The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is a federally funded nutrition education program, for low-income families, which operates through state land-grant institutions. The strength of the EFNEP program is in its unique approach to reaching these families through the use of paraprofessionals who are indigenous to the target population. Paraprofessionals are hired and trained to conduct educational intervention programs in local communities.

Through the implementation of local EFNEP programs, much data is gathered which documents the impact of the program on the participants enrolled. However, there is little documentation concerning the effect that EFNEP has on the paraprofessionals who conduct these programs. This study explores the role of the EFNEP paraprofessional, and the individual change which they incur as a result of their involvement in the program. Specifically, this study identifies factors of psychosocial change, which EFNEP paraprofessionals undergo as a result of their training and work experience, and factors which are associated with the psychosocial impact.
The design of this study was qualitative, and was accomplished through the use of four focus groups with a total sample size of twenty participants. The constant comparative method was chosen for data analysis, which is a systematic process of constantly comparing occurrences in the data in order to develop themes or categories.

Based on the analysis, conclusions are presented about the psychosocial impact of EFNEP training and work experience on the EFNEP paraprofessional and the factors which contribute to change. A model is presented which suggests that this psychosocial impact is a sum of training, support and work experiences when added to the preexisting characteristics that the paraprofessionals have when hired into the program. Under these conditions, paraprofessionals may exhibit changes including skills development, heightened community status, and changes in personal and community relationships. They may also exhibit changes which were identified as the way in which they view others, increased caring for others, and an increase in positive self concept.

INDEX WORDS: EFNEP, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, nutrition education, paraprofessional, psychosocial change, transformative learning
EFNEP TRAINING AND WORK EXPERIENCE: THE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT ON THE
EFNEP PARAPROFESSIONAL

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
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EFNEP TRAINING AND WORK EXPERIENCE: THE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT ON THE EFNEP PARAPROFESSIONAL

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I AM EFNEP

I am EFNEP – born in the turbulence of the 60s when attention was drawn to hunger, poverty and malnutrition present in the lives of many Americans, to help low-income families and youth improve their diets. Part of the Land Grant College movement, I bring the University connection to many who otherwise might never benefit from its research and knowledge.

Nutrition assistants are my eyes, hands, and heart who teach, care, and go the extra mile delivering nutrition education messages to a large, ethnically diverse population. Their dedication, compassion and commitment along with the thousands of volunteers who donate their efforts, has brought personal growth and career opportunities to clients, as they increased self-esteem, left welfare, found better jobs, improved nutritional status, earned high school and college degrees and in some cases became Extension agents. I work to be efficient, creative and accountable – but I do not lose commitment to those I serve. My program is my people. My product is education. My goal is helping people to improve their nutrition and health.

Today, the need for me continues. As the number of low-income people increases, I can save dollars by modifying the diets of low-income participants and reduce the risk factors associated with chronic diseases – thereby reducing health care costs. I have made a difference in people’s lives and in their futures. I have helped provide tools and opportunities to succeed – to achieve and excel. What more could a nation want for its families and its children? I am EFNEP!

Excerpted from a speech given by Margaret “Peg” Randall in 1988.

Reprinted from The Reporter, (2005, pg. 23)
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There are so many people to thank who have helped me along the way, and the gratitude I feel is deeper than mere words can express. I first want to thank my family: Henry, Rob and Garrett. They have shared me with this process, and were supportive while I attended classes in the evenings or pecked away the weekends on the computer. I hope that Henry and I have instilled in our sons the value of education and the importance of lifelong learning.

My coworkers have also been an encouragement to me. The entire Athens-Clarke County Cooperative Extension staff has been supportive, beginning with Dan Gunnels who bugged me insistently until I agreed to enroll in doctoral studies. My EFNEP program assistants have shared my excitement, especially three primary cheerleaders: Beffie, Betty and Molly. The Cooperative Extension administration has allowed me the opportunity to pursue my study.

I appreciate the cooperation of all my EFNEP coworkers statewide. Our state leader, Gail Hanula, provided access to the paraprofessionals who participated in the focus groups, and my agent coworkers provided assistance in implementing the group sessions. Special thanks go to all the EFNEP paraprofessionals who participated in the focus groups. Your stories are my inspiration.

I am grateful to all my professors, and especially to my committee members Drs. Lorilee Sandmann, Christine Langone, Thomas Valentine, and Elizabeth Andress. I am so glad that Dr. Cervero had the foresight to pair me with Dr. Sandmann. She is truly an asset to the department. Her expertise, coupled with her positive attitude, was a motivation to me through all the challenges.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is a federally funded nutrition education program, for low-income families, which operates through state land-grant university institutions. The strength of the EFNEP program is in its unique approach to reaching these families through the use of paraprofessionals who are indigenous to the target population. Paraprofessionals are hired and trained to conduct educational intervention programs in local communities.

Through the implementation of local EFNEP programs, much data is gathered which documents the impact of the program on the participants enrolled. However, there is little documentation concerning the effect that EFNEP has on the paraprofessionals who conduct these programs. This study explores the role of the EFNEP paraprofessional, and the individual change which they incur as a result of their involvement in the program. First, it is helpful to know the background of the EFNEP program, beginning with the identified need which inspired its inception…hunger.

*Hunger and Food Security in America*

Defining hunger, at first, seems like a simple task. However, hunger “has come to mean rather different things to different people.” (President’s Task Force on Food Assistance, 1984, p. 34.) Anderson, (1990), defined hunger as “an uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food” and “the recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food (p.1598). The United States
Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2007a) is now using the term “Food Security” to define this phenomenon, and states, "Food security means that people have access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. At a minimum, this includes availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and assured ability to acquire personally preferred foods in a socially acceptable way” (¶ 1).

In 1960, 38.9 million Americans in 13.4 million families were living in poverty (Leidenfrost, 2000). Over 47 years later, the statistics have not improved much. Klein (1998) found that “not all households are equally likely to be hungry.” This study found, A slightly larger proportion of households with children were classified as experiencing hunger. Black and Hispanic households with children were about twice as likely to be classified as experiencing hunger as their white counterparts. Female-headed households were four times more likely to experience hunger than husband-wife households. The lower a household’s income, the higher the chance of experiencing hunger (p. 1).

Cason, Scholl and Kassab (2002) found that families, who do not receive wages that allow them to meet costs of living, have limited access to enough nutritious, safe, and acceptable food. Their study found that “scientific research documents that less than optimal diets have a significant impact on health, quality of life, and longevity. Poor intake of fruits and vegetables and of nutrients derived from these foods can predispose persons to a greater risk for chronic disease, such as cancer and cardiovascular disease” (p. 63).

Hunger disproportionately impacts children. Kleinman, Murphy, Little, Pagano, Wehler, Regal & Jellinek (1998) report that “studies have consistently shown that poverty is one of the most powerful predictors of psychiatric and functional problems in children” (p. 4). According to their research conducted at the Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University, there are
thirteen million children in America who live in households with limited access to sufficient food. Brown & Rohde (2002) list the adverse consequences of hunger and food insecurity for children and cite the effects on health, psychosocial and behavioral, as well as learning and academic. The health effects include 1) poorer overall health status and compromised ability to resist illness, 2) elevated occurrence of health problems such as stomachaches, headaches, and 3) greater incidence of hospitalizations. Psychosocial and behavioral effects are 1) higher levels of aggression, hyperactivity, and anxiety as well as passivity, 2) difficulty getting along with other children, and increase need for mental health services. Learning and academic consequences include 1) impaired cognitive functioning and diminished capacity to learn, 2) lower test scores and poorer overall school achievement, 3) repeating a grade in school, and 4) increased school absences, tardiness, and school suspension (p. 6).

Overview of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

In response to the hunger and food insecurity issue in America, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has implemented, over the years, a number of food assistance programs and nutrition education systems. Some are solely educational in nature, while others link nutrition education with feeding programs. Among the latter are the Food Stamp Program, Women, Infants & Children Program, School Meals Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Food Distribution Program. Those that are educational only include the National Research Initiative, the Nutrition, Diet, and Health Base Program, and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007b).

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is a USDA program that operates through the division of Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service,
or CSREES (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007c). Information found on the CSREES website explains that EFNEP is a “unique program that currently operates in all 50 states and in American Somoa, Guam, Micronesia, Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands” (¶ 1). The report goes on to state that the EFNEP program is designed to “assist limited resource audiences in acquiring the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and changed behavior necessary for nutritionally sound diets, and to contribute to their personal development and the improvement of the total family diet and nutritional well-being” (¶ 1).

The EFNEP program is delivered through the Cooperative Extension Service system (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007c). According to Seevers, Graham, Gamon & Conklin (1997), “a unique feature of the program is the hiring of paraprofessionals, people [typically] without [post-secondary] degrees, who are from the targeted communities. EFNEP program aides visit homes and demonstrate selection, preparation, and serving of nutritious foods” (p. 78). The CSREES report also explains that Extension professionals provide training and supervision to paraprofessionals and volunteers who teach EFNEP, and goes on to state that the paraprofessionals usually live in the communities where they work. They recruit families and receive referrals from neighborhood contacts and community agencies. The paraprofessionals may teach the lessons through direct contact in group or individual situations; mailings and telephone teaching to complement other teaching methods; mass media efforts to develop understanding, awareness and involvement in the educational program; and development and training of volunteers to assist with direct teaching. (USDA, 2007c, ¶ 4)

Statement of the Problem

There are food insecurity issues in America. Nutrition education programs are offered by USDA to address these food insecurity issues. One of these programs is the Expanded Food &
Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). In EFNEP, paraprofessionals serve as the messengers of the educational message. These paraprofessionals are trained in a very specific nutrition education curriculum and are expected to teach the nutrition concepts at the community level. They work with low-income families, and are indigenous to the communities with which they work.

Even though the traditionally recognized EFNEP target audiences are low-income families who enroll and graduate from EFNEP, this study investigates the effect of the program on the EFNEP paraprofessionals themselves. Most studies that have been conducted about the EFNEP program have focused on nutrition knowledge and/or behavioral aspects of nutritional change. Even then, these studies have primarily focused on the student, or participant of the EFNEP program classes. Only a few studies have measured nutrition knowledge and behavioral change within the paraprofessional.

Documentation is needed to show the comprehensive impact of the EFNEP program on the paraprofessional, including characteristics which are psychosocial in nature. Two studies have addressed psychosocial aspects of the program, but these studies were conducted over twenty years ago. An early study by Hernecheck-Buck (1986) found that, in addition to nutrition knowledge and behavior change, the EFNEP participants also make changes outside the realm of nutrition education. Many were found to experience changes, which were considered psychological and social in nature. Likewise, an early study by Rauch (1985) found some of these same results in the life patterns of EFNEP paraprofessionals. However, there has been no study to investigate psychological or social change in EFNEP paraprofessionals.

This study will focus on aspects of the EFNEP paraprofessional change that are psychosocial in nature. By better understanding what these changes are, EFNEP can better
recruit, train, and retain the paraprofessional staff that are critical to the success of the program. This study will also show that another dimension exists regarding the impact of the EFNEP program. This impact includes qualities of human growth and capacity building in terms of the psychosocial changes made in the personal development of the paraprofessionals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to show how training and work experience of the EFNEP paraprofessional can effect their individual change and personal development. This study will identify factors of psychosocial change which EFNEP paraprofessionals undergo as a result of their training and work experience. Research questions guiding this study are:

1) What is the psychosocial impact of the EFNEP training and work experience on the EFNEP paraprofessional?

2) What factors contribute to the psychosocial impact on the EFNEP paraprofessional?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in adding to the small body of literature, in both theory and practice, concerning the EFNEP impact on the paraprofessionals who work in the field.

Theoretical Significance

This study has implications on research related to psychosocial learning and change in adulthood, particularly for that dealing with paraprofessionals. A variety of concepts have been identified concerning the progression of psychological development, including theories of ego development (Erikson, 1963; Loevinger, 1976), self development (Gould, 1978; Josselson, 1987; Keegan, 1982, 1994; Levinson, 1986), moral development (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1973), and faith and spiritual development (Fowler, 1981; Jones, 1995). In summarizing developmental characteristics of psychological change, Merriam & Caffarella (1999) grouped developmental
changes into three categories including sequential, life events and transitions, and relational models of development. (p. 115)

Merriam & Caffarella (1999) associate learning in times of transition to work and family. Further they continue by stating, there has been an “increasing recognition that explaining development in adulthood is more than just focusing on the individualized self. Rather, emphasis has been placed on our collective selves as defined by society” (p. 117).

This study also has implications for research based on situated cognition. Situated cognition is an area of learning research which may be linked to adult education’s experiential emphasis on learning (Wilson, 1993). There are three assumptions about situated cognition which relate to this study. First, is the idea that learning and thinking in the everyday world is a social activity. Second, adult’s ability to think and learn is structured by the availability of situational provided “tools”. And third, human thinking is also structured by interaction within the setting (p. 72). Basically, situated cognition ties learning to experience. Hansman (2001) adds, “The core idea in situated cognition is that learning is inherently social in nature. The nature of the interactions among learners, the tools they use within these interactions, the activity itself, and the social context in which the activity takes place shape learning” (p. 45).

This study lends itself to research related to learning in the workplace as well. Watkins (1995) offers a portrait of learning in the workplace, and the emerging issues. “Workplace learning encompasses what learners do rather than focusing solely on what trainers or developers do in organizations...[with] the increasing demand for learning at work coupled with an emphasis on more informal, self-directed learning practices makes workplace learning a helpful semantic differentiation” (p. 3). Watkins states, “In the past, workplace learning was primarily skills
training based on immediate job needs. In the future, workplace learning will become everyone’s responsibility and will be integrally tied to performance and production” (p. 15).

Incidental learning is addressed in the study. Marsick & Watkins (2001) discuss informal and incidental learning, and describe the theory as one which is “usually intentional but not highly structured” (p. 25). Examples the authors give include self-directed learning, networking, coaching, mentoring and performance planning which includes opportunities to review learning needs. “When people learn incidentally, their learning may be taken for granted, tacit, or unconscious” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 26).

Emancipatory learning is relevant to this study since it examines a process by which individuals with the “least power in society gain more autonomy and independence, more control over their own lives” and are empowered “to bring about change of greater equality and social justice” (Thompson, 2000).

Finally, transformative learning will be addressed and a model of transformative learning and change will be revealed. Mezirow’s theory of adult transformative learning labels remarkable change, having both personal and social dimensions (Nelson, 1997). The basis of Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning is life experience (Mezirow, 1996). Furthermore, learning can consist of a change in one’s beliefs or attitudes, or can lead to an entirely new perspective on life. Mezirow (1990) observes that “no need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experience” (p. 11).

Practical Significance

According to Scholl (2004), there have been more than 100 studies written about the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program since its inception in 1968 (p. 34). Some of the most recent ones include Burney (1998), Camacho (1993), Christensen (1993), Gehrt (1994),
Johnson (1993), Koener (1997), Lewis (1998), Rodgers (1997), Schmitz (1994), Thames (1992), and Welschenbach (1993). Only a few of these studies focus on the EFNEP paraprofessional. Gehrt (1994) studied the role of the EFNEP paraprofessional in the revitalized Cooperative Extension Service. Rodgers (1997) conducted research in order to develop a performance evaluation scale for EFNEP paraprofessionals, and Welschenbach (1993) evaluated the relationship between characteristics of the EFNEP paraprofessional and their effectiveness as change agents. None of these more recent studies focus on the impact that the EFNEP program has on the individual psychosocial development of the EFNEP paraprofessional.

In earlier studies, Chiza-Muyengwa & Ebert (1991) conducted research to measure the nutrition knowledge of EFNEP paraprofessionals. Scores were high on knowledge of meal planning, food preparation, food storage and sanitation. Low scores were found on the paraprofessional’s knowledge of recommended servings of milk per day for teenagers, milligrams of cholesterol contained in one egg, appropriate classification of food into food groups and protein content of foods (¶ 6). Rauch (1985) found that EFNEP paraprofessionals attributed knowledge and practices related to food, nutrition and health to the EFNEP program. Also, Phillips (1980) found that the EFNEP program is effective in changing the nutrition knowledge and nutrition practices of the paraprofessionals.

Finally, a potentially important contribution that this study will make is that of impact attributed to the USDA-sponsored EFNEP program. This study shows that there is another layer of impact produced by the program other than the commonly recognized impact on the student participants. Capacity building in terms of the psychosocial changes made in the personal development of the paraprofessionals adds a new dimension to the impact of EFNEP.
Definition of Key Terms

In order to clarify the purpose, research and discussion of this study, the following key terms are defined:

**Nutrition Education** – This term refers to a broad range of activities that promote healthy eating behaviors (U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, 1996).

**Paraprofessional** - A paraprofessional is defined as a person:

(1) whose position is either instructional in nature or who delivers direct services to students and or their parents; and (2) who serves in a position for which a teacher or another professional has ultimate responsibility for the design and implementation of individual education programs and other services (Pickett, 1986, p.2).

**Indigenous** – Love & Gardner (1992) describe individuals who are indigenous as those with the “insider orientation.” These individuals are similar ethnically, socio-economically, and experientially. “Because they are trusted they can serve as effective conduits of information, resources, services and advice on how to access those services” (p. 3-4).

**Psychosocial** – Darkenwald & Merriam (1982) describe psychosocial characteristics as beliefs, values, attitudes and perceptions about oneself.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this research is to study how training and work experience of the EFNEP paraprofessional can effect their individual change and personal development. Specifically, this study will identify factors of psychosocial change, which EFNEP paraprofessionals undergo as a result of their training and work experience, and factors which are associated with the psychosocial impact. To inform this study, two major sections of literature were reviewed. The first section examines the history and context of EFNEP. The second section investigates theories of learning and change.

History and Context of EFNEP

This section provides an examination of the history and context of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program. This review is organized into four subsections including an historical perspective of EFNEP, program delivery, paraprofessionals as EFNEP educators, and impact with the target low-income clientele.

Historical Perspective

In an article outlining the historical perspective of EFNEP, Leidenfrost (2000) describes the history and purpose of the program. When hunger surfaced as a social issue in 1968, the Cooperative Extension was already equipped to work with the rural disadvantaged. A study was implemented which focused on how to reach low-income families with structured educational programs. An additional component of the study focused on who should be the educator of low-income families, and what type of educational methodology should be employed. At the same
time that pilot studies were proving successful, legislative action was being taken to identify hunger as a social issue (Leidenfrost, 2000).

The current Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman, wrote a letter, dated August 19, 1968, to the President of the United States stating, “this is to recommend, as strongly as I can, that the President authorize USDA to proceed with an expanded homemaker [nutrition education] program” (p. 38). He continues,

Mr. President, I don't know anything that could do more to reach human needs, particularly pregnant women and children, than an expanded homemaker program that would train and inspire ladies in rural communities to reach out as sub-professional (paraprofessional) giving individual attention to the millions of people in the sub-poor category who are literally isolated from society. (p. 39)

From there, a $10 million education program was initiated. Based on findings of the Cooperative Extension studies, paraprofessional teachers were employed to deliver the educational program directly to an adult audience under the supervision of the professional Extension Home Economist (Leidenfrost, 2000). The program included methods to influence behavioral changes as well as nutrition subject matter knowledge, and measured change using a “24 hour food recall” instrument in addition to audience enrollment criteria. The curriculum included, food and nutrition subject matter, financial management related to food, meal planning, food selection, food preparation, storage and utilization, health and sanitation practices, including food safety, information on services available to families and referrals to family services, gardening and food production and food preservation (p. 39).

Leidenfrost (2000) continues by stating, “The original $10 Million grant was evaluated by an independent contractor. It proved so successful that Congress appropriated $30 million in
FY 1970 to support both the continuation of the adult and the addition of a youth program component. The money provided for the employment of both professionals and paraprofessionals” (p. 39). The author concludes that “EFNEP has effectively put the Cooperative Extension System in the arena of social change. The State Extension partners have made EFNEP happen. State coordinators and nutritionists have been the movers in planning and implementing the program” (p. 41). Also, “throughout the history of EFNEP, there has been a positive impact on the diet of its program families. The program proved to be a new dimension in Extension programming; an educational approach to a humanitarian concern” (p. 42).

**Program Delivery**

According to a published study, Cason, et al. (2002) found that EFNEP program delivery methods have changed throughout the years. When the program first began in 1969, the primary delivery method was individual instruction in the participant’s home. In the 1980's, program emphasis moved from one-on-one contact to groups of participants in a variety of non-formal educational settings, including community centers, housing complexes, WIC offices, and churches (p. 64). Chipman & Kendell (1989) reported that this shift in teaching methods came as a result of a recommendation by federal evaluators, in 1979, to improve the cost effectiveness of the program. Additionally, the 1979 report included a concern for the safety of the nutrition educators, also making the case for the necessity to change from one-on-one home visits to group classes in public places (p. 265). Cason, et.al. (2002) found that teaching strategies have continued to change as a result of the 1996 welfare reform act. Many traditional EFNEP clients have been enabled to join the workforce, or to participate in work preparation and training (p. 72). The authors suggest that welfare reform has made individual recruitment of clients more difficult, and has made recruitment of participants involved in pre-existing groups such as
“Welfare-to-Work” programs easier (p. 72). Their research goes on to indicate that even though
the one-on-one, learner-centered approach is the most effective delivery method, it may be
“difficult to justify an organizational change to shift from conducting the program using group
instruction back to the one-on-one methods used during the early years of the program” (p.72).

USDA (2007c) explains that the EFNEP program is delivered as a series of ten or more
lessons, often over several months, by paraprofessionals and volunteers, many of whom are
“indigenous” to the target population. The hands-on, learn-by-doing approach “allows the
participants to gain the practical skills necessary to make positive behavior changes. Through
EFNEP, participants gain self-worth and learn that they have something to offer their families
and society” (¶ 2).

Paraprofessionals as EFNEP Educators

Leidenfrost (2000), in her historical perspective of EFNEP, states “the method of
effectively delivering educational programs by paraprofessionals had been successfully
demonstrated” (p. 38). She documents further,

The Extension Service studies on how effectively to deliver education programs to low-
income families frequently identifies the characteristics of a paraprofessional (program
aide, or program assistant) as an individual with the ability to: communicate with the
intended audience; read and write and keep records; learn and comprehend information
about food and nutrition and transfer this information to the needs of families; adapt to
various situations; meet and teach individuals and in a group situations; and follow oral
instructions (p. 38).

A 1970 study by the U.S. Civil Service Commission completed a statement of critical
incidents of behavior for use in developing a job description and performance evaluation for
paraprofessionals (Leidenfrost, 1983). The American Home Economics Association (AHEA), now the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS), and the U.S. Office of Education conducted a study of home economics-related occupations requiring less than a baccalaureate degree. Both Extension home economists and paraprofessionals participated in the study which identified the paraprofessional as “an individual working within a professional field who has not received a baccalaureate degree” (p. 38).

Reames & Burnett (1991) found that African American women make up the greatest number of employed EFNEP program assistants. Henderson (1992), found the EFNEP program assistant to be an excellent provider of nutrition education for multicultural groups because of the shared ethic and racial diversity. Because of the rich diversity of the staff, the program assistants have insights that are crucial to program development and delivery. The author explains that the indigenous relationship that the program assistants have to the clientele allow them to experience a “trust among the people they serve which means the educational messages are listened to and accepted” (¶ 17).

Collazo, Hall, Hare, Hill, Hughes, Pulido, Quinones, Shorter, Smith & Todd (1993) also found that paraprofessionals are effective in providing valuable help to families. In their study, they found that in Extension, the most extensive use of paraprofessionals has been through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program.

There are, however, certain competencies needed by EFNEP program assistants in order to do their job effectively. A study of the perceived personal attributes and job competencies held by EFNEP professionals who supervise the program assistants was conducted (Wakou, Keim & Williams, 2003). The study looked at personal attributes, job competencies prior to hire, and job competencies after training that were considered important to the supervising
professionals. Personal attributes included (1) good interpersonal skills, (2) positive attitude, (3) a desire to learn, (4) persistent, (5) friendly, (6) self-starter, (7) empathy, (8) flexible, (9) compassionate, (10) respectful, (11) desire to help others, (12) persuasive, (13) self-confident, (14) credible, (15) positive role model, (16) trustworthy, (17) creative, (18) cultural awareness, (19) nonjudgmental, and (20) bilingual.

Job competencies prior to hire, identified in the study, included (1) interpersonal and communication skills, (2) ability to work with diverse audiences, (3) knowledge of community networks, (4) problem-solving skills, (5) experience working with youth and adults, (6) ability to read and understand materials, (7) ability to meet and work with individuals and small groups, (8) follows oral instructions, and (9) keeps all participant information confidential (p. 21).

Finally, additional job competencies were identified. These included (1) being a team player, (2) communication skills, (3) ability to make initial and follow-up visits to families, (4) knowledge of the curriculum, (5) knowledge of community resources, (6) organizational skills, and (7) ability to keep records and make reports (Wakou, et al., 2003, p. 21).

*Impact with the Target Clientele*

Much data is available which documents the impact that the EFNEP program has on the target clientele. Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES) reported program impacts for FY 2006 are the latest available for public dissemination (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007d). According to the national report, in the fiscal year 2006, EFNEP reached 150,270 adults and 409,389 youth. It is estimated that approximately one-half million more family members were indirectly reached through adult participants (p. 1).

The CSREES 2005 fiscal year review reported that there were 2,134 paraprofessionals along with 33,628 volunteers who delivered an average of 8.5 lessons to EFNEP adult
participants. Staff and volunteers met with 15,233 youth groups for 216,723 hours of EFNEP instruction at 93,267 different group meetings (Montgomery & Willis, 2006). Both the 2005 and 2006 reports account that there is a diverse ethnicity of EFNEP participants. According to the 2006 report, 30% of the audience is white, 26% black, 39% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 2% of the audience is American Indian (p.1).

The CSREES reports are based on data collected by the computer system, Evaluation/Reporting System, or ERS, which was developed to capture the positive impacts of EFNEP. Data from the ERS are used to measure food practices and dietary improvements. Ten key food-related practices are measured at entry into EFNEP and then again upon graduation. These changes translate into significant improvements in daily living skills. The 2006 results based on data from 150,270 adult graduates show that:

- 91.5% of adults reported improved dietary intake, including an increase of about 1.4 servings per day of fruits and vegetables
- 88% improved their nutrition practices
- 83% bettered their food resource management practices, and
- 66% improved their food safety practices (p.2).

Multiple cost-benefit analyses highlight the value of EFNEP on the target clientele. A Virginia study found that for every $1 invested in EFNEP, $10.64 in benefits from reduced health care costs can be expected, (Lambur, Rajgopal, Lewis, Cox, & Ellerbrock, 2003). Additionally, an Iowa study showed $8.03 to $1 in benefits (Wessman, Betterley, & Jensen, 2002) and California research indicated $14.67 to each $1 spent in benefits (Joy, Pradhan & Goldman, 2006). Another study in Tennessee looked at food expenditures and found that for
every $1 spent to implement EFNEP, $2.48 is saved on food expenditures. This reduces the
need for emergency food assistance and saves money for other necessities (Burney, 1998).

Learning and Change

Efforts to integrate development and learning in adulthood have been a challenge, and
have generally focused on how we physically age, our psychological makeup, and more recently
on how social and cultural forces shape our development (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Merriam &
Caffarella (1999) state, “the concept of development, as with learning, is most often equated with
change (p. 93). The authors categorized theories of learning and behavior into five basic
orientations: (1) behaviorist, (2) cognitivist, (3) humanist, (4) social learning, and (5)
constructivist (p. 250).

For this study, literature was reviewed which deals with learning and change as it relates
to psychological and social change. These theories have implications for studying the
psychosocial change in EFNEP paraprofessionals.

Psychological Theories of Individual Change

A variety of concepts have been identified concerning the progression of psychological
development, including theories of ego development (Erikson, 1963; Loevinger, 1976), self
development (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1973), and faith and spiritual development (Fowler,
1981; Jones, 1995). All of these authors base their work on the “changing nature of the internal
self as we develop” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 100).

In summarizing developmental characteristics of psychological change, Merriam &
Caffarella (1999) observe:
Psychological changes in adulthood...can be loosely grouped into three categories: sequential, life events and transitions, and relational models of development. The sequential models of development of Levinson, Gould, Erikson, Kohlberg, and others attempt to delineate the common themes of adult life according to what phase or stage of life one is in (p. 115).

The authors describe life events as “happenings that shape people’s lives” (p. 115). They link learning in times of transition to work and family, and continue by stating,

Although life events are usually not thought of as connecting to specific age periods, some seem to be tied more to age than others. Transitions, which are precipitated by life events or even nonevents, are processes that over time can, but not necessarily do, lead to learning and change. Adults often engage in learning as one way to cope with the life events they encounter (p. 115).

In their discussion of relational models of development, Merriam & Caffarella (1999) found that relationships are pivotal to development. They view the relational model as one which “emphasizes that our sense of self is continuously formed in connection to others, with empathic attunement to others as central” (p. 116).

Josselson (1987, 1996) found four elements in the formation of identity. These were classified as guardian, pathmaker, searcher and drifter. Guardians were described as those who have always known who they are and where they are going. Pathmakers are those who try out various ways (or paths) of who they are and what they believe before making any commitments to their being or beliefs. Those who have an ongoing struggle with making choices about their identity are classified as searchers. Even though they are uncertain about who they are and what they want to be, they are in search of trying to figure it out. Finally, drifters don’t make
commitments, and don’t struggle to make them either. They tend to live by impulse of the moment. Josselson (1996) observes that adults can move in and out of these different identities. She states that “one’s identity continues to be modified through adult life....Identity is always both product and process, it embodies continuity and change” (p. 40).

Another way of looking at the psychological aspect of change is through a humanist, or affective orientation. “Humanist theories consider learning from the perspective of the human potential for growth” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 256). One of the most commonly cited scholars connected to humanist theories has been Maslow (1970) and his hierarchy of needs. With humanist theories of learning, self-actualization is the intended goal. However, there are other objectives noted by Merriam & Caffarella (1999), such as:

1. The discovery of a vocation or destiny.
2. The knowledge or acquisition of a set of values.
3. The realization of life as precious.
4. The acquisition of peak experiences.
5. A sense of accomplishment.
6. The satisfaction of psychological needs.
7. The refreshing of consciousness to an awareness of the beauty and wonder of life.
8. The control of impulses.
9. The grappling with the critical existential problems of life.
10. Learning to choose discriminatively (p. 257).

Wallach (2002) conducted a study to determine the psychological empowerment among paraprofessionals within human service organizations. The study assessed the effect of job dimensions, including role ambiguity, role overload, participatory decision making, supervisor-
supervisee relationship and peer support on empowerment. The results provided support for relationships between job dimensions and empowerment. Job dimensions which may affect empowerment included staff role assignment, opportunities for participation in decision making, positive supervisory relationships and peer relationships. Mondore (2002) found that high involvement in work processes led to an increase in the individual’s self-esteem and motivation. Walkley (1997) defined self-efficacy as “the perception or judgment of one’s ability to perform a certain action successfully or to control one’s circumstances.”

Social Theories of Individual Change

Merriam & Caffarella (1999) note that there has been an “increasing recognition that explaining development in adulthood is more than just focusing on the individualized self. Rather, emphasis has been placed on our collective selves as defined by society” (p. 117). One of the examples they cite is of “poor people [who] become invisible in the social structure, other than being told regularly to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and get their lives in order” (p. 118). They distinguish the sociocultural perspective of adult development as one which moves from focusing on how “development is primarily an internal process to one which acknowledges the importance of the social world in which we live” (p. 118).

As cited in Merriam & Caffarella (1999, p. 118), scholars such as Dannefer (1984, 1989, 1996) and Levenson & Crumpler (1996) recognize that the world around us defines us as “who we are, what our ethnic backgrounds are, and our sexual orientation.” Social roles are defined as both positions and associated expectations determined primarily by normative beliefs held by society (Hughes & Graham, 1990).

The idea that learning in adulthood is related to the taking on of a societal role has a long history in adult education. Merriam & Caffarella (1999) point out that “change in adulthood is
determined more by sociocultural factors such as social roles, race, and gender, than by individual maturation” (p.136). Payne, Fuqua, & Canegami (1997), on the issue of gender and society, state “gender expectations emerge from socialization in society, family educational institutions, and religious institutions” (p. 147).

Kidd (1973), based on the work of Malcom Knowles, implied that learning programs could be implemented to address competencies for adults going through role changes, or wishing to become more adept in their current role. As cited in Merriam & Caffarella (1999), Chávez, Guido-DiBrito & Mallory (1996) suggested a model of learning in a social context with their “Frameworks in Learning to Value the Other.” Their model presents stages which fall into five periods, (1) unawareness, (2) awareness, (3) questioning and self exploration, (4) risk-taking and other exploration, and (5) integration. Rosenberg (2003), outlines three areas of effort for social change that is supported by spiritual growth. The author credits the works of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King as the foundation of his theory. The three areas of change that Rosenberg (2003) identified were (1) a change within ourselves, (2) sharing the change with others, and (3) education of ourselves and others.

Collazo, et al. (1993) published helping models based on social predictors. Their study was based on Expanded Food & Nutrition Education (EFNEP) paraprofessional’s interactions with clients in “expert” roles and in “empowerment” roles. The core assumption of the “expert model” is that the people with the problems are not responsible for the direction of the outcomes of the problems. Rather, the expert will help change the problem. On the other hand, the “empowerment model,” is based on the assumption that clients are responsible, at least in part, for the outcome of their problem. This more accepted model, by these authors, places the
paraprofessional as a collaborator both with the professional and the client. Their findings held implications for training EFNEP paraprofessionals.

The empowerment model requires a broader range of in service training topics than the expert model since staff members are constantly expanding and experimenting with new ideas and approaches to problems. Training must also focus on critical thinking and problem-solving skills as well as content knowledge (¶ 18).

There are five additional theories which have implications for research regarding social change in EFNEP paraprofessionals. These are (1) situated cognition, (2) learning in the workplace, (3) informal and incidental learning, (4) emancipatory learning, and (5) transformative learning.

Situated cognition is an area of learning research which may be linked to adult education’s experiential emphasis on learning (Wilson, 1993). There are three assumptions about situated cognition which may relate to this study. First, is the idea that learning and thinking in the everyday world is a social activity. Second, adult’s ability to think and learn is structured by the availability of situationally provided “tools”. And third, human thinking is also structured by interaction within the setting (p. 72). Basically, situated cognition ties learning to experience. Hansman (2001) states, “the core idea in situated cognition is that learning is inherently social in nature. The nature of the interactions among learners, the tools they use within these interactions, the activity itself, and the social context in which the activity takes place shape learning” (p. 45).

with an emphasis on more informal, self-directed learning practices makes workplace learning a helpful semantic differentiation” (p. 3). Watkins states, “In the past, workplace learning was primarily skills training based on immediate job needs. In the future, workplace learning will become everyone’s responsibility and will be integrally tied to performance and production” (p. 15).

Marsick & Watkins (2001) discuss informal and incidental learning, and describe the theory as one which is “usually intentional but not highly structured” (p. 25). Examples the authors give include self-directed learning, networking, coaching, mentoring and performance planning which includes opportunities to review learning needs. “When people learn incidentally, their learning may be taken for granted, tacit, or unconscious” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 26).

Emancipatory learning is a theory of social change which can also inform this research. Emancipatory learning forms the base for empowerment. Adult educators often speak of empowering learners by helping them develop self awareness as well as social and political identity. Emancipatory learning takes place within the context of social and political transformation (Foley, 1998; Imel, 1999). According to Tisdell (1998), emancipatory learning theories “have begun to address issues around positionality, authority, voice, and the construction of knowledge” (p.153). Emancipatory learning may be viewed as radical by some. However, Thompson (2000) states, “the radical tradition in adult learning is concerned with how learning, knowledge and education can be used to assist individuals and groups to overcome educational disadvantage, combat social exclusion and discrimination, and challenge economic and political inequalities” (p.1). This is in agreement with Loughlin’s 1994 study in which she found that through emancipatory learning learners are able to become more engaged in social
action to make changes. Emancipatory learning is relevant to this study since it examines a process by which individuals with the “least power in society gain more autonomy and independence, more control over their own lives” and are empowered “to bring about change of greater equality and social justice” (Thompson, 2000).

It is transformative learning that holds the greatest implication for this study. Mezirow’s theory of adult transformative learning labels remarkable change, having both personal and social dimensions (Nelson, 1997). The basis of Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning is life experience. He describes learning “as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). He describes meaning perspectives as “broad, generalized, orienting predispositions” (p. 163).

Meaning perspectives are the conduit through which adults interpret the world. Furthermore, learning can consist of a change in one’s beliefs or attitudes, or can lead to an entirely new perspective on life. Mezirow (1990) observes that “no need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experience” (p. 11). Development is described by Mezirow (1991) as an outcome of transformative learning. He states, that transformation is “the central process of adult development” (p. 155). In addition to the centrality of experience, Mezirow’s theory holds components of critical reflection and the transformative learning’s link to adult development. According to Nelson (1997), adult education approaches to transformative learning generally emphasize the interpretive role of critical reflection and critical thinking.

Franz (2003) explored learning in Extension staff partnerships that transform the individual, the partnership, and the organization. Three types of learning were identified
including “instrumental, communicative, and transformative learning” (¶ 13). The author found that transformative learning is “considered important for more integrated and inclusive thinking and decision making in individuals” (¶ 16).

Chapter Summary

Literature indicates that since most adults spend much of their time at their work, training and work experiences play an important role in their human development. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program provides the context for this study, and the diverse theories related to psychological and social change focusing on different aspects of human development provide the conceptual framework of this study of EFNEP paraprofessional educators. Literature also provides a base for the recognition that all of these developmental processes are uniquely interwoven.

EFNEP paraprofessionals work with low income families and are indigenous to the communities with which they work. They are trained in a very specific nutrition-content curriculum and are expected to teach concepts at the community level which will lead to behavioral changes with their student participants. It has been documented, in an early study (Hernecheck-Buck, 1986), that these participants make changes outside the realm of nutrition education, experiencing changes which may be considered psychological or social in nature. Likewise, an early study (Rauch, 1985) found some of these same constructs in the life patterns of EFNEP paraprofessionals.

Based on this literature review, transformative learning is the theory which holds the most relevance to explain change which is likely to occur in the EFNEP paraprofessionals. All of these findings indicate the need for this study in order to identify factors related to change which
EFNEP paraprofessionals undergo, and discover the connection between training and work experience and their personal development.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The strength of the EFNEP program is in its unique approach to reaching families through the use of paraprofessionals who are indigenous to the target population. Paraprofessionals are hired and trained to conduct educational intervention programs in local communities. There is very little documentation concerning the effect that EFNEP has on the paraprofessionals who are trained and conduct these programs. Consequently, this study has explored the role of the EFNEP paraprofessional, and the individual change which they incur as a result of their involvement in the program. Documentation was needed to show the comprehensive impact of the EFNEP program on the paraprofessional, including characteristics which are psychosocial in nature.

The purpose of this study was to show how training and work experience of the EFNEP paraprofessional can effect their individual change and personal development. This study identified factors of psychosocial change which EFNEP paraprofessionals undergo as a result of their training and work experience. Research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the psychosocial impact of the EFNEP training and work experience on the EFNEP paraprofessional?

2. What factors contribute to the psychosocial impact on the EFNEP paraprofessional?

In this chapter, a description of how the study was conducted will be given. The design of the study will be explained as well as the sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability issues, as well as researcher’s bias and assumptions.
Design of the Study

The intention of this study was to understand the change which the EFNEP paraprofessionals undergo as a result of their training and work experience. A constructionist view may be used in understanding this process. According to Crotty (1998), change is a result of our engagement with our world. “It is the view that all knowledge and all meaningful reality is contingent upon human practice, being constructed through interaction between human beings and their worlds, and developed and transmitted within their social context” (Crotty, 2003, p.42). With the constructionist theoretical perspective in mind, the design of this study was qualitative. Qualitative research was ideal for this study since it enlisted one of the basic characteristics: to “strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences” (Merriam, 2002, p. 4).

Merriam (2002) goes on to explain that “often qualitative researchers undertake a qualitative study because there is a lack of theory or an existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon...therefore, another important characteristic of qualitative research is that the process is inductive; that is, researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively deriving postulates or hypotheses to be tested” (p. 5). That was the case of this study: seeking to understand how EFNEP paraprofessionals make meaning of their training and work experiences, and to know if experiences in EFNEP change the lives of EFNEP paraprofessionals.

Another characteristic of qualitative research is that “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis” (Merriam, 2002, p.5). The benefit of the human instrument, over that of surveys or other written instruments, is the ability to be “immediately responsive and adaptive (p.5). Asking EFNEP paraprofessionals to disclose personal
information about their lives can be a sensitive issue. Since these paraprofessionals recognized the researcher as part of the EFNEP team, there was already an established rapport. According to Glesne (1999), “people will talk more willingly about their personal or sensitive issues once they know you” (p. 99). Because of this, I had the ability to engage the paraprofessionals in stories about their experiences. According to Merriam (2002), these richly descriptive stories are the product of the qualitative inquiry.

Sample Selection

As an EFNEP Extension Agent, my job responsibility includes training and support of six EFNEP paraprofessionals housed in a cluster of counties in the Northeast Georgia Extension district. Through meetings and trainings, there is continued contact with other EFNEP paraprofessionals throughout the state. Because of an on-going working relationship with the seven other EFNEP Extension agent professionals who train and supervise these paraprofessionals, it was possible to obtain agreement from them to help identify and recruit participants. The total population of paraprofessionals in all Georgia counties is fifty six.

The study was accomplished through the use of focus groups. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension is divided into four administrative regions: Northeast, Northwest, Southeast and Southwest. There were four focus groups conducted, one from each of the regions in the state. The four areas that were selected for the focus groups were comprised of clusters of multiple counties. The cluster counties were selected from the four regions and all of the paraprofessionals from those clustered areas were invited. All of the paraprofessionals invited did attend except for one who missed work due to illness that day. The total sample size for this study was twenty participants.
Data Collection

As previously stated, data were collected through the use of focus groups. Krueger & Casey (2000) define focus groups as:

a special type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition, and procedures. The purpose of a focus group is to listen and gather information. It is a way to better understand how people feel or think about an issue, product, or service. Participants are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group (p. 4).

According to Krueger & Casey (2000), focus groups have become popular over the past three decades. They note that the intent of the focus group is to promote self-disclosure among participants in that they encourage people to do and say what they really think and feel. The authors go on to explain that the reason focus groups work so well is because they make the participants feel comfortable.

Our goal is to create a comfortable, permissive environment in focus groups. We always select participants who have something in common, and we tell them they have this thing in common. The moderator is not in a position of power or influence and encourages comments of all types – positive and negative. The interviewer is careful not to make judgments about responses and to control body language that might communicate approval or disapproval. The role of the moderator is to ask questions, listen, keep the conversation on track, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. The groups are held in locations where the participants will be comfortable….Often when talking to participants, we call it a small group discussion, rather than a focus group, so the process
doesn’t seem intimidating or mysterious. We try to make people feel comfortable (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 9).

Focus groups provide qualitative data. They usually involve a small number of people who are similar to each other in a way that is important to the researcher. The nature of the homogeneity is determined by the purpose of the study. The researcher compares and contrasts data collected from at least three focus groups. “The focus group presents a more natural environment than that of an individual interview because participants are influencing and influenced by others – just as they are in life” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 11). Morgan (1997) discusses the advantage of focus groups, compared to that of one-on-one interviews. He suggests that the focus group is the “opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time” (Morgan, 1997, p. 8). According to the author, the three major advantages of focus groups are “(a) an ability to collect data on a larger range of behaviors, (b) a greater variety of interactions with the study participants, and (c) a more open discussion of the research topic” (Morgan, 1997, p. 8).

In this study, the length of each focus group was approximately two hours, beginning mid-morning. Arrangements were made with each of the EFNEP Extension Agents involved allowing the paraprofessionals the opportunity to participate in the focus groups during regular work time. Light refreshments were provided before the focus groups began, and lunch was also provided for the participants following the conclusion of each group session. I was successful in acquiring a small grant from a professional association to offset these expenses as well as expenses incurred for overnight lodging required to travel to two of the locations.

A preliminary focus group was held prior to data collection to develop and refine the interview protocol. None of the participants in the preliminary focus group were a part of the
four study focus groups. Dialogue in this preliminary focus group directed the development of
the interview guide which included eight probing discussion questions.

Participants in the study were asked to respond to questions from the developed interview
guide that were open-ended to allow respondents the opportunity to express views and share
stories which they felt were relevant. In accordance with the process that both Krueger & Casey
(2000) and Morgan (1997) discuss, the procedure for each focus group was as follows:

1) EFNEP Extension agents were contacted in the targeted areas, and approval was
gained to conduct the focus groups.

2) Participants were invited to the focus groups by the EFNEP Extension agent with
whom they work.

3) Personal contacts were then made with the potential participants. Each participant
was written a personalized letter inviting them to the focus group and thanking them for
their committed participation. Information about the date, time and location of the focus
group meeting in their area was included.

4) A few days prior to the focus group, the EFNEP Extension agent and the study
participants received a reminder telephone call.

5) On the day of the focus group, participants were greeted when they arrived, and
offered light refreshments as the group chatted informally. Having insider knowledge of
the culture of EFNEP made me realize that a home-baked product would generate a more
comfortable environment for the paraprofessionals. So, a healthy snack was prepared and
the recipe was shared.

6) The supervising agent was excused before the focus group discussion began.
7) Before beginning with interview questions, each participant was asked to complete a consent form and a demographic information sheet. These two documents were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Georgia are included as Appendices A and B.

8) Following the interview guide, this researcher directed the discussion, keeping the conversation flowing, and taking notes. The interview guide was also approved by the UGA Institutional Review Board and is included as Appendix C. Comprehensive notes were taken and two tape recorders were operated to prevent lack of data collection due to equipment failure.

9) At the conclusion of the focus groups, participants were thanked and invited to the lunch which had been pre-arranged to be delivered to the location. The supervising EFNEP agent had assisted with the arrangements, and joined the group for the lunch. Additionally, as another thank you token, a booklet of poems was prepared which was given to each participant. Earlier in the year all EFNEP agents and paraprofessionals had attended the statewide EFNEP continuing education conference held on the University of Georgia campus. Joye Norris, a renowned speaker and author who specializes in adult education methods was the keynote speaker. Norris inspired the group by dividing everyone into teams with the challenge of developing a poem beginning with the phrase “What if?” The poems were written on flipchart pages and posted around the room. I realized then the compilation of these poems would make a meaningful gift to give in the focus groups which would take place later in the year. After the session, I inquired about the flipchart pages and was given the poems. The poems were compiled in the form of small booklets, and one was given to each participant and the supervising agents. As
expected, all were delighted by the memory of the activity and the inspirational poems which had been created. A compilation of these poems is included as Appendix D.

10) Afterward, an individualized hand-written thank you note was sent to each of the participants and supervising agents.

11) Each participant will be given a “summary of findings” document at the conclusion of the dissertation process.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data is the process of compiling all the research notes into a product that makes sense. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis correspond as a simultaneous activity (Merriam, 1998). Krueger & Casey (2000) affirm that focus group analysis is systematic, verifiable, and continuous, with the foundation for data analysis laid before the first focus group takes place. This emerges through selecting the qualities needed in participants, configuring groups, and writing the questions. Questions which are sequentially arranged allow participants to build on comments by other participants. Because of this, responses to later questions are typically critical to the study. The key components of analyzing the data include the tapes, transcripts and notes.

The Constant Comparative method was chosen for this study. It is a systematic process for analyzing data which involves constantly comparing occurrences in the data in order to develop themes or categories (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Analysis was begun by listening to the four tapes and developing a transcript of each focus group. The first step was to number each line in the transcripts so that entries could easily be found. Then, the font color of each of the documents was changed so that there would be four different colored transcripts. Next, the four transcripts were printed and read thoroughly. While
reading, themes began to develop in which entries could be grouped together, and notations were made in the margins. Then, with the aid of a word processor, all four transcripts were opened and a fifth document was begun in which I used to copy and paste the entries into categories. Since the four transcripts had been color coded, it was possible to place the entries into categories yet still identify the focus group from which the statement had originated. However, even with the lines numbered I found myself scaling up and down the computer screen looking for entries. So, to ease the process I went back to the paper copies and cut entries into strips and then taped them together by themes. This made the copy and paste process on the word processor much simpler since there was a hard copy to use as a guide with the color coded themes grouped together and the lines numbered. This process was similar to the “long-table approach” described by Krueger & Casey (2000).

The next step in the process was to begin analysis of specific questions. Krueger & Casey (2000) suggest that a descriptive summary be written of what each group said in response to a question. From there, the authors suggest to look at factors such as frequency (how many times a comment is made), specificity (how much detail is given), emotion (statements which show emotion, enthusiasm, passion, or intensity), and extensiveness (how many people made a similar comment). Since a visual approach to analysis had been taken, it was feasible to break the data into manageable chunks, and reach logical conclusions and recommendations.

Validity and Reliability

In research, issues of validity and reliability must be addressed. Merriam & Simpson (2000) describe two types of validity, internal and external. Internal validity considers the question of whether or not the researcher’s observations are consistent with reality. These authors state,
Qualitative inquiry assumes that there are multiple, changing realities and that individuals have their own unique constructions of reality. The understanding or reality in qualitative research is really the researcher’s interpretation of participant’s interpretations or understanding the perspectives of those involved, uncovering the complexity of human behavior in context and presenting a holistic interpretation of what is happening. Because qualitative researchers are the primary instruments for data collection and analysis, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through observations and interviews (p. 25).

According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), a researcher’s perspective may influence interpretation of the data and therefore put internal validity at risk. Being aware of this issue, I mentally distanced myself as a researcher from that of an EFNEP Extension agent by allowing the transcripts to drive the themes and conclusions rather than the history I have with the organization.

External validity focuses on whether or not results can be transferred to other studies (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). To make the findings useful to other groups or settings, an effort was made to include as much description and detail as possible in the conclusions section. This is the avenue by which readers will understand how conclusions were reached and relevance to their situation may be ascertained.

Merriam & Simpson (2000) also discuss reliability. The purpose of reliability is to ensure that the findings of a study can be replicated. By doing things in a consistent manner in regard to purpose, size and composition of the groups, reliability will be taken into consideration. Consistency was attended to by 1) following detailed procedural steps, 2) following an interview guide in order to ask each group the same questions, 3) having myself,
the researcher, to be the only person asking interview questions, 4) timing of the four focus
groups to be held within a close period of time, and by 5) targeting participants who have the
characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the study.

Bias and Assumptions

The purpose of this study was to show how training and work experience of the EFNEP
paraprofessional can effect their individual change and personal development, particularly that of
a psychosocial nature. Merriam (1998) predicts that the personal assumptions of the researcher
will be a source of bias. Being an EFNEP Extension agent presumably led to some bias.
However, allowing the data to guide the conclusions acknowledges potential bias.

The initial challenge was that of familiarity with the program. EFNEP is a familiar
environment for me, so it was imperative to remain open-minded about the issues that were
discussed as the paraprofessionals expressed their stories of change. A second bias was my zeal
to tell these women’s stories. There are so many stories of change that EFNEP participants
undergo as a result of the program. These are relayed through ongoing reports and impact
statements that are submitted to administration. However, due to involvement with the program,
I have personally witnessed change which has occurred in the lives of paraprofessionals as well.
It was my desire that these observations be studied and the stories told about the women who
deliver the EFNEP programs in their community. However, the inevitable subjection due to my
current role in EFNEP can be viewed as a strength since I am familiar with history, structure,
and work processes.

Chapter Summary

This research was a qualitative study that explored the psychosocial characteristics of
EFNEP paraprofessionals. The intention of the study was to understand change which the
EFNEP paraprofessionals undergo as a result of their training and work experience. Qualitative methodology was accomplished through the use of focus groups. There were four focus groups conducted, one in each of the four Georgia Cooperative Extension regions, with a total sample size of twenty participants. The constant comparative approach was utilized as the method of data analysis. By conducting the study in a consistent manner, by following detailed procedural steps, and by clarifying my bias and assumptions as the researcher, reliability and validity have been addressed.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the study designed to understand how training and work experience of the EFNEP paraprofessional can effect their individual change and personal development. The purpose of the study was to identify significant factors of psychosocial change which EFNEP paraprofessionals undergo as a result of their training and work experience. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What is the psychosocial impact of the EFNEP training and work experience on the EFNEP paraprofessional?

2. What factors contribute to the psychosocial impact on the EFNEP paraprofessional?

For this study, four focus groups were held representing the four quadrants of Georgia: Northeast, Northwest, Southeast and Southwest. Specifically, these focus groups took place in Augusta, Decatur, Savannah and Albany, Georgia. Twenty EFNEP paraprofessionals participated in the focus groups. To protect the identity of participating paraprofessionals, these focus groups will be referred to as Group A, Group B, Group C, and Group D. Additionally, each participant has been assigned a pseudonym.

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part 1 presents the profiles of the four focus groups. Part 2 reports the research findings, explained by supporting data from the focus groups.
Part 1: Focus Group Profiles

This section presents the profiles of the four focus groups and the paraprofessionals who participated in each. The four focus groups were held between October 29, 2006 and December 1, 2006. The length of each focus group was approximately two hours. Each of the focus groups took place in Cooperative Extension offices. Supervising Extension Agents in these areas helped with arrangements, but did not participate in the focus groups.

Basic demographic information is presented including age, race/ethnicity, gender, education, number of years lived in their community, whether the community is urban or rural, number of years worked for EFNEP, and total household income. At the time of this study, all EFNEP paraprofessionals in Georgia are female; therefore, all participants in the focus groups are female. The EFNEP program in Georgia generally targets urban areas of the state. However, in clusters of counties served by a supervising agent, there are a few outlying counties which are more rural in nature. Table 1 summarizes, and gives an overview, of the demographic information.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Years in Community</th>
<th>Urban or Rural</th>
<th>Years in EFNEP</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gabriella</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Tech school</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justine</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawna</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5 ½</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus Group A was conducted on October 29, 2006. The group included Gabriella, Naomi, Justine, and Lily. Gabriella is a 46 year old, married, Hispanic female. She has lived in her urban community for fourteen years, and has worked for EFNEP for one year. Before working with EFNEP, she worked with another Extension food & nutrition education program. She graduated from a technical college. Naomi is a 63 year old, married, African American female. She has lived in her urban community for twelve years, and has worked for EFNEP for ten years. She has completed some college coursework. Justine is a 45 year old, married, African American female. She has lived in her urban community for thirty years, and has worked for EFNEP for six years. She has also completed some college coursework. Lily is a 65
year old, single, African American female. She has lived in her urban community for thirty years, has worked for EFNEP for nineteen years, and has completed some college coursework.

Focus Group B was conducted on November 9, 2006. The group included Shawna, Daisy, Grace, and Jane. Shawna is a 35 year old, married, African American female. She has lived in her urban community for thirty four years, and has worked for EFNEP for two months. She has completed some college coursework. Daisy is a 49 year old, married, African American female. She has lived in her urban community for forty nine years, has worked for EFNEP for two years, and has completed some college coursework. Before working with EFNEP, she worked with another government program which targets low income families. Grace is a 49 year old, married, African American female. She has lived in her urban community for seventeen years, has worked for EFNEP for five and one-half years, and has completed some college coursework. Jane is a 54 year old, married, white female. She has lived in her rural community for fifty two years, and has worked for EFNEP for one year. She is a high school graduate. Before working with EFNEP, she worked with another Extension food & nutrition education program.

Focus Group C was conducted on November 17, 2006. The group included Darlene, Nancy, Lacey, Pamela, Olivia, Marcella, and Lucida. Darlene is a 47 year old, married, African American female. She has lived in her urban community for fourteen years, and has worked for EFNEP for eight years. She has completed some college coursework. Nancy is a 58 year old, married, white female. She has lived in her rural community for forty nine years, and has worked for EFNEP for twenty years. She is a high school graduate. Lacey is a 66 year old, married, African American female. She has lived in her rural community for forty two years, and has worked for EFNEP for one year. She graduated from college with a four-year degree.
Before working with EFNEP, she worked with another Extension food & nutrition education program. Pamela is a thirty eight year old, single, African American female. She has lived in her urban community for eleven years, and has worked for EFNEP for three years. She is currently working on a college degree. Olivia is a 64 year old, single, African American female. She has lived in her urban community for sixty years, has worked for EFNEP for four years, and has completed some college coursework. Marcella is a 32 year old, married, Hispanic female. She has lived in her rural community for five years, and has worked for EFNEP for three years. She is currently working on a college degree. Lucida is a 31 year old, married, Hispanic female. She has lived in her rural community for six years, and has worked for EFNEP for one and one-half years. She is also currently working on a college degree.

Focus Group D was conducted on December 1, 2006. The group included Sally, Wilma, Arielle, Rita, and Catalina. Sally is a 40 year old, married, white female. She has lived in her rural community for forty years, and has worked for EFNEP for sixteen and one-half years. She has some college coursework. Wilma is a 49 year old, married, African American female. She has lived in her urban community for four years, has worked for EFNEP for three years, and has also completed some college coursework. Arielle is a 50 year old, married, Hispanic female. She has lived in her urban community for four years, and has worked for EFNEP for three years. She is a high school graduate. Rita is a 51 year old, married, white female. She has lived in her rural community for fifty one years, and has worked for EFNEP for eight months. She has completed some coursework from a technical college. Catalina is a 57 year old, single, Hispanic female. She has lived in her urban community for one year, and has worked for EFNEP for six months. She graduated from a technical college.
Part 2: Findings

This section details the findings of the study in order to understand how training and work experience of the EFNEP paraprofessional can affect their individual change and personal development. The discussion will begin with categories of change which were identified in the data that will answer the research question, “What is the psychosocial impact of the EFNEP training and work experience on the EFNEP paraprofessional?” The chapter will conclude by discussing factors, identified in the data, which will answer the research question, “what factors contribute to the psychosocial impact on the EFNEP paraprofessional?”

Categories of Change

Categories of change were identified in the data that will answer the research question, “What is the psychosocial impact of the EFNEP training and work experience on the EFNEP paraprofessional?” These categories identified in the table below include 1) skills development, 2) community status, 3) relationship changes, 4) viewing others, 5) caring, and 6) self esteem.

Table 2

Categories of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Change</th>
<th>1) Skills Development</th>
<th>2) Community Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public speaking</td>
<td>Teaching skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching skills</td>
<td>Food behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food behavior</td>
<td>Nutrition knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition knowledge</td>
<td>Resource management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource management</td>
<td>Ability to deal with difficult situations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Viewing Others</td>
<td>5) Caring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Bonding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Self Esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Skills Development

In this section of the characteristics of change a number of skills will be presented which the paraprofessionals have gained as a result of their EFNEP experiences. These include public speaking, teaching skills, food behavior, nutrition knowledge, resource management, and the ability to deal with difficult situations.

Public Speaking.

EFNEP paraprofessionals are educators. However, very few begin the job with the skill of addressing an audience effectively. According to Gottlieb (2004), some studies have shown that the fear of public speaking is equal to, or even greater than, the fear of dying. Many of the paraprofessionals in the four focus groups admitted to being afraid to speak in front of a group when they were first hired. Some acknowledged that even though they have always liked to talk, standing in front of a group in a teaching role was an entirely new situation for them.

Daisy said, “If you were about to become a public speaker, or wishing to be, EFNEP is a wonderful place to start your training…everybody has those butterflies, but it enables you to strengthen your communication with your audience.” Sally voiced, “But public speaking was not something I was good at. So public speaking is one thing that I’ve gotten from EFNEP.” She went on to say, “I was just always a shy person…but now I don’t have a problem with it at all. It’s built my confidence. I’ve really come a long way.” Rita dittoed that by adding, “I’ve gotten better because at first I was really nervous.”

Teaching Skills.

When EFNEP paraprofessionals speak in front of a group, they are telling something that their audience needs to know. This means that they have progressed beyond being a mere public speaker into the role of teacher. Many of the paraprofessionals attributed their improved
teaching skills to their EFNEP experiences. Fourteen of the twenty paraprofessionals participating in the focus groups expressed that EFNEP had helped them become a good teacher. Jane, Grace, Daisy, Shawna, Gabriella, Naomi, Justine, Pamela, Marcella, Olivia, Lucida, Wilma, Sally, and Rita all revealed that EFNEP is the reason that they feel comfortable in their teaching role.

Daisy and Pamela expressed that they have gained the ability to adapt to the needs of their audiences. Wilma and Sally both said that they have become a better listener, and have used this skill to better serve the needs of their students. Wilma disclosed,

When you do this job, you have to become a teacher, a nurse, a confidant. You have to listen to what’s going on. Sometimes they will call me and make sure that I’m coming because they know I will listen and just so I can come there and they can tell me about what’s going on in their life. I mean, we do the classes, but you still have to listen to what these people have to say. If they got something pressing on their mind they’re not going to learn. If it takes 15 minutes of the class to talk to them and let them get whatever they got on their mind off, then that’s what I’ll do. Because I think we need to take care of their mind and their bodies.

Grace strives to put the needs of her students before her own needs: “I always have a positive attitude. You would never know what’s going on with me because I have a job to do and that’s I do. I can be tired and aching, but when I come into that classroom, you’d never know.”

Shawna, Grace and Daisy listen to their students as well, but they feel that they have gained the ability to steer their class in the right direction. If the discussion gets off track they have the capability to guide the discussion back to the nutrition topic. Daisy admits, “You have to have that interaction but you also have to remember what you’re there for. And bring that
conversation full circle back to nutrition.” Rita wants to make sure that she keeps her classes fun:

I think a lot of times when they hear the word class they think it’s like school. And a lot of them think that they will have to take a test. But, after they come and see that it is fun they relax. But you have to get them first. I think when they hear the word ‘class’ it scares them because they think it’s going to be like school.

Rita may not realize, but in this statement she has expressed the adult education principle of andragogy.

Grace, Gabriella, Olivia, Lucida and Sally have learned the importance of varying their teaching techniques. Grace uses role play and Sally uses games. Olivia practices a skill that she learned in a recent EFNEP training – music and exercise. She admits that it helps her as much as her students:

I’ve started using the music in my class. And when they come in I say, ‘Ok everybody, let’s get to moving.’ And I’ll put on a CD and start moving. We first do our breathing exercise. And they really like that. Shoot, it helps me too.

Gabriella and Lucida have gained an appreciation for using visuals in their classes. Lucida declared that the students like her classes and sometimes, “they like it so much that they don’t want to leave when the class is over.” Wilma enjoys incorporating some of her passions into her teaching: “Some of my passions are drawing, so I like to do my artwork and I write poetry and I write stories. And I try to put some of that in my teaching and I think it makes the class more enjoyable for them.”

Standing in front of a group and relating to students is only part of being a teacher. The EFNEP paraprofessionals know this firsthand. Justine admits that sometimes she has to do her
homework: “Some of the things they ask me about make me come back to research and that improves my knowledge…and then I have more knowledge to give. So in a way they [students] are educating me to want more education.”

Reports, and other office activities, are another aspect of teaching. When coming to work with EFNEP many of the paraprofessionals had never used a computer before. Rita stated that because of EFNEP, she “…got computer skills. I didn’t know anything about working with a computer. And then I got this job. And now I can enter data in the computer and type up my travel. I can also type handouts and things.” These statements from the paraprofessionals prove that EFNEP is very adept in building human capacity. Computer skills are very valuable in the 21st century. This is a skill that can make Rita more marketable if she has the desire to move on to a different job.

Food Behavior.

Improved behavior related to food is another skill that EFNEP paraprofessionals gain on the job. It was never the intent of this study to focus on food behavior since there are a number of other studies which have already addressed, and documented, this point. However, there was so much data that came from the focus groups about changed food behavior that it could not be ignored as a characteristic of change. Every one of the focus group participants made statements concerning improved food practices. In other words, one hundred percent of the participants made positive improvements in their food behavior based on their involvement in the EFNEP program. This shows that the paraprofessionals improve in the same concepts they instill in their students.

Grace began the discussion in her group by stating, “I took the knowledge that I have with EFNEP and I transferred it into my personal Life.” She went on to explain that she now
cuts back on salt in the food that she prepares for her family. She recognizes that this, “can only improve their health as well as, you know, hypertension, diabetes, whatever they may incur or encounter during life.” Daisy and Olivia expressed that they use many of the EFNEP recipes in the meals they prepare for their family. Daisy stated, “in order for you to believe what you’re doing you have to practice it as well and that will convey over to your clients.” Jane and Shawna both discussed the treats that she gave to children during the recent Halloween season. Jane handed out a glove filled with popcorn. Shawna prepared a large pot of chili and served the trick-o-treaters. They both admitted that before coming to work with EFNEP, they gave the more common candy treats. Shawna has also begun substituting ground turkey for the ground beef that she once used for grilling burgers. She shared, with pride, that her family says ‘they are really good.” Jane laughed when she announced that she “tricks” her husband: “When he drinks down his [whole] milk, I pour mine [low fat] in there.”

Naomi admitted that she now does a better job of controlling her hypertension by cutting down on fat and salt:

EFNEP helped me learn about the food that I eat. I was a person that really, really liked bacon. Then I discovered that bacon was one of the things that elevated my blood pressure. So now I tell people that have hypertension to make sure that what you’re eating is not elevating the blood pressure. Coffee will elevate my blood pressure. All the sodium I used to put in food. I no longer cook that way. It has changed my cooking behavior…it really changed me. I feel better because I’ve learned to eat better. And I’m telling other people that have other ailments. And, I’ve learned how important water is, because I was a person that didn’t drink water. And now I’ve learned that water is good. It helps to flush my kidneys. And, you know, by having hypertension that’s one of the
things that usually will follow is kidney failure. I am very, very conscious now of what I eat.

Naomi continued to be very vocal about her improved food behavior:

I don’t think I would have even had a clue if I had not started working for EFNEP because I would not have known the things I know about food…I thought I could eat what I wanted, as much as I wanted and it really wasn’t doing my body any good. And when I started with EFNEP I found out that I was crazy. If I had known better a long time ago, I would have done better. I really would have. And that’s what I tell people now. When you’re young and you say ‘I can eat this and I can eat that’ I mean you may not see any weight coming on but there’s other things that it does other than put on weight. So, EFNEP helped me. It helped me. I mean, it really did, it helped me.

Lily and Justine have increased the variety of foods they eat. Justine has also learned more about the portion sizes of the food she eats. Lacey, Sally, and Arielle understand how to read a food label now. Lacey also feels that EFNEP has changed her life when it comes to food choices and exercise:

EFNEP has helped me change the way that I live – my lifestyle. How important it is to exercise. To make healthy eating choices and to look for the best bargains you can to help your family. And it helped me do that well. I wasn’t doing the right thing. And I’ll tell you the truth – it helped me cook better. Before I started I didn’t know how to cook that well. I really didn’t. And it actually helped me to make healthy cooking choices. I’m really surprised at myself, how much I have done.

Darlene is doing better with portion control: “I used to be real bad on the helping sizes but now I do better with portion control. The more I teach, the more it becomes a part of me.”
Gabriella grew up in a Latin country. She expressed her reason for increasing vegetables in her diet and the meals she cooks for her family. “I have started to eat more vegetables. In my country we don’t have the conditions to grow the vegetables so we don’t eat them. But now we’re here and we have vegetables and I can tell my people what they get from the vegetables.”

Pamela, Nancy, Marcella, Lacey and Lucida told that they stopped thawing meat on the counter, and stopped letting food sit out for extended periods, as a result of their involvement with EFNEP. Lacey disclosed, “I’m very conscious about leaving food out, how long it’s been. And that’s one thing EFNEP has really taught me. I wasn’t that conscious before. We’d leave our chicken out all day…but I wouldn’t dare do that any more.” Rita told that she has stopped preparing recipes that call for raw eggs, and added, “You think I’d do that now? No way!” Additionally, Marcella voiced that she now uses a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of meat before feeding it to her family. Wilma verbalized that she began eating breakfast as a result of EFNEP. Grace summarized the sentiments of all the others. She tells people, “If I knew then what I know now, I would be doing things this way and that way. But, I think that knowledge gets you coming along and then you start to practice.”

**Nutrition Knowledge.**

Just as in food behavior, it was not the intention of this study to record skills related to nutrition knowledge change since this also has been documented in other studies. However, this too is voiced strongly in the data. Grace, Gabriella, Justine, Naomi, Darlene, Rita, and Arielle all articulated their change in knowledge about nutrition, representing all four of the focus groups. Grace feels good that she has increased knowledge that she can share with others:

> Because when folks see me…they know I’m going to be talking about nutrition so they start asking questions. And that’s a good way for us to recruit…it can only advance or
improve my knowledge because what I did not know then I know now and I can tell it to somebody. And I feel good when they come back and tell me it has made an impact on their life. And we get that all the time.

This impact on the lives of others is a natural result of their nutrition knowledge change.

Justine stated, “Some of the things they ask me about makes me come back to research and that improves my knowledge.” Naomi is proud that she knows about the nutrients found in vegetables: “I ate vegetables but I didn’t know the nutrients that are in them. I didn’t know why I ate them. I didn’t know how much of them I needed. I didn’t know that when I ate green vegetables I was getting vitamin A but I ate the collard greens and the turnip greens. But I didn’t know why. I ate them because they tasted good to me.” Both Darlene and Rita have increased knowledge about food safety. Darlene recounted, “I’ve really gained a lot of knowledge about food safety and the different types of bacteria and how they can make you sick.” All these statements made evident, and validated other studies, the fact that the paraprofessionals have experienced both behavior and knowledge change.

Resource Management.

Resource management is another area in which the paraprofessionals have experienced change. Lacey pointed out that she has “…learned how to stretch my food dollar. I never used to plan my menus for a week but I do now. I’m more conscious about how to save food dollars so I can put it toward some other need I have.” Wilma makes her own spaghetti sauce. She related that it was not only cheaper, but had less sodium. Pamela has changed, and is no longer wasteful of food:

Now at home I tell [my family] that if there is food left, it can be stretched to another meal. Whether you’re on food stamps or have money for food, throwing away food is
like throwing away money. It could be somebody’s lunch for the next day. It could be another supper or breakfast. Especially when we’re running low on funds and groceries are running out…You know everything is so expensive now. I try to cut corners anyway I can. And that’s what I stress to my clients too. Use coupons; don’t be embarrassed to take a calculator. You know, budget before you go in the store. Use your shopping list – I do. Those little grocery lists that we give out [an EFNEP incentive], I use them too when I go shopping. And then when I have a little money left over, I can use that to buy something I want.

Ability to Deal with Difficult Situations.

Data from the focus groups also show that the paraprofessionals change in their ability to deal with difficult situations. Jane, Grace, Arielle, and Daisy have each had to deal with class members who are disruptive. Wilma and Sally have experienced fights among class members. Sally said, “I have learned how to deal with difficult situations. Some times they want to get in fights but I never tell on them because then they won’t trust me and learn what I have to say.” Wilma works with women who live together in rehabilitation housing. She added,

I’ve had a physical fight one time. I wasn’t going to get in the middle of it. But the girls handled it themselves. Some of the girls held one of them back and the other girls held the other one back. And I told them that nothing is worth getting yourself put out, because the director of that program has a zero tolerance for things like that. I told them that all you live together in this house and y’all need to learn how to treat each other well. They have to learn how to take care of each other and build each other up.

Another difficult situation that paraprofessionals deal with is the obligation of maintaining the confidentiality of their students. Several of the paraprofessionals expressed that
class members may not believe that they hold confidences, and that suspicion threatens their relationship. Wilma stated, “I think they shy away from us because they know we’re working with other agencies and they think we’re telling things about them. So, a lot of times they’re a little shy about what they put on their enrollment forms. And they are afraid to let us come in their house because they are afraid that we are going to report that they’re living in the projects but they have a big screen TV, or that their boy friend lives with them.” The bilingual paraprofessionals talked about the concern in some of the Latino communities and the fear they have of not having official documentation. Sally has had relatives in her class, and later she felt that they reacted to her differently. She told them that it was confidential that they were there. “But I still think they think I told somebody.” Many of the issues that the paraprofessionals deal with are very sensitive. These conversations establish that they grow as individuals as they work through these difficult situations.

Another difficult situation where paraprofessionals experience change is in the desensitization to things they see, hear and even smell. Wilma told about a time where she was in the home of one of her students: “There was this one time when something crawled across my finger and it was a roach, and I just brushed it out of the way.” Sally described a situation that she considered as a transformation for her:

One of the worse things is the smell of some of the homes. I’m from a very poor background, but we were always clean. One day I was going to make pudding with this girl and I went in her kitchen and I was getting ready to set up and she had some dishes in her dish rack and I saw something crawling on them and it was maggots. I looked at her and said, ‘Do you know what these are?’ And, she said, ‘no, but I can’t seem to get rid of them.’ …I asked her if she had washed [the dishes], and she said that she had but she
didn’t have any dish detergent. And I asked her if she had any bleach, and she didn’t. So I told her that we couldn’t cook today. And she went next door and borrowed some bleach from her neighbor and we took all the dishes outside and hosed them down and put bleach on them. I’ve never forgotten that.

Community Status

In each of the focus groups the paraprofessionals discussed the increased status they now have in the community as a result of their involvement with EFNEP. This section will highlight statements which demonstrate this point. Comments will be featured that emphasize their recognition and how they feel about their community status will be discussed. Quotes will reveal that increased respect and position in the community have led others to perceive them as experts, have increased community leadership and partnership opportunities, and have increased their ability to network within the community.

Wilma exclaimed, “I’ve found that I’m somewhat of a celebrity.” She went on to say, “I can be somewhere like the grocery store or in a restaurant, and they start hollering, “Miss Wilma, Miss Wilma.” And my daughter told me, “every time we go somewhere, somebody’s hollering, Miss Wilma.” Sally agreed and added, “I’ve never thought of it, but that’s true, we are [a celebrity].” Lily, Naomi, Justine, Gabriella, Lucida, and Arielle all commented that they are more widely recognized in the community since coming to work with EFNEP. Lily, Naomi, Gabriella and Arielle have been recognized by adult students who have been enrolled in the EFNEP program.

Gabriella declared, “I go to the WIC department for teaching nutrition and everybody knows me and sometimes when I go to the grocery store or wherever I go there will be a lady to come up to me with her husband and she’ll say ‘excuse me, can you tell my husband what you
teach in the classes because he don’t want to believe me,’ so it makes me feel better and I see they get what I say because they are concerned about that [for their family].” Lily stated, “I have been places in the evening and have met them and they spoke to me and they go on to tell me that they’re doing what I said. A lot of times you see faces. You don’t remember the names but they’ll tell you exactly.” Naomi disclosed, “I had a girl come to me and say ‘Miss Naomi, you don’t remember me but I was in one of your groups years ago’ and she told me she was in our life skills program and that she was clean now. But, you know, you’ll see them and they’ll tell you they still remember the recipe and they are still doing some of the things you taught them to do.”

Arielle has been able to use her recognition in the community to gain the trust of individuals she has identified as potential students to enroll: “It’s a thing of trust. Because if you try to enroll someone and they don’t know you but somebody else does, then that helps. I know one time I was at the health department and I was trying to enroll this lady and she didn’t know me. But another lady had been through the classes and she talked to the lady. And then she enrolled in the class.”

Justine and Lucida have both been recognized out in the community by children who have been enrolled in the EFNEP youth groups. In each case, the students had been anxious to introduce their parents. When Justine is in church, “the kids will tell their mama, ‘oh, that’s the lady that came to our classroom. She taught us about food and nutrition. That’s the lady that brings the food, mama.’ And then they’ll say, ‘oh mama, she’s got good recipes.’” And according to Justine, that always leads to the parents asking for more recipes. Other paraprofessionals expressed, as well, that they are known and recognized in their community for their expertise.
The paraprofessionals all agreed that seeing their students in the community will always invoke some type of reaction, especially in the grocery store. When Olivia’s students have seen her in the grocery store they do not want her to look in their carts because they fear they have items that she would disapprove. On the other hand, Pamela has had students ask her to “look in my buggy to see how good I’m doing.” The paraprofessionals concur that they are seen as examples in both grocery stores and restaurants. Jane voiced her position in the community as an example to others: “you know, I’m in such a small county that when I go to the grocery store I am inevitably going to run into somebody. And they’re looking at my buggy to see what I have.” Sally said, “They do look at your buggy in the grocery store.” Daisy had the same opinion and declared, “That’s right. And you get it in restaurants too.” Arielle expressed, “I can’t eat in public because they always want to see what I’m eating.”

Along with recognition and status, the paraprofessionals have gained increased respect in the community. Lucida explained, “In the community they respect what we do. I, myself, have been asked by my church to share our program and talk about some of the things that we teach. And, also the younger people, when they see you out in the community they will come up and say they remember you and say that they had an apple, or they don’t eat any more candy – and that makes me feel good.” With increased respect, the paraprofessionals are called upon by community members to share their expertise. Grace, Naomi, Justine, Olivia, and Lucida all expressed that they had been called on by their church and other community groups to conduct nutrition classes or be in charge of food related events.

Grace talked about a cooking school she was asked to conduct at her church. She believes the pastor was shocked when he realized the extent of what she could offer to the congregational members:
I just had a meeting with one of the pastors at the church and they’re forming a cooking school and he had asked me to coordinate that cooking school. Well, I gave him an agenda, a proposal of what I thought we would be doing. And he said ‘you gonna be doing all this teaching in the cooking class?’ Cause his thing was he wanted me to come and cook so I said ‘well, I can’t just come and cook with the class without giving them the information that I have.’ So I laid it out and told him everything I was going to be doing and I told him the objectives and everything and he was just overwhelmed. And he said ‘Well I’m impressed.’ And he was ready to get started. He first wanted to wait till January. Now he wants to start the first week of December because he feels like the information needs to be gotten out to the people.

Justine chuckled as she spoke of all the leadership roles she has assumed because of the expertise her community has regarded in her: “I always find my name on the committee list for the food committee, where I didn’t even sign up. But they know I’m the nutrition one and they know that I know how to prepare whatever. And they know I’ll keep the food safe. So they put my name on stuff that I never even dreamed of being on.”

Community leadership for the paraprofessionals does not stop at the church. Olivia talked about her role in a local hospital, and Lucida discussed the numerous displays she’s been called upon to exhibit in the community. There was an abundance of stories told about newly found leadership roles. The paraprofessionals not only attributed their community status to their EFNEP involvement, but also how they are able to interact in community settings. Grace believes EFNEP has given her the confidence to be a better committee member and community leader. She stated, “I’m on a lot of committees and EFNEP has improved the way I speak up when I have something to say at the meetings. Now, I can speak with confidence where as
before I was more of an observer. Now I can speak up.” Justine also thinks her work with EFNEP has opened the doors for community leadership opportunities. She believes that, “being in EFNEP you do get put on committees because we are very outspoken, we are with the people. When you’re hands on with the people they are always picking us because we’re there – we know.”

Grace is another EFNEP paraprofessional who has gone beyond the call of duty. She has used her status in the community to network and build partnerships in order to help individuals and families in need beyond the realm of nutrition and food budgeting. Grace’s statement reveals another dimension of how EFNEP has instilled community leadership and the desire to give back to the community. She recalls,

With my GED students, sometimes the teacher may say to me, ‘I have a student that’s really in need of other assistance. She would really love to do nutrition, but she’s had her water cut off. Do you know of anybody?’ Because they know we’re out there. We network all the time. We resource with different people all the time. I mean, we’re partners with different people…I can refer her to someone else. She gets that taken care of and she comes back – then, she’s ready for nutrition…I know it’s sort of like that’s not your job. But I always look at it like if I can refer someone to get some assistance then that will bring them back to me.

Relationship Changes

One of the questions prepared for the interview guide was intended to allow the paraprofessionals an opportunity to talk about personal relationships, and changes that may have incurred due to their service with EFNEP. At the conclusion of the four focus groups the data was surprising. In all four focus groups the conversation almost entirely centered around food
safety and the impact that they had on family and community members based on their new knowledge about keeping foods safe to eat. Pamela spoke of the changes in her mother’s food safety behavior: “My mama will say, ‘that’s the way I’ve always done it and it ain’t killed me yet…she fusses for a little bit, but she’ll do it. This exemplifies that the paraprofessionals are now seen in a new light among their family members. They are listened to, and have assumed creditability amid the family ranks.

Lacey pointed out that her husband is the family member that cooks meat. She told that she has been giving him pointers on the proper way to cook and serve the meat: “At first it was kind of hard for him to make a change, but I just kept preaching to him how important food safety is. And he’s doing better.” Lucida also has a husband who is the meat-cook of the family. She recalls, “That’s one way that EFNEP changed my life. My husband, I told him everything that I have learned, and now he does the same thing. When he cooks he washes the sink and the counter and later he sanitizes everything.” Lucida has also worked to change food safety behavior in her family living in her native Latin country. She talked about a time when she went home to her country for a visit and found that her family members let frozen meat thaw on the counter. She was elated when she received a letter later telling her that they no longer thaw meat this way. Lucida has also made an impact on her children. She has a son who is only eight years old who refuses to eat a hamburger unless the temperature has been checked with a thermometer.

The focus group discussions further revealed that the paraprofessionals are so committed to preaching food safety that they can be quite adamant and ready to jump on family members that disregard their advice. This, in turn, creates discomfort and intimidation within the family and causes tension to form. Marcella has been working to change her husband:
It is really hard to teach food safety. When I started working for EFNEP, I learned the importance of taking care of the protein. And when I teach all these steps to my husband he does not agree with me. One weekend he was so happy to cook a deer. And when I got out of bed, the meat was on the counter. And I said to him ‘I know you did not leave that there all night.’ And he said, ‘yes I did.’ And I said ‘I’m not going to eat that.’ And he said ‘why?’ I said, ‘because there is a lot of bacteria.’ And he said, ‘I don’t see them.’ And he started to get mad and he called my boss lady.

Rita disclosed that she drives her husband “crazy” with her food safety messages: “My husband thinks I drive him crazy about telling him to wash his hands. If he comes in the kitchen to help me do something I’ll say ‘wash your hands.’ And he’ll say, ‘I just washed them.’ And I’ll say, ‘wash them again.’ It just drives him crazy.” One of Catalina’s relatives told her, “She could not even sleep at night thinking about the food safety because of things I told her.” Sally admits, “My family thinks I’m a fanatic about food safety.”

Similar relationship changes have occurred within the community and across the extended family. Church picnics and family reunions were other hot topics related to food safety knowledge and experiences which led to this conclusion. Lucida and Olivia had both worked to change habits at church gatherings where food had previously been allowed to sit out for long time periods. Pamela had successfully worked to change food safety behavior during family reunions when, here again, food had been allowed to sit out. She strongly believes that, “When you’re having a family gathering, you don’t want anyone to get sick.”

While food safety awareness has caused discomfort in some relationships, it has strengthened others. Interestingly, the paraprofessionals in one of the focus groups felt the safest with each other. Marcella said, “That’s why all of us here cook and eat lunch together. We feel
comfortable, because all of us, we know how to practice food safety.” Olivia followed up by saying, “I know that all the food we cook is fine. But at these other places, I eat what I carry.” At one point this same group began to discuss tailgate parties and how they would see men cooking without following food safety steps. On that subject, I thought Olivia said it best in summing up their collective feelings: “Well, they’re not married to anybody in EFNEP, because if they were married to someone in EFNEP they would be doing better!”

*Viewing Others*

These data also show that a number of the paraprofessionals have changed the way in which they view others. An African American EFNEP paraprofessional (not a part of this study) once disclosed that before coming to work with EFNEP she thought all white people were rich. She was surprised to find that there were white families who lived with limited resources. In order to discover if there were other EFNEP paraprofessionals who had similar experiences, an interview question was designed for the focus groups to assess this as a possible characteristic of change. The data found that some of the paraprofessionals did change the way in which they view others as a result of their EFNEP experiences. Lacey simply communicated: “EFNEP has helped me change the way I see people.” Olivia revealed, “You know, sometimes when you’re not in a situation you can be judgmental. And, I think EFNEP has really helped me to not be judgmental when it comes to our clients. You know, anybody could be put in that situation.” Pamela recounted what she has learned through her work in EFNEP, with a little help from her mother:

Well you can’t go into a room of people acting like you’re better than them…It’s like my mama always told me, ‘people are always watching you so be careful what you do. You don’t want to give off the wrong vibe. If they think you’re acting like you think you’re
too classy, then they might shut you down.’…Because no one knows what the future holds. Even though we may have now, we may not have next week. Anything can happen. Changes can come about at any time. I have a lot of single parent families – and I’m a single parent. And a lot of times people look down on them. I try to be as supportive as I can because they already don’t have. They don’t need any more negative or disillusionment. So, I try to be positive and give them something to look forward to.

There is another way in which EFNEP has changed the way that paraprofessionals view others. The program has opened the eyes of many of the paraprofessionals to cultures that are different from their own. Throughout the four focus groups many of the paraprofessionals told similar stories of how they now think differently about other cultures and nationalities. The data indicate that EFNEP has broadened the minds of the paraprofessional staff to think more globally. Justine, an African American, talked about her work with Latinos, Asians and Africans. She voiced, “I have so many different nationalities now, that if it were not for EFNEP, I never would have communicated with.” Justine went on to articulate that, “There is no language barrier in cooking.” Everyone laughed when Justine recounted her version of a conversation with an individual who declared, “I’m going to learn how to be an American. I’m going to learn how to cook some soul food.”

Lily, Naomi, Daisy, and Jane have had similar experiences. Naomi admitted that she believes that by working in EFNEP she, also, has had the opportunity to get to know other cultures with which she may not have ever interacted. Lily was adamant in her belief that she and other EFNEP staff need to take the time to learn about the culture of their students so they would not accidentally do something that may be insulting. An insightful statement made by Justine sums up this section:
They really want to learn. But like everyone’s said, you got to go in with the willingness to break that language barrier. And food is one of the things I think can break any language barrier…that I would not have ever known if I had not been part of EFNEP. I would have always been on one side of the room and they’re on another side of the room. Bring a dish. It makes a difference.

Caring

In each of the four focus groups, there were paraprofessionals who made statements which led to the consideration that EFNEP had been a catalyst which brought about increased caring for others. The term “caring” was used to suggest a change in their state of mind. Statements made in each of the focus groups led to the conclusion that the paraprofessionals exhibited a deep concern for the students with which they work, and that their involvement with the students had transformed them into a role of care giver. Specific terms that will be used to reveal their level of caring include compassion, bonding, mentoring, and advocacy. The depth of how they have gone beyond the call of duty to express their commitment to their students will be conveyed.

Naomi succinctly said, “I care more.” She went on to explain that, “I’m more concerned and care more because of my line of work. I have a passion for people anyway. But I found when I first started working with EFNEP how many people didn’t have food here in this county.” She related that the most devastating thing for her was, “I would go in [a home] and find a young mother no more than 19 or 20 that had nothing but food stamps and had 2 or 3 children and didn’t know how to buy the food or how to prepare it once she had bought it, and it made me want to do more cooking and help to show them how to do more.” Throughout the discussion in the four focus groups there were other indicators of the active caring and concern
that the paraprofessionals had for their students. Within this section statements which categorize these indicators will be emphasized.

*Compassion.*

Olivia said, “EFNEP has really helped me be more compassionate.” Nancy added, “EFNEP makes us more compassionate because we see all the different situations that people are in.” Grace told the group that she shows her compassion through listening, even if it means putting the intended lesson on hold for a while. She said, “I just listen to what they have to say for a moment and then bring them back to what we’re talking about. They seem to be able to talk about it a little bit better because I think they just want someone to listen.” Lily feels that her students know that she cares for them: “They know I’m concerned about their welfare and that will encourage them to go on and do more. Because most of the time you got to encourage them and sometimes they don’t get that. They’re just looking for approval. I can go that extra step.”

Marcella, a bilingual paraprofessional, talked about her goal of helping Latino families. “In our community a lot of people need our help, especially in their own language. And those people do not know how to make healthy food choices or how to feed their children. After the program, after the graduation, they are grateful for all the information we have been teaching to them.” She went on to say that making a better community “is one of my goals.” Gabriella also conducts classes in Spanish. Before joining the EFNEP staff in her county, Gabriella worked for the Family Nutrition Program (FNP). The FNP program was another Extension food and nutrition education program which focused on individuals with limited resources, but had a broader target audience. When FNP was phased out in Georgia, the paraprofessionals working with that program were integrated into the EFNEP staff. In FNP, Gabriella had been conducting
nutrition classes for senior citizens. She expressed a frustration that was voiced in all four of the focus groups where paraprofessionals had transitioned from FNP: “I feel like this job is limited now. It is very limited and I feel like I don’t help all the people that need it. It’s important for the young, but it’s important for the old.” Jane and Lacey, who had also originally worked with FNP, shared similar concerns. These expressions demonstrated their caring nature in the desire to serve additional populations.

Lacey summed up the caring expressed by the paraprofessionals. “We care because we’re there with them. We go into the homes and we can really see the action.” Jane thinks that “even if you haven’t been there you can be sympathetic and that, to me, helps me relate to them. Because, you know, all of us have had some rough roads.”

Bonding.

Throughout the focus group discussions, paraprofessionals expressed a bonding with their clients. One example is that of Darlene: “I’ve learned through the years of working with groups and individual clients, I learned from them, but they have taught me. The relationship that we have when I’m teaching is very important because that helps as a tool to get the information to the clients. So, along with the training, they have helped me develop good communication skills, and people skills and I enjoy it and have really developed a great love for EFNEP.”

Lucida and Marcella bond with their Latino clients. Lucida admits, “We go to the houses and we see the real life there. We see the real situations…so you see the different situations and it’s like this is your life. You live in their problems…and if you show them you care, then they trust you. They want to learn.” Pamela, who is not Latino adds, “People think that Hispanics are
Hispanics and that they all speak the same language and are all alike. But it is not like that…you have to get to know him or her.

Mentoring.

Daisy, Jane, Justine, Lily, Naomi, Lucida, Pamela, Arielle, Catalina, Sally, and Wilma all consider themselves as mentors for the individuals with which they teach. Daisy tells her students, “I’m working this with you – the same with you. We’re all human and it all takes time and I’m on the same planet.”

Lily works with teenage mothers which are another target audience of the EFNEP program, called TAMS (Teen Age Mother-S). She voiced her caring sentiment for the teens by stating, “There is no love for the teens in their home. So she feels if she would have a baby then she would have somebody to love her.” Lily went on to say that in addition to her duties with EFNEP, she also works with a church ministry that targets the pregnant and parenting teens. She says, “One of the biggest things is the self esteem. If you can help them with their self esteem, with all the things they have going on, that they will decide that they want to finish school and delay a family. Self esteem is the biggest thing because they don’t feel the love at home.” This demonstrates Lily’s caring and commitment to this population by her willingness to go beyond the call of duty by getting involved with a church ministry which also reaches out to the pregnant and parenting teens.

Lucida feels that mentoring can be something as simple as making sure her clients see her personally practice the principles she teaches in class: “When I encourage them to use the grocery list, always I think about myself because when they see me at the grocery store they always see me with a shopping list. And they take the information seriously.” Pamela was quick to add, “And the only way that you can actually tell them, you have to do it yourself, so you
know it’s effective to practice those things that you tell them.” Sally also cares for her students and believes she is in the right place to serve as a mentor. With a laugh she commented, “They ask me a lot of questions about what to do because they think I know everything.”

**Advocacy.**

Justine also has an active TAMS program, as a part of her EFNEP work, and conducts classes with teen mothers. She considers herself as an advocate for the youth to help them stay in school and graduate. She describes,

For some reason 10th graders are the ones I see the most. In 10th grade they’re having the baby, they’re dropping out, and they’re not continuing their education. So by 10th grade they are moms and they drop out. That’s when I start advocating to them to stay in school. And that’s one of the reasons I think TAMS is a great program for the teens because with us working with them on how to have a healthy baby and how to keep the baby healthy. We’re also teaching them other resources especially with the county as a partner with us on our TAMS program. We’re able to refer them to different programs that the county offers to help them stay in school…but, you’d be surprised of how many girls drop out of school because they can’t read or write. They put it on the baby. They will say the baby and make it seem like the baby’s the issue but we find out it’s the education. They didn’t learn and they feel like they can’t catch up.

Lily has taken her role in EFNEP a step further and has advocated on behalf of the TAMS youth with state elected officials: “To really be an advocate for teens you need to coordinate with legislators, and touch base with them, and that’s how they hear that I feel strongly about it.” In addition to being a voice with state representatives, she has also addressed the local school board as an advocate for the teens. Lily, Naomi, Justine, and Gabriella all said
that working with EFNEP has given them the empowerment to feel comfortable talking with elected officials. Naomi advocates to elected officials to help her clients with whatever need they may have, “whether it be education, whether it be housing, whether it be child care, day care, whatever care they need.” Justine feels that it is also important to be an advocate for her students within the community, and motivate these groups to work through legislators, especially faith-based organizations and churches: “You’d be surprised how if you make a statement in church how far that statement will go because half those people know somebody in the legislative office.” She stressed that she’s not just talking about teens, but for people of all ages, and added, “It really doesn’t matter about age – just if we’re willing to help those people.”

Self Esteem

Self esteem is a person’s core belief about himself or herself and is considered an important component of emotional health. Dictionaries describe self esteem as the mental image one has about his or her strengths, weaknesses, and status, or a person’s self worth (Random House, 2006). In a previous section it has already been reported that the paraprofessionals feel like EFNEP has improved their status in their community. This section will also establish that they attribute EFNEP to the improvement of their self esteem. The paraprofessionals feel good about themselves, and are proud of the work they do. They feel more confident and knowledgeable, and they feel they have a better lifestyle now than they did before coming to work with EFNEP. They are also more thankful for what they have. Several of the paraprofessionals reported that they are working on a college degree, and are appreciative that they can do so with tuition assistance.

Jane, Daisy, Grace, and Wilma made statements expressing that the work they do in EFNEP makes them feel good about themselves. Jane talked about the work that she was doing
with the GED classes and with Head Start parents. One of the examples that she conveyed had to do with a conversation that she had with the Head Start director: “The director said to me ‘I just wanted to tell you this staff and these parents were just excited about what you’re doing… and we’ll have a good group sign up [for the classes].’ And that made me feel good that they were excited about it.” Daisy also told of specific instances when her work with EFNEP made her feel good about herself. One example that she gave made evident that EFNEP was the catalyst which boosted her self esteem: “What makes me feel good, it’s wonderful when you see adults hanging out the door looking for you, and coming to greet you. You know, children do that. But to have grown adults [they do not].” Catalina discussed the graduation programs that she plans and implements for the students who complete the EFNEP course. She voiced, “When we have the graduation, they feel good and I feel good.”

Wilma explained that she feels good when she sees her students out in the community applying what they have learned in the EFNEP classes: “I saw one of my class members in the store and she told me she was buying the ingredients to make the turkey & squash [EFNEP recipe] and she was so proud of herself that she was making something that she had learned about in the class.” Grace revealed, “I feel good when they come back and tell me it [EFNEP] has made an impact on their life. And we get that all the time…And if we only reach one or two persons that come back and tell us that they’ve done this then it makes us feel so good.” Grace went on to say, “They even tell us, ‘I’m so glad you’re here.’ When they see us carrying those red and black bags they go to closing up their books and putting everything away. Wanting to know what we’re going to do. It’s exciting!”

It was inspiring to hear the paraprofessionals talk about how proud they are of the work they do, and how their EFNEP experiences have made them more knowledgeable and more
confident. Lacey spoke out to say, “I’m just real proud of myself. EFNEP has helped me and changed me.” Shawna, Daisy, Jane, and Wilma credit EFNEP for their increased confidence. Shawna expressed that one of the reasons she feels confident is because she “is in control of the class” and that her positive attitude sets the tone. She feels that it is her mission to have a smile on her face and to brighten the day of the students in the class. She reflected on a particular class and commented, “And sometimes you may have someone say, ‘you know before I came to class I was feeling kind of down. Thank you that you have brightened up my day.’” Daisy feels more confident because “I am knowledgeable in my information, and it’s good information, and it’s real information, and everybody needs it.” Lucida has gained self confidence because of her belief that the work she does with EFNEP makes a difference in the lives of others. Wilma tells her students that she is “a work in progress.” Arielle and Lacey feel more confident because they now have a better lifestyle. Arielle articulated that she dresses better. Lacey simply stated, “I have a better lifestyle.”

Several of the paraprofessionals talked about how they are more thankful for what they have. Nancy told, “I’m more thankful for what I have.” Wilma’s declaration was, “Sometimes I thank God that I’m where I am and I’m doing as well as I am.” Pamela thinks that EFNEP “taught me not to waste. People take food for granted and I think it has helped me not waste food. And to not take the food for granted. Because there’s so many people that don’t have it.”

Some of the paraprofessionals are taking college classes. Employees of the University of Georgia are allowed to take degree classes at no cost through a tuition assistance program. Pamela, Marcella and Lucida have taken advantage of this opportunity. This demonstrates that EFNEP has empowered them to make positive changes which will lead to lifestyle improvement and increased self esteem. Lucida spoke of her appreciation of the classes she has been able to
take: “It is an opportunity I would not have had.” Pamela has specifically chosen a degree in social work: “I’m in school now, working on a degree in social work because I really like helping people.”

Throughout the four focus groups it was both impressive and inspirational to learn of their strength and determination. This section will conclude with one of the most powerful statements made in relation to self esteem. Lucida moved to Georgia from a Latin country. When she first came to the community she got a job in the vegetable fields where many of the immigrants work. Lucida expressed, “I just want to say that EFNEP got me out of the fields. The fields were very hard work. EFNEP got me out of the fields.”

The dialogue in the four focus groups clearly demonstrated that EFNEP experiences have changed the lives of the paraprofessionals who are hired, trained, and work in the program. Changes include skills development, heightened community status, relationship changes, viewing others, caring, and self esteem. For almost four decades, EFNEP has documented change in the lives of the students, or clients, who enroll and graduate from the program. The documentation in this study is especially significant in that it identifies another layer of impact attributed to the USDA-sponsored EFNEP program. Capacity building, in terms of the psychosocial changes made in the personal development of the paraprofessionals, adds a new dimension to the impact of EFNEP.

Factors Contributing to Change

This chapter concludes by discussing factors, identified in the data, which will answer the research question, “What factors contribute to the psychosocial impact on the EFNEP paraprofessional?” These factors are identified in the table below, and include 1) an indigenous staff, 2) personal identification, 3) training, 4) support, and 5) the work experiences.
Table 3

*Factors Contributing to Change*

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<td>1) An indigenous staff</td>
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*Indigenous Staff*

The strength of the EFNEP program is in its unique approach to reaching the low income families through the use of paraprofessionals who are indigenous to the target population. EFNEP paraprofessionals are hired and trained to conduct educational intervention programs in their local communities. Love & Gardner (1992) describe individuals who are indigenous as those with the “insider orientation.” These individuals are similar ethnically, socio-economically, and experientially. Being indigenous, the life stories of these EFNEP staff suggest that they experience similar changes to that of the students with which they work. Jane expressed,

I was raised really poor. So I think that when you’ve been there you understand what low income means… and I can relate because of that…my daddy worked and my mama did too but there were nine kids in my family. So I can relate to having lots of kids and not having money to do. I use myself as an example in saying that my mama stretched every penny and she had to.

Grace was also raised in a poor family and feels that she can relate to the struggles of her student audience. She revealed, “I can relate to them and they can relate to me…when you can come to them and you have a story of your own. They have plenty of them [stories]. And when
they come to you and tell you a story you can understand.” This insider way of exchanging stories was a factor in the changes previously discussed.

Justine described her childhood growing up in an urban environment. Her family believed in farming, and would send money back to their home-place farm. In turn, most of the food Justine grew up eating came from this family farm. She expressed, “We still don’t have a lot of money and I’ve learned from EFNEP that you can take a small amount of money and still eat nutritious. That’s the way it’s made a big impact with me.”

Sally and Wilma can also relate to their audiences. Sally told the group that she had been a single mother for ten years which was something that she had in common with many of the students in her teaching groups. Wilma voiced, “They’ve all had hard times [the students]. But, I tell them that I’ve had hard times too. I was unemployed, I was stretching my dollar, I’ve had hard times too, and they can relate.”

**Personal Identification with EFNEP**

In addition to being indigenous to the communities with which they work, there are other ways that the paraprofessionals personally identify with their EFNEP experiences. These aspects of personal identification were cited as reasons which led them to work with EFNEP, and have been important factors in the change that they have experienced. They include a love of talking with and helping people, an avenue to incorporate their passions into their work, and a sense of mission.

* A Love of Talking and Helping.

One of the factors that led to change with EFNEP experience is that the paraprofessionals entered their work with an existing love of being with and talking with people. Daisy told about calling her family members to tell them about her new job with EFNEP: “Everybody in my
family said ‘Well, that’s right up your alley. You love to talk.’” Grace said, “As far as speaking and talking, I could just rattle on forever.”

Several of the paraprofessionals talked about the love they have for helping people and how EFNEP has provided an opportunity in which to share themselves with others. These paraprofessionals also talked about the good feeling they get from helping others in their role as an EFNEP educator. Sally talked about how she was stuck in a job for a long time that was not a good situation for her. When she began to look for something different someone told her about an opening with the Cooperative Extension EFNEP program. She said, “It just seemed really interesting to me to do something to help people. I’ve always been interested in helping people. It’s a good challenge and it makes me feel good about myself. That’s what attracted me to EFNEP and it still attracts me.”

Arielle agreed and added, “Helping people is what attracted me to the job too. I worked in another program where I helped Hispanics and when I heard about this job I thought it was a good opportunity. A door opened for me.” Catalina also works with Spanish-speaking families. She explained, “I always have liked helping people. I feel for them. I like to see the people learn.”

Before coming to work with EFNEP, Wilma had experienced a personal loss in the death of her mother. To her EFNEP is not only a way to help others, but also to be a crusader for good health. She verbalized how she has used EFNEP as a way to cope with her loss by educating others:

I was unemployed and my mother had passed away the summer before. She had died of pancreatic cancer and I had read a lot about it and found that a lot of the problems that she had was from her diet and lack of exercise. So I decided I wanted to do something
about spreading the word about eating better and treating ourselves better, and what
better way to do it than teach it. I don’t have a degree so EFNEP was a way for me to
spread the news. And if I can help young people then they won’t have to go through the
things that I went through with my mother.

*Avenue to Incorporate their Passions into their Work.*

Daisy, Rita, Jane, and Shawna talked about personal passions that they have. Each of
them credit EFNEP for giving them the chance to work in an environment which allows them to
incorporate their passions into their work. Daisy discussed her love of cooking, gardening, being
creative, and being able to work with people in the community. She has found ways to integrate
each of these passions into her work with the EFNEP program. Rita also enjoys cooking.

Before being hired with EFNEP she had volunteered for her Extension Agent to conduct holiday
cooking shows: “And when the job came open she hired me.”

Jane had been a stay-at-home mother while she raised her children. After the children
were grown she wanted to work, but had no experience: “So then you reach this certain age and
you’re thinking, I have no experience, and what am I going to do? So I had been a substitute
teacher at the school which I enjoyed a lot.” She went on to relate a personal experience with a
weight loss program which initiated her passion for good nutrition and health, and eventually led
her to seek a job with EFNEP:

I joined a group called TOPS, [Take Off Pounds Sensibly], where they [the national
affiliate] would send all this nutrition information and programs that they want you to do.

Well, I was elected their leader for five years so I had all this previous knowledge about
nutrition and I had the teaching from the school. So when I saw this job announced in
the newspaper I said wow that would be good for me. So, I thought I would go down
there and apply for this job. I didn’t know that I would get hired, but I did just right off the bat. So, it just worked out for me.

Shawna’s passion is her children. She spoke of her previous job with a preschool program and how the lack of schedule flexibility limited time she could spend with her children in support of their education and activities. To compound the issue further, she had begun taking college classes at night to advance her education:

I taught [at the preschool] for fifteen years. My last three years, I went to work at 8:15 and worked until 4:15. I left there and went to school until 9:00. And I had a husband and four children – I did that for three years…So that summer I was telling my husband that I was thinking about leaving [the preschool] and trying to find something that’s more flexible. I don’t know. When you’re in the classroom, it’s like you’re confined. And your kids have something planned but you can’t ever go…But, it’s your job so you have to be there.

Due to this situation, Shawna had even begun to feel that she was a bad parent:

I know one time there was a program going on at my daughter’s school so I went over there and the teacher said, ‘I haven’t seen you since the first day of school.’ When you work and go to school it’s so hard and I just felt so bad that the teacher had to tell me that she hadn’t seen me since the first day of school. I was just so confined.

For Shawna, EFNEP was the factor that changed her feelings of hopelessness. She told the group that even though she works very hard in her EFNEP job, she now has the flexibility to use her leave for time to spend with her children’s activities.
A Sense of Mission.

In listening to the paraprofessionals discuss their experiences, a central theme became evident to consider as a factor of change. They all spoke with such zeal, making it reasonable to conclude that they consider their work with EFNEP as a mission. A number of the paraprofessionals even talked about how they were “called” or “led by God” to their EFNEP work. When Shawna was relating her experiences with balancing work and family, she referred to her job with EFNEP as “I feel like this was my calling.” Daisy also verbalized a spiritual experience as the vehicle that brought her to EFNEP:

I soul-searched for eight months and I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I just prayed to God to give me a job that would allow me to do what I love to do…The funny thing about it is that I saw the add in the paper but I was on my way to a real estate seminar…I went on to the hotel [where the real estate seminar was being held] and when I got there I went to reach for my wallet in my purse and my wallet was in my other purse. So I couldn’t go in because I couldn’t pay for parking. And I was just having a bad day. I just backed up out of the parking lot and I just sat there in the car and I just boo-hooed. So I said, ‘Lord, what is going on?’ and then I heard this voice say, ‘Well, you have your resume with you and you have the address, why don’t you just go over there before you go home and put in the application.’ So I thought I might as well. And when I walked in the office, it just felt like home. That’s my story. I believe He leads you.

At one point Jane and Grace began a discussion among themselves about their spiritual experience that led them to EFNEP. Jane voiced, “You know, when I think back on my life you can see how God works.” Grace added, “I think God places you where you need to be.” Lucida
moved to the United States from a Latin country in 1989 and began working in vegetable fields. She attributes her dreams as the spiritual experience which led her to EFNEP:

In my dreams, children appear – all the time since I was little. So I was feeling that my plan was to work with people. And I came here to work in the fields and I was helping people all the time. I didn’t know nothing about EFNEP. I didn’t know nothing about the United States. So, when I got my residency card I was looking for a different job [and got the job with EFNEP]…I thought I was blessed to have this kind of work.

These statements are evidence that a number of the paraprofessionals attribute a higher calling as the reason for their involvement with the EFNEP program. This factor is a catalyst for the change which has occurred in them as they have taught classes in the community and have worked with families who need assistance.

*Training*

Another factor that has contributed to the paraprofessionals’ change is that of training. EFNEP has a structured, well tested training mechanism in that professional supervising Extension Agents are responsible for orientation training and the continued in-service training of small groups of paraprofessionals. Supervising agents vary in their training methods and schedules. These agents may schedule weekly, bimonthly, or monthly continuing education trainings for the paraprofessionals under their supervision. Most couple these structured small group trainings with more informal one-on-one training and counseling sessions on an ongoing basis. The ability to train in small groups, as well as one-on-one training, is significant in equipping these indigenous staff members with the information needed to effectively teach the EFNEP curriculum in their communities. Many paraprofessionals come to work for EFNEP
with only a high school education. Many have no previous knowledge of nutrition, and limited
skills in appropriate food behavior and resource management.

In addition to ongoing training from supervising agents, the paraprofessionals also have
opportunities to receive in-depth training, network, and learn from each other at statewide
trainings. Paraprofessionals attend one day of statewide training each year taught by State
Extension staff. A three-day continuing education conference is held every two years on the
University of Georgia campus which brings in speakers from a national level. Discussion in the
four focus groups led to the recognition that the paraprofessionals acknowledge training as a key
ingredient in their success.

Grace expressed, “EFNEP gives you everything you need - the skills, the knowledge, the
update. So you have the information to go out and give to your clients.” Darlene feels that “the
training has helped me develop good communication skills and people skills.” In one group,
Olivia and Darlene began to discuss the most recent EFNEP conference. Olivia said, “I think we
get a lot of good information in the trainings that we get.” She went on to talk about the
conference guest speaker who spent the bulk of the conference teaching the paraprofessionals
about dialogue-based learning, and motivating the staff to include more dialogue in the EFNEP
classes. Olivia stated, “That lady that was the speaker, she was so good. I don’t know what they
can do to top that at the next conference. The only way you could do it is to just bring her back.”
Another speaker at the conference used a video based on the book *Who Moved My Cheese*
(Johnson, 1998). Darlene and Marcella reported that they had always heard of the book, but
didn’t know what it was about until it was used at the conference. Interestingly, the book is
about helping individuals develop skills of change in order to make a difference in their work
and in their lives.
Lucida voiced,

I’ve only been in this position for a year, and when I first came I just wondered what I was going to do, and how I was going to do it. And these trainings have helped me so much, and I really do appreciate the training. It makes me feel a lot more comfortable now because I just really did not know what I was doing.

It was Grace that acknowledged the link between the EFNEP trainings and the change in her personal life: “I tell people that if I knew then what I know now I would be doing things this way and that way. But I think that knowledge gets you coming along and then you start to practice.

Support

Another factor established by the data is that of support. The dialogue from the focus groups suggests that this factor contributes to the change that EFNEP staff experience. There are two types of support which the EFNEP program provides – resources and encouragement.

Resources.

The resource that is the core of EFNEP is the curriculum. Although the paraprofessionals are given flexibility in the way they implement the classes, they are expected to follow a standardized curriculum. The lessons cover basic nutrition information on the five food groups: grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy and protein. Additionally there are concepts in the lessons which teach the students how to read and understand food labels, how to keep their food safe, and how to manage their food dollars to get the most nutrition from the least dollar spent. Most of the paraprofessionals who participated in the focus groups made some reference to the lessons that they teach through the EFNEP curriculum. At the time of these focus groups Georgia EFNEP was piloting a new curriculum. The intent of the new curriculum is to
encourage more dialogue-based learning in the classes. Daisy commented that she liked the new information because it was packaged in a way which makes it simpler to teach.

An important part of the curriculum is the variety of activities and other teaching strategies designed for the paraprofessionals to use in their classes. Grace was complimentary of the activities incorporated into the lessons and feels that they are a factor which has led to her improved teaching skills: “You get new ideas and new things that you can do to enhance the class. And I think that has improved my teaching skills. I mean just to think of something new to do with the class lifts me to bring that extra knowledge that I have out.”

A critical component of an EFNEP lesson is the food demonstration. New paraprofessionals quickly learn that there is a difference between knowing how to cook and being able to perform an effective food demonstration. However, it is imperative that food demonstrations be conducted because they encourage class members to try new foods, and to cook them for their families. The paraprofessionals also quickly realize that the food demonstration is a very popular aspect of the EFNEP lesson, and they appreciate having the resources needed to conduct them. Grace proclaimed,

I don’t care when we are doing a food demonstration, you know, the smell is in the building and you have people coming. I mean even when I walk down the hallway people will say ‘now, what are you here for?’ and then I tell them what I’m here for and then they want me to come to their class and talk about nutrition.

Daisy laughed when she recalled her nickname for the popular EFNEP recipe *stewed sausage over rice*: “I tell them that’s what EFNEP named it, but actually the name is ‘come and get it!’”

EFNEP paraprofessionals are also well supported in the quantity and variety of visual aids that are available to use in the classes. These materials range from cooking utensils and
equipment for food demonstrations to professional visual aids which depict serving sizes of food, as well as models to show the amounts of fat, sugar and salt in common foods, clogged arteries, and loss of calcium in bones. They have Food Guide Pyramid visuals in both three-dimensional and flat posters as well as colorful brochures, display boards with professional quality exhibit panels, and game boards such as jeopardy. Black lights and a special lotion are used with a hand washing activity when teaching the food safety lesson. They have overhead projectors for showing transparency slides and some paraprofessionals have laptop computers to use with power point slides. At the conclusion of the class series they have certificates from the University of Georgia that they can give to their graduates. Grace pointed out, “I think that the nutrition board, the Pyramid, has really been an eye catcher. Because when folks see you with that board they know you’re going to be talking about nutrition so they start asking questions.” She went on to say,

We have a lot of props we can take to the classes. And it makes you feel good when you can hold up a little flash card, or something, the rubber food models. And those test tubes, they really go crazy when they see those things. And they say, ‘is that for real?’ And they look at it and this gives me the extra confidence to go on and talk about it. The knowledge is there but I just feel so good when I have something to show them.

Daisy agreed, and went on to explain that when she and her EFNEP coworkers exhibit at health fairs, “All the other people that are there, vendors, are jealous because the people are drawn to us.”

Encouragement.

Encouragement is another mode of support for the EFNEP paraprofessionals. Encouragement for the staff comes in two forms – mentoring and team work. In an earlier
section it was discussed how EFNEP staff considers themselves as mentors for their students. The data also show that they encourage each other through peer mentoring. Shawna has only been on the job about two months. Her new coworkers have graciously invited her to their classes so that she can observe and learn by watching them. She voiced, “I observe and I take a little bit from each one…And I always try to do things I’ve learned from them and I ask them if I’m doing it right.” She continued, “I have some good mentors and they help me out a lot.” Jane has also been thankful for the mentoring she has received. She added, “It’s so good to be able to see different things, different teaching styles.” Daisy explained that when she first came to work for EFNEP that her coworkers “took me under their wing.” And then she revealed this insight:

I’ve worked with a lot of women; I mean a lot of women. It can be crowded in the hen house sometimes. But I’ve told them I’ve never worked with a group of women quite like them. We call each other sisters. And whatever it is, you don’t have to ask. If they see a need they’re jumping up. And it makes the job much smoother. A lot of people can’t be blessed to get up in the morning and come into a job where you’re glad to see and glad to be here.

In addition to mentoring each other, the EFNEP paraprofessionals work together as a very cohesive team. Grace shared, “Everybody works together. Before we walk out that door, we make sure that everybody’s got their stuff together. We do good teamwork.” Daisy agreed and added, “You know, it really works because one of us in here may be trying to get stuff together and the other person is free, we just join in and say ‘what you need for me to do.’” Jane is the only EFNEP staff member in her county, and she admitted, “I’m jealous about the teamwork…. I vent to our FACS agent, but she’s not really a team person for me.”
The data presentation in this section will conclude with testimonials made by Shawna and Olivia. Both of these paraprofessionals idealize their EFNEP support system as something more than merely sharing a workload. Shawna conveyed that working with the EFNEP program exemplifies the perfect work environment:

I wanted to be in a good environment with good people that have the same positive attitude…They may have something going on at their house but you don’t know nothing about it. They’re still professional. It’s good to work around people like that.

And finally from Olivia, “I think as educators ourselves, we go to trainings and we become friends with each other. We’re all like a big family!”

Work Experiences

Each of the changes discussed in this chapter can be summarized by indicating that they are related to the work experiences of the EFNEP paraprofessionals. It is evident from the stories told by these paraprofessionals that the work experiences which they undergo through EFNEP are a factor in change. Their work experiences place them in situations which position them to act on behalf of others, and place them in leadership positions in the community. As they conveyed their EFNEP work experiences, they linked the experiences to changes in relationships, increase in positive self esteem, and in the way they view others. Additionally, they revealed skills which they have acquired due to their EFNEP experiences.

Chapter Summary

Do EFNEP paraprofessionals change as a result of their training and work experience? The data indicate that they do. The psychosocial impact of EFNEP manifests itself in a variety of ways including the development of new skills, heightened community status, changes in
family and community relationships, changes in the way the paraprofessionals view others, increased caring for others, and increased self esteem.

The factors that form the base for these changes consist of the indigenous nature of the staff, personal identification with the job qualifications or the intended audience, the training system provided by state leaders and county supervising agents, and the support which is afforded to the staff through resources provided and their internal mentoring of each other. Additionally, it is clearly seen through the conveying of these paraprofessionals’ stories that the overall experiences which they undergo through their work are a factor in change.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents conclusions and interpretations of this study’s findings, draws implications for theory and practice, and makes recommendations for future research. The purpose of the study was to understand how training and work experience of the EFNEP paraprofessional can effect their individual change of personal and social development. The intent of the study was to identify significant characteristics of psychosocial change which EFNEP paraprofessionals undergo as a result of their training and work experience, and the factors which lead to these changes. The study was guided by two research questions. First, what is the psychosocial impact of the EFNEP training and work experience on the EFNEP paraprofessional? This question focused on characteristics of change that the paraprofessionals undergo as a result of their EFNEP training and experience. And second, what factors contribute to the psychosocial impact on the EFNEP paraprofessional? In other words, what is it about EFNEP that causes these psychosocial changes within a person?

A qualitative research design was implemented to explore these areas. The findings were drawn from discussion that was recorded during four focus groups including twenty EFNEP paraprofessionals from across the state of Georgia. Site location selection was purposeful in that the focus groups represented the four quadrants of the state. Data was analyzed by using the constant comparative method. The results of this study revealed characteristics of impact and contributing factors that were common among the paraprofessionals regardless of their region.
Conclusions

Two broad categories of conclusions were drawn based on this study. First, EFNEP paraprofessionals do change as a result of their training and work experience. EFNEP has a psychosocial impact on their individual lives through personal and social development. The second conclusion is that there are factors inherently unique to EFNEP which cause this impact to occur. In an early study, Hernecheck-Buck (1986) found that EFNEP participants make changes outside the realm of nutrition education experiencing changes which may be considered psychological, affective and social in nature. Likewise, Rauch (1985) found some of these same constructs in the life patterns of EFNEP paraprofessionals. This study, more than twenty years later, affirms that EFNEP paraprofessionals experience psychosocial change.

**Impact: Characteristics of Change**

The concept of change as an impact from the workplace can be defined as situated cognition. This area of learning research may be linked to adult education’s experiential emphasis on learning (Wilson, 1993). There are three assumptions about situated cognition which relate to this study. First of all, the idea that learning and thinking in the everyday world is a social activity. Second, an adult’s ability to think and learn is structured by the availability of situational provided “tools”. And third, human thinking is also structured by interaction within the setting (p. 72). Hansman (2001) states, “the core idea in situated cognition is that learning is inherently social in nature. The nature of the interactions among learners, the tools they use within these interactions, the activity itself, and the social context in which the activity takes place shape learning” (p. 45). Informal education within a community setting, as in EFNEP education, is a social interaction. Situated cognition ties social interaction and experience to learning.
Merriam & Caffarella (1999) state, “the concept of development, as with learning, is most often equated with change (p. 93). After focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed, there were six types of change that were experienced among the participants. These were 1) the development of a variety of new skills, 2) a heightened community status, 3) changes in relationships both within the family and within the community, 4) changes in the way the paraprofessionals view others, 5) increased caring for others, and 6) an increase in positive self esteem. Each of these will be briefly discussed.

**EFNEP Paraprofessionals Develop New Life Skills**

The data discovered a variety of skills that the paraprofessionals develop as a result of working in the EFNEP program. These included public speaking skills, teaching skills, increased positive food behavior, increased knowledge about nutrition, better resource management related to food purchasing, storing and preparation, and the ability to deal with difficult situations which arise on the job.

EFNEP paraprofessionals are educators. However, very few begin the job with the skill of addressing an audience effectively. According to Gottlieb (2004), some studies have shown that the fear of public speaking is equal to, or even greater than, the fear of dying. Many of the paraprofessionals in the four focus groups admitted to being afraid to speak in front of a group when they were first hired. Some acknowledged that even though they have always liked to talk, standing in front of a group in a teaching role was an entirely new situation for them.

Even more frightening than merely speaking in public is that of teaching the EFNEP students. Cason, et al. (2002) found that EFNEP program delivery methods have changed throughout the years. When the program first began in 1969, the primary delivery method was individual instruction in the participant’s home. In the 1980's, program emphasis moved from
one-on-one contact to groups of participants in a variety of non-formal educational settings, including community centers, housing complexes, WIC offices, and churches (p. 64). Chipman & Kendell (1989) reported that this shift in teaching methods came as a result of a recommendation from a 1979 federal evaluation to improve the cost effectiveness of the program. Additionally, the 1979 report included a concern for the safety of the nutrition educators, also making the case for the necessity to change from one-on-one home visits to group classes in public places (p. 265).

Many of the paraprofessionals attributed their improved teaching skills to their EFNEP experiences. Fourteen of the twenty focus group participants expressed that EFNEP had helped them become a good teacher. They have developed teaching strategies that enable them to take control of a class situation and keep discussion on track. They desire to be a good teacher and strive to implement creative teaching strategies to make classes interesting and fun for the learners. Additionally, they have a positive attitude about teaching and are willing to put the needs of their students before their own needs.

Two other skills that EFNEP paraprofessionals gain on the job are improved behavior related to food, and increased knowledge about nutrition. As related in Chapter 4, it was not the intent of this study to focus on these areas since there are a number of other studies which have already addressed these issues. Chiza-Muyengwa & Ebert (1991) conducted research to measure the nutrition knowledge of EFNEP paraprofessionals. Scores were high on knowledge of meal planning, food preparation, food storage and sanitation (¶ 6). Rauch (1985) found that EFNEP paraprofessionals attributed knowledge and practices related to food, nutrition and health to the EFNEP program. Also, Phillips (1980) found that the EFNEP program is effective in changing the nutrition knowledge and nutrition practices of the paraprofessionals.
However, there was so much data that came from the focus groups about changed food behavior and nutrition knowledge that it could not be ignored as a characteristic of change. Every one of the focus group participants made statements concerning improved food practices. In other words, one hundred percent of the participants reported positive improvements in their food behavior based on their involvement in the EFNEP program. This shows that the paraprofessionals improve in the same practices they teach their students. Additionally, the paraprofessionals improve in resource management skills as they increase the ability to stretch their own food dollar.

Data from the focus groups also show that the paraprofessionals change in their ability to deal with difficult situations. Examples included dealing with disruptive class members and maintaining confidentiality. The paraprofessionals have also gained desensitization to things they see, hear, and even smell.

**EFNEP Paraprofessionals Gain Heightened Community Status**

A second finding of the study is that as a result of EFNEP experiences, paraprofessionals gain heightened status within their community. The idea that learning in adulthood is related to the taking on of a societal role has a long history in adult education. This adult onset learning produces change. Merriam & Caffarella (1999) point out that “change in adulthood is determined more by sociocultural factors such as social roles, race, and gender, than by individual maturation” (p.136). The paraprofessionals receive increased respect and positioning in the community. This has led others to perceive them as experts. They have had increased community leadership and partnership opportunities, and have increased their ability to network within the community.
The paraprofessionals feel that EFNEP has given them the opportunity to be in the “spotlight” in their community. A couple even voiced that they feel like a “celebrity” in the community. They revealed that increased respect and position in the community has led others to perceive them as experts, has increased community leadership and partnership opportunities, and has increased their ability to network within the community.

Discussion in the focus groups inevitably turned to experiences in which they encountered their students in grocery stores and restaurants. Sometimes the student would delight in showing off the items in their grocery cart or selected menu item. Others, at the presence of their teacher, would be ashamed of what they had selected. Because of this, the paraprofessionals were well aware that they should make wise selections in order to serve as a role model in the community.

The visibility that accompanies the paraprofessionals’ community status can also aid in drawing participants into EFNEP classes. School children who have been in an EFNEP program recognize the paraprofessionals in stores and restaurants. The paraprofessionals use their recognition to draw parents into EFNEP.

Along with recognition and status, the paraprofessionals have gained increased respect in the community. They are given more responsibility at church, in community organizations, and on committees. Again, they credit EFNEP for giving them the confidence to be better committee members and community leaders.

*Changes in Relationships Occur due to Involvement with EFNEP*

Changes in various relationships occur due to the paraprofessionals’ involvement with EFNEP. These changes may be internally within their family, or externally within their community. In their discussion of models of development, Merriam & Caffarella (1999) found
that relationships are pivotal to development. They view the “relational model” as one which “emphasizes that our sense of self is continuously formed in connection to others, with empathic attunement to others as central” (p. 116). The authors note that there has been an “increasing recognition that explaining development in adulthood is more than just focusing on the individualized self. Rather, emphasis has been placed on our collective selves as defined by society” (p. 117). They distinguish the sociocultural perspective of adult development as one which moves from focusing on how “development is primarily an internal process to one which acknowledges the importance of the social world in which we live” (p. 118).

The EFNEP paraprofessionals in the study revealed that they had experienced changes in relationships. However, it was surprising to find that these relationship changes centered almost exclusively on their new found knowledge of safe food handling. The awareness of the potential of harmful bacteria in food has made an impact on how the paraprofessionals interact with family and community members related to meal service. At one end of the continuum the paraprofessionals gained increase respect due to their expertise in this area. At the other end, they invoked feelings of discomfort with others and were viewed as being fanatics.

The paraprofessionals are very quick to reprimand family and community members that are not handling food in the proper way they have learned through EFNEP training. They refuse to eat food that they consider to be “set out” for too long. And, they refuse to eat food that they consider to be thawed improperly. Some of the paraprofessionals will only eat dishes that they themselves prepare and bring to church picnics or family reunions. This adamant mindset can lead to negative reactions. Interestingly, they feel the most comfortable eating together. In one of the focus groups the paraprofessionals talked about preparing and eating lunch together during
work days since they could trust each others’ food handling technique. As in the previous conclusions EFNEP has been the catalyst in these relationship changes.

*EFNEP Paraprofessionals Change in the way they View Others*

As a result of working with the EFNEP program, the paraprofessionals change in the way they view others. Mezirow’s theory of adult transformative learning labels change as having both personal and social dimensions (Nelson, 1997). The basis of Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning is life experience and describes this “as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162).

This theory of transformation is supported in the data by the way in which EFNEP paraprofessionals change their view of others. Their EFNEP experiences have broken down barriers and reduced stereotypes of people different from themselves. They reported being less judgmental and more willing to embrace cultures which are different from their own. In a number of cases EFNEP triggered transformation which broadened the minds of the paraprofessional staff. They have come to realize that food and family are human conditions shared by all regardless of race, socioeconomic level or culture.

*EFNEP Paraprofessionals Develop an Increased Caring for Others*

This study revealed that EFNEP paraprofessionals develop an increased caring for others as a result of their experiences with the program. Collazo, et al. (1993) published “models of helping” based on social predictors that resulted from their study on EFNEP paraprofessional’s interactions with clients in “expert” roles and in “empowerment” roles. Their findings place the paraprofessional as a collaborator in the change that the client experiences. The caring exhibited by the paraprofessionals is a confirmation that they use their expert and empowerment roles to
bring about positive change in the lives of their student clients. They, in turn, experience a change in their own life.

The term “caring” is used to suggest a change in their state of mind. Statements made in each of the focus groups led to the conclusion that the paraprofessionals exhibited a deep concern for the students with which they work, and that their involvement with the students had transformed them into a role of caregiver. In this role, caring may manifest itself in increased compassion for others, bonding with and mentoring of students, and advocacy for the individuals and families they teach.

Compassion for their students has led the study participants to go beyond the call of duty, or their job description, to help their students. They “live” the problems experienced by their students. They will listen when it seems that no one else will. They are flexible to change the content of the lesson when there is an evident need to be met which differs from what they may have intended to teach during the class. In this, they can sense that their students realize the caring that is present. Additionally, the paraprofessionals who are bilingual and work with Spanish-speaking students are deeply concerned for the welfare of the Latino families. Because the caring is recognized the paraprofessionals are granted trust within these communities.

Because of the caring and bonding which occurs, the paraprofessionals sometimes feel limited in what they can do within the constraints of their EFNEP work. One example expressed in each of the focus groups was their desire to work with senior citizens. The role of EFNEP in the community is to work with families with children in the home. Occasionally the paraprofessionals will work with grandparents that have been put in the position of raising their grandchildren. But, they readily point out that they believe that all seniors can benefit from the EFNEP program.
Some of the paraprofessionals work with the TAMS (Teen Age Mother-S) aspect of EFNEP programming. Again, they go the extra mile to help the young girls. They are keenly aware that very often these girls come from a home where there is an absence of love and caring, and the paraprofessionals become the surrogate of dispensing this affection. They serve as mentors to assure that the girls know how to care for their child. And, they provide support and encouragement for the young mother to complete her high school education. The paraprofessionals advocate for the young mothers in the community for resources and with elected officials to influence policy. In all this, the paraprofessionals credit EFNEP for giving them the empowerment to feel comfortable in these mentoring and advocacy roles.

*EFNEP Paraprofessionals Exhibit an Increase in Positive Self Esteem*

As a result of training and work experiences in EFNEP, the paraprofessionals increase in positive self esteem. A variety of concepts have been identified concerning the progression of psychological development, including theories of ego development (Erikson, 1963; Loevinger, 1976), self development (Gould, 1978; Josselson, 1987; Keegan, 1982, 1994; Levinson, 1986), moral development (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1973), and faith and spiritual development (Fowler, 1981; Jones, 1995). All of these authors base their work on the “changing nature of the internal self as we develop” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 100).

Another way of looking at the psychological aspect of change is through a humanist, or affective orientation. “Humanist theories consider learning from the perspective of the human potential for growth” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 256). One of the most commonly cited scholars connected to humanist theories has been Maslow (1970) and his hierarchy of needs. With humanist theories of learning, self-actualization is the intended goal. However, there are other objectives noted by Merriam & Caffarella (1999). Those that apply to EFNEP
Paraprofessionals include 1) discovery of a vocation or destiny, 2) knowledge or acquisition of a set of values, 3) acquisition of experiences, 4) a sense of accomplishment, and 5) grappling with the critical problems of life.

The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSRESS) explains that “through EFNEP, participants learn self-worth, that they have something to offer their families and society” (USDA, 2003, ¶ 2). The data from this study indicate that EFNEP paraprofessionals also learn self-worth and realize that they have something to offer to family and society. Mondore (2002) found that high involvement in work processes led to an increase in the individual’s self-efficacy and motivation. Mondore’s research has implications for this study in that the paraprofessionals take action based on the ideals they develop. This may stem from the fact that the paraprofessionals exhibit such a high investment in, and involvement with, their work in the community.

The paraprofessionals in the study feel good about themselves, and are proud of the work they do. They indicated that they feel more confident and knowledgeable than they did before coming to work with EFNEP, and they feel they have a better lifestyle now than they did before their EFNEP involvement. They also admit that they are now more thankful for what they have as a result of their EFNEP experiences. Several of the paraprofessionals reported that they are working on a college degree, and are appreciative that they can do so with the University of Georgia’s employee tuition assistance program.

The paraprofessionals also feel good when they know they have made a positive impact on the lives of their students. They enjoy seeing their students achieve goals that they have set such as a completion of high school or a GED. They are delighted when they see their students in the community apply concepts that they have learned through EFNEP.
Throughout the four focus groups, it was both impressive and inspirational to learn the strength and determination of the EFNEP staff. It was inspiring to hear them talk about how proud they are of the work they do, and how their EFNEP experiences have made them more knowledgeable and more confident.

**Factors which Contribute to Change**

Anytime there is change there is likely to be contributing factors. Efforts to integrate learning and development in adulthood have generally focused on how we physically age, our psychological makeup, and more recently on how social and cultural forces shape our development (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). In this regard, the study uncovered five factors which led to the psychosocial change, or impact, in the lives of the paraprofessionals. These were 1) the nature of being indigenous to the communities in which they work 2) personal identification with the work of the program, 3) on-going training, 4) the support that they receive, and 5) their overall work experiences.

**EFNEP Paraprofessionals Change because they are Indigenous to their Community**

Paraprofessionals change due to their indigenous relationship with the people and community with which they work. Henderson (1992), found the EFNEP paraprofessional to be an excellent provider of nutrition education for multicultural groups because of the shared ethnic and racial diversity. Because of the rich diversity of the staff, these paraprofessionals have insights that are crucial to program development and delivery. The indigenous relationship that the paraprofessionals have to the clientele allow them to experience a “trust among the people they serve which means the educational messages are listened to and accepted” (¶ 17).

Being indigenous to the EFNEP audience means that the paraprofessionals often have first hand knowledge of the dire circumstances they see in their students. They talked about
growing up poor, or raising children as a single parent, or even coming to this country to work in
the fields so they could provide a better life for their family. Love & Gardner (1992) describe
individuals who are indigenous as those with the “insider orientation.” These individuals are
similar ethnically, socio-economically, and experientially. The life stories of these study subjects
indicate that they experience similar changes to that of the students with which they work. The
data suggest that the indigenous nature of their relationship in the community with their students
is a factor in this change.

**EFNEP Paraprofessionals Change because of Personal Identification with the Program**

In addition to being indigenous to the communities with which they work, there are other
ways that the paraprofessionals personally identify with their EFNEP experiences. These aspects
of personal identification were cited as reasons which led them to work with EFNEP, and have
been important factors in the change that they have experienced. Paraprofessionals change
because of this personal identification with EFNEP work, or the “helping” qualities needed for
the job. They tend to have a preexisting interest in helping others as well as a love of talking
with people. Often they find that EFNEP gives them an avenue to incorporate their passions into
their work. Many of the paraprofessionals exhibit a sense of mission and verbalize this by
indicating that they have been “called” to the job.

A study of perceived personal attributes and job competencies for EFNEP staff was
conducted by Wakou, Keim & Williams (2003). Personal attributes that were considered
important included good interpersonal skills, positive attitude, a desire to learn, persistent,
friendly, self-starter, empathy, flexible, compassionate, respectful, desire to help others,
persuasive, self confident, credible, positive role model, trustworthy, creative, cultural
awareness, nonjudgmental, and bilingual (p. 21). The data from this study clearly demonstrate that the paraprofessionals possess these attributes.

*EFNEP Paraprofessionals Change because of the Training they Receive*

Extensive training is provided for the paraprofessionals in both new orientation and ongoing in-service training. Training undeniably leads to change in the personal lives of the paraprofessionals. Training for EFNEP paraprofessionals includes formal and informal learning situations. Marsick & Watkins (2001) discuss informal learning, and describe their theory of incidental learning as one which is “usually intentional but not highly structured” (p. 25). Examples include self-directed learning, networking, coaching, and mentoring. The EFNEP paraprofessionals receive this and much more.

Many paraprofessionals come to work for EFNEP with only a high school education. Many have no previous knowledge of nutrition, and limited skills in appropriate food behavior and resource management. Training begins the day they are hired. The supervising agent provides orientation training, and then continues with weekly or monthly training. The training is delivered in a group setting with clusters of paraprofessionals, and is often followed up with individual informal training. Discussion in the four focus groups led to the recognition that the paraprofessionals acknowledge training as a key ingredient in their success.

*EFNEP Paraprofessionals Change because of the Support their Receive*

The ongoing support that the paraprofessionals receive is a key factor in their change. One type of support is that of the resources that are available to them to use in their classes. The paraprofessionals talked about the pride they have in using the multitude of visuals and other props provided to them to use in their classes. Resources to provide food demonstrations were
also cited as important factors. They loved to talk about their favorite recipes and feel the food demonstrations make them a hit with their students.

A second type of support is that of the encouragement they give to each other. This study documents that the paraprofessionals offer themselves as mentors to their students. The study also documents that the paraprofessionals mentor each other. This occurs not only within a county unit, but across the state as they interact with each other at state trainings and conferences.

In addition to mentoring each other, the EFNEP paraprofessionals work together as a very cohesive team. This team work is another form of support that the paraprofessionals give each other. Seasoned staff are nurturing of less experienced coworkers and “take them under their wing.” Team members help each other prepare for classes. They consider each other as not only colleagues but as friends and even family members.

**EFNEP Paraprofessionals Change because of their EFNEP Work Experiences**

The previous chapter revealed numerous stories which document the impact that the EFNEP program has on the personal life of the EFNEP paraprofessional. It is evident from the stories told by these paraprofessionals that the work experiences which they undergo through EFNEP are a factor in change. Their work experiences place them in situations which position them to act on behalf of others, and place them in leadership positions in the community. As the study participants talked about their EFNEP work experiences they linked the experiences to changes in relationships, increase in positive self esteem, and in the way they view others. Additionally, they revealed skills which they have acquired due to their EFNEP experiences.
Implications for Theory: A Model for Psychosocial Change

Josselson (1987, 1996) found four elements in the formation of identity. These were classified as guardian, pathmaker, searcher and drifter. Guardians were described as those who have always known who they are and where they are going. Pathmakers are those who try out various ways (or paths) of who they are and what they believe before making any commitments to their being or beliefs. Those who have an ongoing struggle with making choices about their identity are classified as searchers. Even though they are uncertain about whom they are and what they want to be, they are in search of trying to figure it out. Finally, drifters don’t make commitments, and don’t struggle to make them either. They tend to live by impulse of the moment. In this regard, EFNEP paraprofessionals would be classified as guardians. They describe themselves in their role as someone who is fulfilling their destiny. They hold fast in their belief that they are not only providers of nutrition education but also missionaries of goodwill and service to the community.

Rosenberg (2003) outlines three areas of social change that is supported by spiritual growth. The author credits the works of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. as the foundation of his theory. The three areas of change identified were (1) a change within ourselves, (2) sharing the change with others, and (3) education of ourselves and others. Mezirow (1990) observes that “no need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experience” (p. 11).

Emancipatory learning forms the base for empowerment. Adult educators often speak of empowering learners by helping them develop self awareness as well as social and political identity. Emancipatory learning takes place within the context of social and political transformation (Foley, 1998; Imel, 1999). According to Tisdell (1998), emancipatory learning
theories “have begun to address issues around positionality, authority, voice, and the construction of knowledge” (p.153). Emancipatory learning may be viewed as radical by some. However, Thompson (2000) states, “the radical tradition in adult learning is concerned with how learning, knowledge and education can be used to assist individuals and groups to overcome educational disadvantage, combat social exclusion and discrimination, and challenge economic and political inequalities” (p.1). This is in agreement with Loughlin’s 1994 study in which she found that through emancipatory learning learners are able to become more engaged in social action to make changes. Emancipatory learning is relevant to this study since it examines a process by which individuals with the “least power in society gain more autonomy and independence, more control over their own lives” and are empowered “to bring about change of greater equality and social justice” (Thompson, 2000).

This study shows that a person can have predisposed internal factors such as having a personal identification with the nature of EFNEP work or being indigenous to the EFNEP audience. When external factors are added including training, support and EFNEP work experiences, psychosocial changes can occur. Changes identified include skills development, community status, relationship changes, change in viewing others, increased caring for others, and increased self esteem. This process can be classified as transformative learning.

Development is described by Mezirow (1991) as an outcome of transformative learning. He states, that transformation is “the central process of adult development” (p. 155). EFNEP paraprofessionals undergo a transformation as a result of their training and work experience. In short, this study presents findings which suggest that the psychosocial impact of EFNEP on the EFNEP paraprofessional is a combination of the individual person, plus EFNEP training, support and experiences. This psychosocial change is a result of transformative learning. A model is
presented in Figure 1 which summarizes the findings. Figure 1 suggests that the psychosocial impact of EFNEP on the EFNEP paraprofessional is a sum of training, support and work experiences when added to the preexisting characteristics that the paraprofessionals have when hired into the program. When these internal and external factors are combined the result is personal change. Again, the paraprofessionals may exhibit psychosocial changes including skills development, heightened community status, and changes in personal and community relationships. They may also exhibit changes which were identified as the way in which they view others, increased caring for others, and an increase in positive self esteem.

*Figure 1. A Process Model for Psychosocial Impact*
Implications for Practice

By better understanding the changes which occur in the paraprofessional staff, EFNEP can better recruit, select, train, support, and retain staff. This understanding has implications for EFNEP program administration. Selecting the right individual for the job, as well as effective training and support of the individual is critical to the success of the program.

Supervising Extension agents can phrase interview questions which give them insight into personal characteristics which may indicate if a candidate is suitable for hiring. For example, this study cites innate characteristics found in successful paraprofessionals. These include being indigenous to the target student audience and having characteristics of personal identification with the EFNEP mission. By realizing this, supervising agents can recruit from an indigenous population. Supervising agents can also phrase interview questions in order to ascertain whether or not the candidate possesses the characteristics identified in this study: an interest in helping others, a love of talking with people, and passions which can be incorporated into their work. During the interview, supervising agents can also listen for information that would indicate that the candidate exhibits a sense of mission.

This study also establishes implications for training new EFNEP paraprofessionals, and for their continuing education and support. By adequately meeting the needs of training and support the probability of staff retention can be increased. First of all, the psychosocial aspects of the work should be considered when developing training curriculum. For example, training curriculum should include content that not only prepares staff for the cognitive domain of nutrition knowledge, but also addresses and prepares them for the psychosocial aspects including teaching strategies, dealing with difficult situations, working in environments which lack proper sanitation, maintaining client confidentiality as related to personal information or citizenship.
status, being a role model or mentor to their students, and maintaining the public persona of being representatives of the University and of Cooperative Extension. Furthermore, the “empowerment model” published in the Collazo, et al. (1993) study places EFNEP paraprofessionals as a “collaborator” with both the supervising professional and the client. The study recommendations call for a broader range of in-service training topics since the paraprofessional staff members are constantly expanding and experimenting with new ideas and approaches.

In addition to training, better staff retention can be achieved by creating an internal mentor system by which the paraprofessionals support each other. Paraprofessionals which are new to the job can benefit immensely by being paired with a more experienced paraprofessional coworker in a formal mentor situation. Before being sent out to teach classes on their own, new staff should be given the opportunity to attend and assist with classes being taught by the mentoring paraprofessional. Having a peer mentor can also give the new staff member an opportunity to ask questions and address issues which they may not freely discuss with the supervising agent. This, again, can increase the likelihood of greater staff retention.

As previously referenced, Mondore (2002) found that high involvement in work processes can lead to an individual’s self-efficacy and self motivation. As defined by Walkley (1997), self-efficacy is “the perception or judgment of one’s ability to perform a certain action successfully or to control one’s circumstances.” It is evident in the data that EFNEP paraprofessionals are highly invested in their work processes. Supervising agents should be aware of this phenomenon and continue creating opportunities for this level of investment. Furthermore, Watkins (1995) indicates that workplace learning focuses on what learners do rather than on what trainers solely do. The discussion of informal and incidental learning by
Marsick & Watkins (2001) is also confirmed in the data to relate to paraprofessionals’ experiences in their EFNEP work. Wallach (2002) also conducted research which linked job dimensions to empowerment among paraprofessionals in human service organizations. Again, by being aware of these indicators, supervising agents can seek and provide opportunities for EFNEP paraprofessionals to exercise control over their work processes, thereby increasing retention rate.

The materials and visuals provided to the paraprofessionals are of importance. These supplies give paraprofessionals the confidence to teach the nutrition concepts and the creditability needed to become a successful teacher. Supervising agents and program administrators should strive to always place cutting-edge and highly visual teaching materials into the hands of the paraprofessionals and assure that the paraprofessionals are trained on how to use these materials in the EFNEP classes. Additionally, program administrators should manage budgets to assure that there remain funds available for food demonstration supplies and equipment.

As a final point, this study has implications for reporting program impact. When reporting impact of the program supervising agents and administrators can take note of, and take credit for, changes which occur in capacity building both within the lives of the paraprofessionals and in the greater community. There already exists much documentation of the impact of EFNEP at the client level. Documenting and reporting impact at the paraprofessional level could provide additional justification for continued funding from USDA based on evidence of an extra layer of impact beyond that of the client level.
Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of the study was to understand how training and work experience of the EFNEP paraprofessional can effect their individual change and personal development. The research incorporated a qualitative research methodology to identify and investigate significant characteristics of psychosocial change which EFNEP paraprofessionals undergo as a result of their training and work experience, and the factors which lead to these changes. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested for future research:

1. Replicate this study in other states, or by using a larger geographical area including multiple states or regions.

2. Conduct a similar study with additional questions added to the interview guide that explores the possibility of change factors not identified in this study. For example, it would be interesting to know if the psychosocial changes experienced by the EFNEP paraprofessionals can be tied to years of service, prior formal education, or other demographic characteristics.

3. Conduct a similar study to investigate the possibility that the psychosocial changes follow a continuum which may begin with social changes and progress into psychological changes. It appears that there may be a progression of change tied to experiences, but in this study there were not specific interview questions that can lead to conclusive findings on this issue.

4. Conduct a study that explores one of the findings in depth. This may include investigating the predisposed sense of mission that the EFNEP paraprofessionals portray and the spirituality component of the findings. Others findings of this study that could be examined in depth include the increased caring for others which EFNEP
paraprofessionals exhibit, the gain of a heightened community status, changes in relationships within the family and/or the community, the increase in positive self esteem, the change in the way the paraprofessionals view others, or the new life skills which they develop.

5. This study suggests that there is a philosophical orientation of EFNEP toward empowerment. Further research is needed to determine what is explicit about the EFNEP model, or implementation, that leads to empowerment.

6. Replicate this study with EFNEP professionals who serve as supervising agents. Even though the extension agents are not on the front line working with the clients, they may also experience some of the same type of psychosocial changes based on their involvement and experiences with the EFNEP program.

7. Replicate this study with other types of helping paraprofessionals and/or professionals to examine psychosocial changes based on experiences that these workers undergo. Possible research subjects may include those in primary education such as teachers and paraprofessionals, youth services, clergy, social workers or those in health related fields.

8. Replicate this qualitative study using individual interviews instead of focus groups. Based on literature review, one would expect to find more negative changes in the experiences of the paraprofessionals. The only negative outcome discovered in this study was that relationship changes occur in a negative way based on the paraprofessionals’ knowledge of food safety. It was a phenomenon, however, that this same route of conversation occurred in all four focus groups. This leaves a question of whether there were no other negative changes or whether there were negative changes
but no one was willing to discuss them in a group setting. Individual interviews may be more successful in bringing to light additional negative changes.

9. Conduct a quantitative research project drawing upon the same intent of this study.

Originally, this investigation was planned as a quantitative study. A preliminary focus group was formed from paraprofessionals in order to ascertain constructs to use as variables in a survey. After the rich discussion in this inaugural group it was decided that there were a wealth of stories from EFNEP paraprofessionals that should be shared. At that point the direction of the study changed, and the four study focus groups were implemented. Now that this study has identified characteristics of change, or constructs, as well as factors associated with the change, these may be used as variables for a quantitative study questionnaire.

Chapter Summary

Based on the analysis of four focus groups containing twenty people, conclusions are presented about the psychosocial impact of EFNEP training and work experience on the EFNEP paraprofessional. This study first identified characteristics of change. These included 1) the development of a variety of new skills, 2) a heightened community status, 3) changes in relationships both within the family and within the community, 4) changes in the way the paraprofessionals view others, 5) increased caring for others, and 6) an increase in positive self esteem.

Second, factors were identified which contribute to change. These consist of 1) EFNEP paraprofessionals change because they are indigenous to their community, 2) EFNEP paraprofessionals change because of personal identification with the program, 3) EFNEP paraprofessionals change because of the training they receive, 4) EFNEP paraprofessionals
change because of the support their receive, and 5) EFNEP paraprofessionals change because of
their EFNEP work experiences. These factors can be categorized as being either internal factors
or external. Internal factors are those which are inherent to the person and preexisting before
being hired into the EFNEP program. In the case of the EFNEP paraprofessionals it was found
that being indigenous to the community in which they work, and having a personal identification
with the qualities of the EFNEP program were internal factors leading to the changes
experienced. External factors were those related to the training, support, and the work
experiences which the paraprofessionals undergo.

A model was presented which summarized the findings. This model suggests that the
psychosocial impact of EFNEP on the EFNEP paraprofessional is a sum of training, support and
work experiences when added to the preexisting characteristics that the paraprofessionals have
when hired into the program. Under these conditions, paraprofessionals may exhibit changes
including skills development, heightened community status, and changes in personal and
community relationships. They may also exhibit changes which were identified as the way in
which they view others, increased caring for others, and an increase in positive self esteem. It
appears that change occurs through the process of transformative learning.

This study has provided new insight into the lives of EFNEP paraprofessionals. It has
also documented an additional impact of the EFNEP program beyond that of the usual reported
results that have been widely documented for more than thirty years. Additionally, the findings
provide empirical documentation which is consistent with the poems written by EFNEP
paraprofessionals at the 2006 Georgia EFNEP conference, included as Appendix D.

EFNEP impacts the lives of families with limited means. The study clearly shows that
EFNEP also impacts the lives of the paraprofessionals who are hired, trained, and work in the
field. This impact includes qualities of human growth and capacity building in terms of the psychosocial changes made in the personal development of the paraprofessionals.
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APPENDIX A
CONSENT FORM

I, ______________________________, agree to participate in a focus group, as a part of the research study entitled "EFNEP training and work experience: the psychosocial impact on the EFNEP paraprofessional" conducted by Judy Hibbs from the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, & Policy Program in Adult Education, the University of Georgia (706-613-3640) under the direction of Dr. Lorilee R. Sandmann, the Department of Adult Education, the University of Georgia (706-542-4014). The purpose of this research study is to understand how EFNEP paraprofessionals' lives are changed by their training and work experience.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate in this focus group, and even if I choose to participate, I may stop at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all personal information returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

I understand that I will be asked to participate in a focus group to answer questions about information related to my experiences as an EFNEP paraprofessional. The focus group session will last about 2 hours. I understand that I will be served a free luncheon following the focus group discussion for taking part in the session. For this focus group session, no psychological, social, legal, economic, physical discomfort, stress or harm is anticipated. I realize that participants may benefit from the opportunity to share experiences with others, and to reflect upon the role that training and work experiences have had on personal development.

Information shared during the focus group will be audio taped and hand written notes will be taken. My personal information revealed during the session will not be shared with outside people without my written permission, unless otherwise required by law. Furthermore, I will respect the confidentiality of information that other participants divulge in the group. The audio tapes will be labeled with pseudonyms, and only these pseudonyms will be used when transcribing and analyzing data. Transcriptions and audio tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet. Audio tapes will not be publicly disseminated at any time during the process, and will be destroyed after the completion of the doctoral dissertation. If information about me is published, my identity will be disguised by a pseudonym.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this focus group and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records. The researcher, Judy Hibbs will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706) 613-3640.

________________________    ___________________________  ________________
Name of Researcher   Signature    Date

________________________    ___________________________  ________________
Name of Participant   Signature    Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.
For questions or problems about your rights as a research participant, please call or write: the Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, the University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.
APPENDIX B
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
EFNEP Focus Group Participants

Focus group interviews are being conducted as a part of the research study entitled "EFNEP training and work experience: The psychosocial impact on the EFNEP paraprofessional" conducted by Judy Hibbs from the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, & Policy, the University of Georgia (706-613-3640) under the direction of Dr. Lorilee R. Sandmann, the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, & Policy, the University of Georgia (706-542-4014). In order to draw conclusions in the analysis of data, some demographic data is needed. Your responses to the following questions will be kept confidential, and will not include your name or any specifically identifying information.

What year were you born? ________________________________________________________

What is your gender? ____________________________________________________________

What is your race or ethnicity? __________________________________________________

What town do you live in? ______________________________________________________

What town do you work in? _____________________________________________________

How many years have you lived in your community? ________________________________

How many years have you worked for the EFNEP? ________________________________

What did you do before this job? ________________________________________________

What is your highest level of education? __________________________________________

Is your household income (check one):

_________ Less than $10,000  ________ $10,000 – 15,000  ________ $16,000 – 20,000

_________ $21,000 – 25,000  ________ $25,000 – 30,000  ________ More than $30,000
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE
EFNEP Focus Group

Background and Consent

I’m Judy Hibbs, and I’m an area EFNEP agent in the Athens area. I’ve been with UGA Extension for 23 years. The last 10 years have been spent working with EFNEP. I’m working on a doctorate degree from the University of Georgia. There are 2 things that I have to do for the doctorate, 1) take courses and 2) conduct research and write up that research, which is called a dissertation.

Having worked in Extension, and also worked with paraprofessionals like yourself, I know well the kind of difference you make in your communities.

So often, people will study nutrition but they will only study the recipient, or client. There have been very few research projects which look at you and your jobs. So, my study is in trying to understand better the many workers like you, EFNEP program assistants, who are actually out there in the field helping people. So, this study is about EFNEP paraprofessionals, and how your lives are changed by your training and work experience with EFNEP.

I have several questions to ask you today. We’ll be flexible with the questions so that you can share everything that you’d like.

Information shared during this focus group will be audio taped and hand written notes will be taken. No personal information revealed during the session will be shared with other outside people. Also, I ask you to respect the confidentiality of information that other participants divulge in the group. When we get through talking, I’ll take the tape home and type up all the ideas that you say. The tapes and notes will be kept in a locked cabinet, and will be destroyed after I complete the dissertation. If I end up publishing information that comes from this focus group, your identity will be disguised by a pseudonym.

Introductions

Let’s begin by going around the room. Would you tell me your name, and tell me a little about yourself. You don’t have to speak; you may say “pass”. So, state your name, and tell me something important about the work you do.

Now I know who you are and you know who I am. One of the reasons why we’re here is because I want to understand how your lives have changed by your participation in the program. So, what we want to talk about today is if and how EFNEP program assistants change. How you have changed as a result of working in this program.
As we share, there are no wrong ideas, so we can’t say “no, you’re wrong.” But, we should listen to one another and build on those ideas.

**Questions** (With each of the following questions, allow time for responses)

1. How have you changed? Remember back to before you became an EFNEP program assistant? Do you remember the type of person you were before you had the job? Then, think about now? Has anyone changed, if so what has changed?

   Probe: Do you think about yourself differently in terms of what you can? Do you think about yourself, as a person, differently?

   Probe: Do you have new skills? How about relationships in the community?

2. Let’s talk about how the community looks at you. Before you had your job, if you’d go to the supermarket or the main street in town how did people react to you, as compared with now, after you’ve had the job?

3. You talked about your professional relationships with your clients, and in the community. What about changes within your own home, with your family?

4. What about among your social circle of your friends and your extended family? Do they treat you differently now that you have this job? Do they use you as a resource? Do they consider you as an expert?

5. What parts of EFNEP/your job have caused you to change?

6. Have you changed in any negative ways? Or, have there been any bad consequences as a result of taking this job?

   Probe: Have any of you had negative reactions from anyone in your family, or your friends as a result of your work? Do you ever have people you went to school with treat you as if you are not a real teacher?

7. Do you believe you’ll live longer because you taught in this program? Or, will your family members live longer or be healthier?

8. Are there any other changes that we have not discussed?

Thank you for your time and input. Your comments are very helpful to understanding and supporting EFNEP program assistants. After I’ve had a chance to write my report, I’d like you to read it to make sure that I’ve got it all right. Thanks again.
APPENDIX D
What If........
A Collection of Poems written by Georgia EFNEP Staff
EFNEP Conference, March, 2006

*What if* I show my learners I care?
I might open a new door.
What if they wanted to come inside?
I could lead them to a healthier life.
What if my learners trusted me to show the way?
I would empower them to make a change.
How much do they know I care?

*What if* I show you pictures?
I might get your attention.
What if we dance together?
I can get close to you.
What if I prepare a demonstration?
I would get you more involved.
Would you learn more this way?

*What if* I were more animated?
I might surprise you.
What if you talked more?
I could hear more.
What if I had more hands on activities?
I would have more helping hands.
What if I were you?
What if you were me?

*What if* I had a DVD player?
I might be able to play fruity music.
What if I had a fruit bowl centerpiece?
I could capture more attention.
What if they eat the fruit?
I would know they had one serving of fruit.
Would they continue to eat more fruit?
What if I dressed up like a clown?
I might make my students laugh!
What if I dressed up like a ballerina?
I could teach my students how to dance!
What if I dressed up like a monkey?
I would teach my students how to have fun!
Laugh, dance, have fun… isn’t that what a student really wants anyway?

What if I opened my mind to a new domain, and stepped onto the pier of the unknown with no fear of what I see before me?
I might be able to conquer one of my own fears by learning from someone else’s fears.
What if I taught another to be more easy going?
I could help them to learn to enjoy the moments instead of concentrating on the ending result.
What if I could help others to learn how to improve their surroundings?
I would help them to see more of the world that’s around them.
Wouldn’t the world be a better place to live in for you and me and all of our communities?

What if I was an Angel?
I might take my classes under my wings.
What if I take all their worries and troubles away?
I could give them stability and peace of mind knowing they could care for their children.
What if I was an Angel?
I would make sure all children had three nutritious meals a day.
Is this possible working in EFNEP?

What if I could be more engaging?
I might sing a tune at the beginning of class.
What if we all had voices like a mocking bird?
I could write a song.
What if everyone would join in and sing?
I would soar like an eagle on a mountain.
Would you be more likely to participate?

What if I could be more creative?
Then I might be able to try new things in my class.
What if I practiced waiting on a response from my participants?
Then they could know I care about what they feel and think.
What if I show more enthusiasm about what I teach?
Then my audience would be more excited about learning.
What if I stuck to my schedule?
I might have more participants.
What if I could do more food demonstrations?
I might have better food recalls.
What if I had my participants write poems?
I might be labeled as crazy.
Why can’t we all be a little more crazy?

What if we could be more creative?
We might convince our homemakers to practice what we teach.
What if we take the time to listen to our homemakers?
We could better understand what their needs are.
What if we could take the information we learned today?
We would be able to make a difference in their lives.
Would we have helped them to reach for their goals, desires and dreams?

What if I was a kiwi?
I might be fuzzy.
What if I was a strawberry?
I could be sweet and juicy.
What if I was a homeless child?
I would dare to dream of all these things I could try.
Would you help me?

What if I could give the world a lift, with this EFNEP gift?
This would be good to take to every neighborhood.

What if I was in my clients shoes, and didn’t know what to do?
I might see things a lot differently, and be more considerate of their feelings of how I should follow through.
What if I faced the hardships and the many struggles they face day-to-day?
I could lend my support by showing them a much better way.
What if they rejected me at first, and didn’t want to hear what I had to say?
I would not give up on them, because it is my duty to help them to the best of my ability to find their way…
Would you give up on me?
What if I walked into an empty class?
I might look at my watch to see if the time has passed.
What if I walked to the door and saw my students coming for more?
I could grab my bags of tricks and start my lesson with their picks.
What if we start out with our colorful papers and our colorful pens?
That would be great way to begin.
I would draw the apple, the pear and the peach to reflect the wonderful students I teach.
Would they find it easier to reflect with me?

What if I was a fruit or vegetable?
I might be bright in color and have many different shapes.
What if people would eat me everyday?
I could help them keep the doctor away.
What if no one would eat me?
I would go to waste and they would be very slow in pace.
What kind of life would it be without fruits and vegetables like me!

What if I eat more veggies?
I would feel better and have prettier skin!
What if I could have more money?
I would use it more wisely!
Would I be a better person?

What if I could fly?
I might be able to reach places beyond.
What if I could see the future?
What if I could reach inside your mind?
I would show you the world of knowledge.
Would you take the chance?

What if I can make a difference?
I might be able to help more people.
What if I learn more?
I could make sure you do too.
I could be your leader.
I would be happy, that I made a difference in your life.
What can I do to help you?
What if I could see your hurt?
I might try to lift you up.
What if I had you share your story?
I would help you see that you’re not alone.
What if I saw beyond your hurt?
I would help you improve your situation.
Would you leave this class with a smile in your heart?