clients they brought in, the intensity of the training, particularly in English, they would provide, and aggressively marketing their trainees by placing them in unpaid internships. With regard to the labor market, there are times it seemed as if some recognized that they could do little about that—Cindy and even John at times. John's comments indicated an ambiguity about the labor market—adopting the position that even in a weak market, when jobs were in short supply, it was simply a question of getting the right kind of job developer to squeeze jobs out.

Placing people in jobs was a prerequisite of getting funding so all of the activities of CBO personnel from recruitment to job counseling and "development" was structured around this end. While students are made aware of the eligibility requirements, conditions under which they might be terminated, the source of funding (government), they were unaware of the relationship between getting in and placement. Whether they are in search of more English training or simply a better job than the one they held previously or currently, or whether, as sometimes was the case, they were simply trying to ensure they continued to receive unemployment benefits,
their entry into the programs drew them into organizational relationships between the government and the private non-profit organizations which serviced them. Through the operations of these, the clients were being selected and allocated to particular kinds of work in the labor market--lower-level white-collar work for the ones who received training. It is through these work practices then that the stratification of a labor market by gender, race, and class is accomplished.
In unfolding the work practices of community organizations offering job training programs, I have sought to demonstrate how their practices of recruitment, selection, job counseling, and placement were articulated to the funding protocol established by the state. Thus they became an intermediary between the state and local labor markets in organizing the Asian immigrant women they drew in into lower-level white collar work. Through these very practices, however, they left out other “needy” clients who were essentially left to fend for themselves in a difficult labor market. This is but one of the outcomes of this intricately organized process; it placed the community agencies’ paths in contradiction to their original goals of helping those who needed help and also directly contradicted the formally stated goal of JTPA to serve those most in need. Here I want to further explore some of the repercussions of how the programs are organized.

At this juncture it is helpful to be reminded of the main tasks of an institutional ethnography: 1) begin the investigation with a focus on work activities of people engaged in the production of their daily lives, 2) develop an analysis of ideological procedures used to make the institutional work processes accountable, 3) initiate an analysis of how work processes in one sphere are connected to those elsewhere and thus operate as part of an extended set of social relations which are textually mediated.
The centrality of a variety of texts in coordinating the activities of people across an array of sites cannot be understated. Some of the texts brought under scrutiny in my study of job training included labor market forecasts from economists working in or for the state, policy directives from state governments, templates for contracting from the federal government, training plans as a stage in the implementation of programs, request for proposals, application forms and narrative reports, and the social science discourse that link skills to occupations. As people in the community agencies, state, local, and federal government constructed, used, and put these into motion, they inevitably shaped and controlled each other's actions, and the lives of the clients to whom the training services were directed as well as those who were denied services.

Part and parcel of a training system fashioned in accordance with the "market principles" envisioned by the Reagan administration--and reiterated in the MassJobs Council's two year work plan in 1992--was a requirement that providers of training demonstrate "efficiency and performance" as a cornerstone of program operation. Not surprisingly, the demonstration of efficiency and performance entailed a mandate to develop detailed reporting mechanisms for showing how clients were served and the costs of serving the clients. Publicly funded programs typically build in requirements for those who implement the programs to develop procedures for record keeping so that various aspects of program effectiveness can be measured. This is part of a political process wherein legislators who craft the legislation which begin the implementation of these programs are answerable to the constituents they represent,
who from time to time, and as organized interest groups, might demand an account of the efficacy of such programs.

As I have argued, the RFP document came equipped with a number of forms that the agency must fill in to document its efficacy, and to demonstrate that it is in compliance with the requirements of the training program. In effect, once an agency has decided to develop a proposal it enters into a “documentary relationship” with the state, a relationship that deepens if its proposal is accepted and it then begins the process of establishing and running training programs. The provider of services is at the bottom of a hierarchically organized system for the delivery of employment and training programs. Integral to that hierarchy is a system for reporting back to the service delivery area at various points in what the agency calls “the training cycle.” In turn, the SDA has to report back to the State Department of Employment Training which then has to report back to the Federal Department of Labor. I indicated that the state’s plan requires that each service delivery area develop and file a two year plan also equipped with a series of tables that document populations, needs, and performance. The construction of client records from application to termination, records for accounting for the costs of providing services, plans, and the like were essential features of this system of documentary accountability. The production of the women clients I interviewed as commodities for the labor market was accomplished through this textually mediated process. Their experiences of recruitment and selection--and of even failing, in at least one case, to be selected--were shaped through
this process. Thus the ways in which their lives were ruled or managed cannot be understood outside of the ways in which these various texts were brought into being and used. I want to posit several ways in which these forms of ruling re-shaped relations between labor and capital, as well as among the individuals whose lives were most directly affected by these programs either as workers or as clients and potential clients, and I also want to articulate the contradictions and tensions which emerged as these programs were implemented.

At the outset, I had indicated that employment training programs were conceived as a means to provide training for work in the paid labor force for those without labor market skills. They were designed to lift people out of poverty. Embedded in this goal was a notion that it was largely the lack of human capital skills which prevents poor people from getting jobs or from getting jobs that pay beyond poverty level wages. In this view skills are seen as properties that individuals bring with them or lack. My research suggests that this is still a prevailing ideology governing employment training--stated in documents as diverse as the National Commission on Employment Policy's report on the JTPA system to the request for proposals that the service delivery areas put out. For example, though the Boston SDA recognized that the economy was poor, the solution was not the creation of jobs for those needing them but the creation of "better skilled" individuals to compete for the few jobs that there are:
This slowdown in the economy has serious implications for the employment and training system as major industries lay off people or freeze hiring. To meet the challenge posed by current economic realities, the education and training system must provide training which is closely linked to particular occupational areas that shows signs of growth, and which develops in clients the basic skills necessary to be competitive in a tight labor market. (EDIC 1992:1)

The unrelenting emphasis on skilling people, set against the demands for performance outcomes, which were measured by employing people in unsubsidized (private sector) employment, in the context of a labor market that was shedding jobs and consolidating skills, in its own way created a series of troubles for the training enterprise at various levels. It also created tensions among workers in different roles at the community organizations, between workers at the different levels, and between agency workers and the clients they served.

For the training agencies, we saw pressure to select clients who, among other qualities, had more than basic level skills so that they would be successful in job placement. Although the agencies responded by providing training in the areas that were being funded (industries that showed signs of growth--a determination that was also embedded in textual processes), they also raised the standards for the quality of the clients being taken into the training programs. For the agencies themselves to remain competitive in gaining contracts, they had to ensure that they would take in
clients who would be “more competitive” in the labor market. Elaine, a manager at the SDA2, (an SDA that also provided some training programs rather than contract all of it out), put it this way:

Cambridge is one of the most successful SDAS because they make their numbers. They make their numbers same way any other state agency in employment training makes their numbers is because they cream . . . [Her emphasis]

Here “making their numbers” is a reference to meeting the performance standards for placement established by the state. “Creaming” is a term that is used to mean that the best of the potential clients are taken into employment training programs and not the wider variety of people who might need training. How the process of creaming works has not been described prior to the account I have given here for the agencies I studied. It was part of a strategy to meet the performance standards required of those who sub-contracted with the state to provide services.

But in effect this “creaming” placed training providers’ operations in contradiction to the intent of job training stated in the request for proposals. The problem of “creaming” (and other problems related to either training people inappropriately or paying contractors for not appropriately skilling people), were raised in reports by the General Accounting Office and had been, at least in part, the basis for the “wave reviews” that happened at the time I started collecting my data.
The Act is supposed to provide assistance to the persons who are most in need or hardest to serve and the states did not bite the bullet and do a good assessment of who needed it most. Basically what they did was leave it open. So what happens is that a lot of people who are more vocal, better educated, motivated they are the ones, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, and that's what's pretty much happened.

(Interview, Federal fieldworker, Feliz)

Thus federal level workers' jobs had become centered around what some referred to as "policing" states and their contractors for not teaching people "real competencies."

This problem of failing to teach "real competencies," another federal worker offered, was related to "performance-based contracting"

[in which] there's interim payments and regulations require that they be based on achievement of certain competencies. So as a consequence of that. And there were a lot of problems in most kinds of contracts. Contractors were being paid for having people just enroll in for a certain thing. So we ended looking at a lot of contracts just looking at benchmarks at which those contractors were paid. They were supposed to have taught their participants along the way to the full competency. And we looked at that was a meaningful thing. So as a consequence of looking at fixed unit performance based contracts, we looked at curricula to make sure that people were getting real (educational or employment) competencies along the way rather than people being paid to just have someone sit in the class
until they get paid at thirty days and then again at sixty days. In a lot of ways programming was improved although the work was dry, dull. Although curricula was better and the connection between the plan and the eventual programing is tighter. That’s a programmatic influence.

Here the worker connected one course of action within a sphere of the institutional complex (the reviews of contract procurement practices) with those in others (curricula in training programs). Thus, the federal government itself became concerned with whether programs were actually providing people with “real competencies.” Because there was a concern for programs to be accountable for the development of such competencies they instituted new frameworks (templates) that states were to use to develop a policy around awarding contracts, and they also helped develop a new participant record form which would require data to be reported on educational background of the participant and data on the competencies (e.g., whether basic skills training or occupational skills training was received) that participants would be developing. This is an example of the circularity of ideological processes. Here questions about the kinds of clients getting into programs result in some changes made in the schema for collecting data but the changes proposed still intend making visible a presumed relationship between skills and jobs.

State has to make sure SDAs are accountable. We have helped the states and the
SDAs to develop a set of principles to be followed by everybody. That's not to say that it can't go via one way or the other but there better be a good reason to. For example, someone who appears to be skilled on paper may after actually testing, some sort of assessment, really not have those skills. If that's the case and they want to put them in an OJT [on the job training] program, they have to document that and prove it. They can't just assume that everybody will understand that the person can't read at a certain grade level or because that the person is handicapped that we are supposed to accept that. Have to make sure everybody understands and they do that by when they conduct their assessment of the person’s needs and deficiencies and so on, they make sure they document that. Based on that picture of a person, they develop what's called an employability development plan which is like sort of a timetable of services to be provided before that person should be able to get into some kind of training that hopefully would be long term. (Interview, Feliz)

On the one hand, the new role that the federal workers found themselves in, provoked, they believed, resentment from the states, and even the SDAs. On the other, these workers felt that their intention was to help people, to both ensure that people got “real help” and that contractors were not being self-serving. Although it might seem that federal level workers were furthest removed from the actualities of clients' lives, I was able to see ways in which they were drawn in to people’s lives through work which was allocated to them, sometimes directly from the White House. One day as I
cruised through the office spaces of the federal workers, I noticed letters from ordinary people lying on their desks. My inquiry revealed that fieldworkers were routinely forwarded letters that people in the state they supervised might have sent to the U.S. President regarding their difficulties with finding employment or employment training programs. Part of the fieldworker’s responsibilities involved responding to these personally. A widely shared view among the federal workers I interviewed was that the current system lacked accountability (especially when they contrasted it with the old CETA system) which was a main reason that real people’s needs were not being met.

Ironically, the measures through which the hoped for new accountability might come--the development of procurement templates, the new participant record--would act to produce further constraints on the work of training agencies with their potential clients. All the while, the federal workers were at pains to communicate their own attempts to work within the mandates established in the legislation--thus, they were not developing “policy” (a role they were not permitted by the legislation) but “templates” for the states to develop policy around contract procurement.

At the community level, workers had to ensure that they were not taking in clients who were already skilled in the programs that they were offering, as Diane had pointed out, but at the same time they encountered a system which, from their point of view, was insufficiently attentive to the kinds of skills training their clients needed (that is, English language training) as Joe had pointed out. For them, this created a
dilemma regarding how to best serve the immigrant Asian clients with limited English who came to them for help. When I interviewed the Asia House workers they still had not figured out a way. The performance pressures for them meant they simply could not take in those with very limited English, which was counted as pre-vocational skills work. Several workers expressed dismay and frustration at the ways in which the Service Delivery Areas operated. This was the organization that most directly controlled their work processes. The community agencies themselves had little connection to the state agencies (that is, the Department of Employment and Training) which could send monitors out from time to time. Not surprisingly, then, people such as Cindy and John at Asia House directed their frustration towards the SDA’s insufficient attention to the challenges they and their clients faced in the current economy.

As front-line workers in the job training complex, Cindy, John, Khanh, and Diane are the people who most directly experience the ways in which this organizational complex interconnects with the program participants who are the objects of its action. But they are divorced from the processes and the people who make policies and develop the schema and categories which shape their work. They, the legislators, and the army of consultants, including economists located in the universities, inhabit much more central levels in this hierarchically organized structure (Smith 1990a:95). Front-line workers, of course, are active in implementing policy and using the conceptual schema generated and in so doing help realize organizational
relevances.

There was also a way in which the pressures for accountability and performance entered into how the workers viewed each other’s responsibilities for the success of the program. This was visible in John’s comments about the lack of skill and/or effort on the part of the job developer who preceded him. Essentially he allocated a good measure of blame to the job developer for failing to place students in jobs which resulted in a loss of funding for the agency. Khanh, the job developer who came subsequently to Louise, also laid blame squarely at Louise’s door for failing to do her job properly which ended in loss of funds for the agency as well. Thus, job developers, teachers, and intake workers can find themselves in oppositional relations which are structured by the requirements of a system of managing training programs which subjects them to measures of efficiency and performance.

Finally, some agency workers, in the case of Asia House, came to view clients as potential threats to their own well-being, and to the survival of the programs. Some of the workers at Asia House had experienced lay-off themselves when the agency’s funding had been cut back. Thus they undertook strategies to ensure that clients and potential clients understood that the agency and other students would be hurt if they did not complete the program and get a job at the end of it. Even if they could select clients who had the requisite mathematics and English skills, and even if they could, through selective questioning, weed out clients who would have child care trouble, they still had experiences which demonstrated how little control they had over people
leaving the programs and not following through to job placement. Thus, intake interviews turned into morality plays about the negative impact on others--future students, others who had been denied services, agencies, workers--if students did not follow through.

**Skills as Ideological Currency**

The notion of “skill” permeates employment and training writing, talk, and programs. The raison d’etre for these programs is the understanding that clients “lack skills” or need to be skilled in order to find jobs in the labor market. Thus “skill,” as I have argued, operates as a key conceptual currency within the job training enterprise. Numerous texts through which job training is organized take up “skill” in relation to labor market needs. Thus for example, the influential *Workforce 2000* flagged the development of a “skills gap” emerging between the types of jobs that were being created in a restructuring economy and the potential workers for those jobs (Johnson and Packer 1987:76). The text specifically warns that “more detailed analysis of the language, math, and reasoning skills required for various jobs reinforces the conclusion that the skill mix of the U.S. economy will rise substantially between now and the end of the century,” and that “when skill requirements in language, reasoning and mathematics are averaged, only four percent of the new jobs can be filled by individuals with the lowest levels of skills, compared to 9 percent of jobs requiring such low skills today” (p. 99). Still, it recognized that many jobs will be created in
service occupations, administrative support, and sales and marketing which are considered low to medium skilled jobs but even workers here would "need to be able to read and understand directions, add and subtract, and be able to speak and think clearly" (p.101). The Department of Labor, in addressing the question of labor market shortages in the still robust economy of 1989, pointed to "what is becoming identified in the media as the "skills gap" (1989:1). The DOL found that employers said that the skills entry level workers were missing were "basic skills required to do any job well." These included "spelling, writing, mathematics, oral communication, flexibility and adaptability, problem solving, self-direction and initiative, and attitudes and work habits" (1989:2). Thus, the DOL, through its survey of employers, had come to expand what could count as skill. This was also evident in the Boston SDA talk when Candace had indicated to me that employers had said that they needed workers who would show up on time (work habits). "What we heard from them [employers] is that the most important thing were the basic skills--the math and English ability as well as workplace skills, work maturity, workplace knowledge. You are supposed to be at work at nine o'clock, stay until five. If you are not there you call in, that kind of thing etc., and all of that factored into the decision that we made about what we wanted our system to look like in terms of services we provide." In attempts to build good work habits, the organization of the program day, and class time built in requirements for timely and routine attendance. In the information sessions community organizations offered, potential applicants were warned that skipping classes, and "not showing up"
whenever they felt like it were impermissible. Employers' concerns about work habits seems to have been taken seriously and incorporated into training program services.

As I have shown, there was dissatisfaction on the part of community workers with how the state defined skill such that it excluded “English.” This is one way in which the programs came to ignore the needs of the clients or potential clients. In addition, because workers had to be able to demonstrate, through the accountability mechanisms which were put in place, that the clients were getting real competencies and new skills, people who wanted programs that they might have had some prior experience in were deemed ineligible for them. Bettie had had to settle for the medical office skills training program—which would nevertheless secure her goal of learning more English—even though she had wanted an accounting program because she had had a bit of training in accounting already (in Hong Kong). Moreover, she was told it was only available to people who were unemployed through a lay-off, which she was not.

In a number of places in my data (Cindy’s comments, the RFP document, and in Candace’s interview) mention is made of “transferable skills,” yet there seemed to me some tension between this aim of building “skill sets that are flexible and transferable to a variety of related occupations” (RFP:ix) and constructing programs around specific employers’ needs (the purpose of the employer roundtables) which seemed to resemble “on the job training programs” (another set of federally funded programs). However, this paradoxical course of action became comprehensible from
the point of view of a system whose fundamental organizing principles were “efficiency and performance.” Getting people jobs, the end product of job training, came to rely on defining employers as customers of the system as well. In a way, talk about transferable skills could be sustained despite these relations with specific employers by reconfiguring how the job market could be thought and talked about (as industry clusters), and therefore thinking of skills that could fit the clusters. I tried to clarify this with Elaine, the SDA2 manager.

K: When you talked about job clusters and the field they were going to fund is interesting. It seems to both be saying that train for specific kinds of jobs in specific fields but at the same time provide transferable skills within that cluster?

E: That’s really true and that came out of the blueprint. So you are not training to be an x-ray technician, you are training to serve in the medical services field. That way you are broad—your underpinning education can be things like terminology—anatomy, physiology, rather than all of a sudden you just learning about that particular machine. In a way it’s not a bad strategy. You have to have some approach.

Beyond these troubles the focus on skills seemed to bring to the fore, is the actuality that the women who came into the programs for the most part were not unskilled, in the sense that they had almost all had work experiences that would count
as "skills." This is one instance which provides us a sense of how skills have to be seen as a socially constructed category. Another was that "skills" got reconstituted with shifts in conditions in the labor market. As Cindy and John had pointed out, the same clients who would have been viewed as skilled enough to get jobs when the economy was good were no longer suitable for the labor market when the economy was "tough." Skills got consolidated in ways that disadvantaged their clients who, even with training, could be overlooked by employers because they could get better qualified workers. This seems to be a feature of labor markets that is overlooked in the employment training system, and indeed in social science analyses that continue to parlay the view of an unambiguous relation between skills and jobs.

The notion that training was a way of skilling people to get jobs was belied in yet another way: i.e., in Candace's (SDA program manager) statement that the community organizations had to understand that some jobs simply weren't suitable for those with limited English skills. From the perspective of the institutional relations governing JTPA, English language was a pre-job training skill. So while from the perspective of clients and frontline workers, many immigrants might simply need more English language skills, that was not permissible given the JTPA parameters. Rather than change how skills get defined so that training in English might be included, the strategy was to deny non-English speaking immigrants a chance at the kinds of jobs where English is more likely to be needed. Decisions such as these were part of the extended set of social relations ordering the immigrant Asian women's labor market
Between capital and labor

I have shown in the analysis presented here that the ways in which training programs operate pull the state and the community organizations which sub-contract with it into a mediating role between capital and labor. The new “market principles” underlying job training re-organization since the 1980s have emphasized the notion that the private sector knows best what it needs and how to provide maximum efficiency. In contrast, the public sector has been constructed as unable to judiciously allocate and use resources amassed through taxation. The outcome of such thinking in relation to job training has been to advocate and establish private-public partnerships in the form of the MassJobs Council in Massachusetts and the Private Industry Councils at the local and regional levels, and even to ensure that there is private business representation on the boards of community organizations wanting to offer government contracted training programs. If they do not have these representations, they cannot get funded. In effect, the relationship between community and business has been restructured in this context with the state the intermediary in this restructuring.

Ironically, what has now emerged is a set of circumstances in which public resources are marshalled for use by the private sector to train the workforce it wants. There has been a shift in the conception of who the clients or customers of training are.
It is no longer merely for the “disadvantaged”; it is for private employers. This new outlook has emerged just at the time of large scale economic transformations which have been referred to in the social science literature as “economic re-structuring” which has resulted in massive job loss among unionized manufacturing workers and the development of contingent work in service industries (See Amott 1998). At the same time, economic forecasts and policy have continued to assert that the new jobs require greater skills. In this context, training programs seem to be a place that could absorb and contain at least the better equipped low end workers (given the performance based requirements for placement) for a short period of time. It becomes a tool for managing the ebb and flow of labor as businesses expand and contract. The burden--costs and time--of training a segment of the low-end work force gets shifted to the state.

I would not want to suggest that this necessarily works in an unambiguously smooth way. The jobs the planning documents identifying occupational priorities targeted did not always materialize in the identified sectors. As I have explained, the process is a cumbersome and lengthy one, so that in the two to three year span of time between plan development, issuance of RFPS, and training offerings, there could be significant shifts in the job picture for a variety of reasons, including political developments that might affect whether jobs in an industry shrinks or grows. This happened with the health care industry in the early to mid 1990s as it reorganized and jobs disappeared which left trainees in the medical office skills programs with little
opportunity. As Elaine, an SDA program manager pointed out,

It’s almost as if you need just in time training to match the manufacturing changes and all that and that may not be enough so some people say the public sector shouldn’t have a role. Companies should train. Why are we trying to fill this gap that we clearly can’t fill. That’s when you get business domination.

In focussing on these programs and the Asian immigrant women clients they took in. I have been able to demonstrate how the state plays an active role in managing the allocation of these immigrants into the labor market. This study highlights how labor market location is not simply a procedure through which people are matched to jobs because of the skills they have or do not have, as the social science discourse on jobs and skills would have us think. It involves the coordinative work practices of people located in diverse multiple sites within the institutional complex of job training. It is in these processes through which gender, race-ethnicity, and class come to be significant for how women are selected and trained for the low-level white collar work which they enter and which crystallizes their place in the American class structure.

While many of the women used the classes to secure their objectives of learning English and finding jobs that paid better wages and benefits, most had plans to find their way to better opportunities despite the placement objective required by the state. Whether they succeeded might be the topic of another study. In the meantime
however, throughout the 1990s there have been political changes which have led to severe cutbacks in and restructuring of a number of government support programs (including welfare programs such as AFDC, now called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, highlighting the time limits imposed) and, in conjunction with this, supports for immigrants. Welfare to work programs present increased pressure on a job training system to train and find jobs for those displaced, and creates added competition for lower level work. This is occurring in an era when we are told that we have had an uninterrupted train of economic expansion which has meant a tight labor market, and very low official unemployment rates. In this context we can expect training dollars to decrease. Whether linguistic minority immigrants such as those I interviewed find themselves with better opportunities in a tight labor market remains to be seen. In spite of the fact that women may resist and continue to find their ingenious ways of turning the programs to their own ends, the training enterprise has evolved in a way which institutionalizes a set of relations which is insensitive to the needs of those it claims to serve.
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