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Walden University

College of Education

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Amanda Sobremesana

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and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Learning Experiences and Goal Setting Strategies from Successful Adult Basic Education Learners

by

Amanda Sobremesana

MA, Chapman University, 2006

BS, California State University, Fullerton, 2004

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

March 2021

Abstract

Adults who are unsuccessful in completing their educational program will not receive the needed certification or diploma to be competitive in a global economy and job market. The completion percentage of adult basic education learners remains low at an adult basic education site in a Western state. The purpose of this study was to better understand the various experiences of the successful adult learner and the different ways they used goal setting strategies to complete their programs. This basic qualitative study was guided by Knowles' theory of andragogy. The guiding research questions asked adult learners what learning experiences and goal setting strategies contributed to their success. Data collection occurred through individual, semistructured phone interviews of 12 purposefully selected adult basic education learners during the last two sessions of program completion. Data were analyzed using a thematic approach with precoding, open, and axial coding. Participants indicated that because they had supportive relationships with others and a positive disposition, they were able to achieve their academic goals. The participants also reported using a set of life skills and study strategies to complete their educational goals. Since facilitators reach a large number of adult learners, the findings from the study will be presented in 3-day, professional development to facilitators at adult basic education sites to better assist with meeting the needs of the adult learner. This endeavor may contribute to positive social change by focusing on improving experiences and strategies of unsuccessful adult learners, thus helping them become more competitive for employment in today's global economy.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to late Dr. James Cross for taking a moment to explain to a teenager how you could be both a teacher and a doctor. You were the reason I became a teacher and why I have never, ever, given up on a student. Even the toughest and seemingly unlovable ones. To my parents, who were babies raising a baby. You both may have been young and unsure but you raised a strong-willed and independent woman. Words cannot describe my gratitude and love. To my in-laws, thank you for always supporting me and encouraging me to finish the journey. Roger – I did it! There is a doctor with the Sobremesana name now. I hope you are proudly looking down from heaven. To my children, Thiago and Lucca. I love you always and forever, no matter what. And finally, to my husband. Your endless belief in me is what got me through when I thought I had nothing more to give. Thank you for being my teammate during this doctoral journey and for the last twenty-two years. I love you.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my doctoral chair, Dr. Tina Pitt. From our first phone call, I knew we were a perfect match. Your kindness and humor kept me level headed and your encouragement kept me writing. I sincerely appreciate how I could always speak candidly about my frustrations and insecurities without embarrassment. You taught me to trust the process, even when it felt like it was not processing.

To Dr. Debbie Beebe, who started this journey as my second committee member, I hope you are doing well. I thank you for your guidance during the initial stages of this journey and your excitement for me as a researcher. I would not have been able to finish this journey, however, without Dr. Mary Howe, who came on as my second committee member mid-way through my study. Dr. Howe, thank you for seeing the potential in me, in my writing and for always pushing me towards greatness.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Bonita Wilcox, my University Research Reviewer for the clarity in her feedback. You were also added to my committee in the later stages, yet you were always attentive and prompt with assisting me in meeting my deadlines.

Thank you to everyone who participated in this study. I know it may not have been the easiest to share your stories during a global pandemic but I appreciate each one of you. Finally, to all my friends and colleagues, for the accountability, the encouragement, and for keeping me in the game the last six years. A special thank you to Kiran and Blythe for taking your role in my mock oral defense so seriously. I am deeply grateful for the commitment everyone made to my success.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction to the Problem

The traditional pathway for adult learners towards a specific certification or a degree program is typically defined as enrolling in college immediately after high school and attending school full-time (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). In recent years, however, adult learners have enrolled at Adult Basic Education (ABE) sites in order to complete diploma pathways, a career/technical program certification, or other programs relevant to their work (NCES, 2016). In a review of the literature about successful adult learners, the predictors of success are centered around meaningful learning experiences and goal setting strategies (NCES, 2016; Khiat, 2017). In order to complete their educational program, adult learners maintain supportive relationships and participate in meaningful learning environments (Aydin, 2017). Researchers have also shown that successful adult learners who exhibit a positive disposition and utilize study strategies and goal setting techniques complete their goals (Choi, 2017; Jordan et al., 2015). Although we know much about successful adult learners at 2-year and 4-year sites, there still exists a need to know if the same recommendations are applicable to adult learners at ABE sites. ABE learners who are unsuccessful in completing their educational program will not receive the needed certification or diploma to be competitive in a global economy and job market (World Education Organization, 2017).

Nationally, the low number of adults completing a program at an ABE site consequently does not meet the projected workforce demands needed by 2020 (California Department of Education, 2013). For the state to maintain economic stability, the skill

level of the workforce must increase. With California reporting the highest percentage of immigrants in the workforce and with 50% of that group having less than a ninth-grade education level (California Department of Education, 2013), the lack of attention given to adult learners at ABE sites lowers the economic projections for the state. The authors of the CDE report stated the purpose of adult education is to bring adult learners to a level of readiness necessary to complete postsecondary degrees and certifications or to advance in their occupations (California Department of Education, 2013). Increasing the number of skilled adults is necessary because economic and workforce opportunities are imperative for the well-being of individuals in the state and also of the nation (World Education Organization, 2017).

Osman (2012) wrote educational goals are decisions or actions taken by an adult learner with the aim of achieving a particular outcome or specifying an outcome to reach. Adult learners can successfully complete their educational goals by having meaningful learning experiences and by implementing goal setting strategies (Knowles, 1950; Osman, 2012; Remedios & Richardson, 2013). Therefore, the gap in practice that needs to be examined are the meaningful learning experiences successful ABE learners have had and the strategies by which those same adult learners set goals to complete their program (Belzer, 2017; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). When adult learners fail to achieve their goals, this leads to a problem between the learner completing their program and the chances they can use their education for greater economic and workforce opportunities (DeSchryver & Dlugoleski, 2015).

At a local level, there is a problem with low completion rate percentages of adult learners at an ABE site in a western state. In the 2017-2018 school year at the study site, only 38% of adult learners successfully completed a program that led the adult to achieve a high school diploma/general education diploma, a state certification for career/technical employment, or a certificate of participation in the English as a Second Language program. This resulted in 62% of adult learners, who were enrolled in an ABE program, were not successful in completing the program (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems National Reporting System, 2019).

According to a former interim director of career/technical education overseeing the study site, it is important to identify the program pathways that are relevant to the goals of ABE learners, and then help them complete the program pathway that will make them successful in a competitive market (Interim Director of Career/Technical Education, personal communication, July 5, 2018). Although the completion rates were measured and published in the site accreditation report, student educational goals, which are possible factors that influence completion rates, have not been explored or evaluated in an in-depth manner. This study will address the gap in practice by exploring the learning experiences and goal setting strategies that assisted successful ABE learners in completing their program.

Rationale

In the site accreditation report for the proposed research site, there is a need to aid adult learners by meeting “regularly with students to set short and long term academic and career goals” so that each adult learner was more likely to achieve completion

(Gagliardi et al., 2015, p. 38). The low completion rates are not unique to one calendar year. According to the 5-year data reported at the ABE site in the study, 17% of enrolled adult learners successfully completed their educational program in 2013-2014, followed by two years of nonreporting from the site for 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems National Reporting System, 2019). In 2016-2017, the average for adult learners who completed their program at the study site rose to 36% and for the last reporting year on file, the average remained consistent in 2017-2018 at 38% of adult learners successfully completing their program at the study site (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems National Reporting System, 2019).

The low completion rates of adult learners from the targeted research site along with the lack of literature about successful adult learners at ABE sites form the rationale for exploring the learning experiences and goal setting strategies of successful adult learners (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Nationally, 53% of ABE learners complete a certification or career/technical license, which is higher than at the local study site (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). Based on the data about the primary attainable goals of the adults at the study site, 80% of ABE learners said their primary goal was to improve their skills in order to complete a certification in a program pathway (Gagliardi et al., 2015). As previously stated, with only 38% of those ABE learners completing their program, the purpose of the study is to explore the learning experiences and goal setting strategies the successful adult learners used to assist them in completing their educational goals at ABE sites. In order to address the local problem, I collected

data through phone interviews with adult learners in the last two sessions of their program. The data collected could help other adult learners at ABE sites with strategies that could assist them in completing their programs.

Definition of Terms

Adult basic education (ABE): An educational opportunity or that provide adults with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to participate as citizens, workers, parents, family, or community members (California Department of Education, 2017b).

Adult education school: Instructional programs organized at sites operated by school districts, community colleges, community organizations, public libraries, correctional facilities, state agencies, and public or private nonprofit agencies (California Department of Education, 2017b).

Andragogy: Assumptions made about the art and science of helping adults learn. The theory that adults are more likely to be more self-directing (i.e., setting and achieving goals) when the adult learner is given the proper tools, resources, encouragement and has had successful prior experiences (Knowles, 1975).

Educational attainment: Refers to the highest level of education a person has completed (United States Census Bureau, 2017).

Emotional belonging: Strategies that promote strong interpersonal connections between learners and school staff or learners and their family. This emotional support provides learners with high expectations that influence the judgments a learner makes about him or herself (Savitz-Romer et al., 2015).

Educational goals: Decisions or actions taken by an adult learner with the aim of achieving a particular outcome or specifying an outcome to reach (Osman, 2012).

Facilitator: An individual who responds to the relevant needs of adult learners, provides support and encouragement, builds a trusting relationship with the learner, and encourages the learner to critically examine their achievements (Cranton, 2006).

Goal setting: A method by which an adult learner evaluates achievements against a specified outcome (Osman, 2012).

Learning experience: Strategies that promote emotional or academic skill development with appropriate and comprehensive support in order to improve learner achievement (Savitz-Romer et al., 2015).

Learning disposition: A combination of learners' motivations, beliefs, and attitudes toward learning and their capacities (Choi, 2017).

Learning strategies: Behaviors, dispositions, and relationships that individuals use to engage in study or work that strengthen a learners' mastery of subject matter (Savitz-Romer et al., 2015).

Readiness to learn: The idea that adults are ready to learn the necessary things in order to effectively move from one developmental stage to the next (Knowles et al., 2015).

Self-directing individuals: Adults with a concept of being responsible for their own lives (Knowles et al., 2015).

Self-regulation and resiliency: Strategies that promote emotional competencies for a learner such as self-awareness, self-management, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and personal responsibility (Savitz-Romer et al., 2015).

Sense of self: A sense of responsibility that an adult has about their own decisions and how they want to be treated by others (Knowles et al., 2015).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because the concept on learning experiences and goal setting strategies from successful adult learners has been articulated in previous qualitative research that focused on successful adult learners at a community college or university level, but it did not account for the successful adults enrolled at ABE sites (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). The predictors of success from adult learners at community colleges or universities centered around the adult learner experience, facilitator-learner interaction, and types of learning strategies (Khiat, 2017; NCES, n.d.). Through the research in this study, I explored what successful adult learners at ABE sites said were the experiences that may have contributed to their educational success, including strategies they used to successfully goal-set to complete their program. The implication for positive social change is other adult learners who have not yet finished their program may benefit from learning the strategies that will help them more successfully set their own educational goals and complete their programs. Thus, the low percentage of adult learners completing their program may increase, thus further helping them become more competitive for employment in today's global economy.

Research Questions

Researchers have concluded that adults who complete their educational goals benefit from an increase in earnings and/or employment status, the social mobility within their family and/or community, as well as an improvement in their basic living (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Thus, the significance of understanding successful adult learner goal setting strategies and learning experiences could potentially lead to assisting those adult learners who are struggling to achieve their educational goals. In order to better understand the experiences and goal setting strategies from successful adult learners, the following research questions will be used to guide this study:

RQ1 – What learning experiences do adult basic education learners contribute to completing their educational goals?

RQ2 – What goal setting strategies do adult basic education learners identify that assisted them in completing their educational goals?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

The concept explored through this study is the learning experiences and goal setting strategies used by adult learners to successfully complete their educational goals. Therefore, Malcolm Knowles' adult learning theory was selected as the conceptual framework for this study. His theory andragogy or adult learning emphasized six main assumptions: (a) adults have an established sense of self, (b) prior learning experiences influence their learning, (c) adults learn through real-life application, (d) adults choose learning experiences willingly and based on relevance, (e) adults are self-directed by

internal motivation, and (f) adults expect to be involved learning process (Knowles et al., 2015).

Adult learners have an established sense of self and are therefore self-directing individuals who take responsibility for actions when they experience failure (Knowles et al., 2015). How adult learners respond to situations through positive actions and self-directed behaviors influences their ability to goal set and complete their education (Choi, 2017). Knowles et al. (2015) acknowledged more research is needed about how to help people acquire the attitudes or skills to be more self-directing after failure, so exploring the strategies of successful adult learners would help those adults who have failed. However, he wrote that adults who have a positive reaction when under stress and evaluate their achievements against a specified outcome, are more successful in completing their educational goals (Knowles et al., 2015).

Adults are successful in completing their educational goals when learning is derived from their prior experiences (Knowles, 1975). This second assumption of Knowles' andragogical framework built upon the idea that when the adult learning experience is considered in the design of adult basic education programs, adult learners can learn new tasks (Knowles, 1975). When learning new material, adult learners' thinking and actions are based on their previous experiences (Russell, 2019). Adult learners may use both positive and negative experiences to influence their view on education; and thus, affecting goal setting and attainment of them (Russell, 2019).

The third assumption of Knowles' theory is when adult learners understand the immediate real-life application and relevancy of those learning tasks, they are successful

in completing their educational goals (Knowles, 1975). The learning material must be purposeful, relevant, and begin with the student's interests for the adults to be successful (Knowles et al., 2015). The acquisition of knowledge from the learning task contributes to the learning process by which an adult learner develops a new skill or idea. Adult learners may expend effort or use practicality in real-life application depending on the task (Knowles et al., 2015). Finally, when adult learners participate in relevant learning activities and gain a sense of satisfaction or reward as a result of these activities, they successfully complete their educational goals (Knowles et al., 2015).

Adults exhibit a greater readiness to learn when they have a choice in the learning experiences (Knowles et al., 2015). Knowles et al. (2015) indicated that experiences such as offering a choice in the times, places, and at a learning speed that is convenient to the individual learner support adult learning. For example, when adults have the choice to select class time in nontraditional formats, such as late evening or weekend course offerings, online or hybrid course offerings, or self-paced courses, the adult learner moves through the material while managing roles and responsibilities.

The sixth assumption is adults are driven by internal motivation (Knowles et al., 2015; Pappas, 2014). Thus, adult learners associate specific behaviors with success and replicate the behaviors to complete their educational goals (Knowles et al., 2015). Adult basic education programs that meet the individual needs of adult learners, either through a learners' personal need or a learners' want to know by acknowledging their prior experiences support successful adult learners (Knowles et al., 2015).

Another assumption of Knowles' framework is adults are successful when the learning experience is self-directed (Fresh, 2019; Knowles et al., 2015). Adult learners are responsible for their learning success through goal setting and then evaluating their achievement towards those goals (Knowles, 1950). Adult learners set goals to increase their competence and understanding of a subject (Welsh et al., 2019). Adult learners who set goals are more successful when attempting to complete their educational program. Alessandri et al. (2020) wrote goal setting leads students to reach their goal relevant outcomes by focusing their attention, effort, and actions. When adult learners are involved in the learning process, the learner evaluates their performance against standards that are specific and objective (Alitto et al., 2016). Alitto et al. (2016) concluded that feedback on the learner's progress towards their educational goals can be provided by facilitators, peers, or through self-monitoring. By involving adult learners in the evaluation of their own performance, it increases reflective learning, therefore, allowing the learner to autonomously decide when changes need to occur in order to achieve their educational goals.

The framework's constructs were used to guide the research questions. I wrote the first research question 1 to ask participants about their prior learning experiences which relates to the framework concept of knowing prior experiences influence adult learner success. Knowles et al. (2015) suggested that adult learner educational goals are influenced by the relevant activities presented to an individual and the process by which the knowledge or skill was acquired by the individual. Adult learners have the ability to structure their environment and also are impacted by the interactions the adult learner has

with the individuals within their environment (Knowles et al., 2015). Knowles determined adults were successful in completing their educational goals when they felt learning was beneficial to their goals. He goes on to say adults are successful in meeting their educational goals when learning has relevance to their well-being and has a real-life application (Knowles et al., 2015). Thus, I drafted research question 2 to ask participants about the goal setting strategies that assisted them in completing their educational goals.

Review of the Broader Problem

I conducted a literature review using the framework and the topic in the study. The key search terms for the literature review were associated with adult learning, including *adult learner experience*, *teacher and adult learner interaction*, and *types of adult learning methods*. During the search process, various search terms emerged with assistance from the use of Boolean operators. These terms included *academic experience*, *academic self-efficacy*, *academic success strategies*, *adult basic education*, *adult education*, *educational attainment*, *goal setting*, *learning experience*, *persistence*, and *predictors of success*, *resiliency*, *self-regulation*, *study skills*, *student success*, and *student perceptions*. I evaluated peer-reviewed journal articles and research studies for credibility and relevance to the research problem. Sources that were unbiased and represented adult learners were selected for review.

Additionally, I conducted website and database searches related to adult basic education, adult learners, and completion rates. These included the California Department of Education – Adult Education, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Institute for Educational Leadership, National Center for Educational Statistics, Office of Career,

Technical Education, and Adult Educational National Reporting System, the Legislative Analyst Office, and the United States Census Bureau. Furthermore, peer reviewed journals were included in the literature review, such as the Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, Journal of Educational Psychology, Educational Psychology, Journal of Further and Higher Education, Australian Journal of Adult Learning, Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice, and Urban Education. The electronic database primarily utilized to conduct the review was EBSCO Discovery Service; however, other databases such as ProQuest, Sage, ERIC, and Education Source were used as needed in order to view the complete journal entry or research study.

Adult Basic Education

ABE sites are often organized at sites operated by school districts and are appealing places for adult learners to complete their educational goals because of the accommodating hours of instruction, lower to no class fees, and the convenience of geographical proximity to work or home locations (Taylor, 2018). In 2017, the programs offered at adult basic education sites not only encompassed adult literacy courses but other programs and courses that provided adults with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate as citizens, workers, parents, family, or community members (California Department of Education, 2017a). Therefore, ABE sites become places where underserved adults can gain the skills and the affirmation needed to complete their educational goals (Coalition on Adult Basic Education, n.d.). The Coalition on Adult Basic Education (n.d.) support the idea that ABE services increase the opportunities for individuals to meet their educational goals of completing a GED/High School Diploma,

furthering their career or increasing their literacy skills. Thus, adult learners who complete their educational goals ultimately experience more productive lives (California Department of Education, 2017b; Coalition on Adult Basic Education, n.d.).

Coming in with prior learning experiences, Zhang et al. (2013) found adult learners at basic education school sites set goals with a clear purpose and high expectations when enrolling in a program at an adult basic education site. For example, an adult immigrant may enroll in an English as a Second Language (ESL) course for life and employment skills to obtain a promotion or to develop their life skills (California Department of Education, 2017b). Adults successfully complete their educational goals when the learning experience is relevant and offers practical information for immediate application in the adult learners' life (Karge et al., 2011). Therefore, other adults at the adult basic education site may enroll in a Career and Technical Education program to successfully complete state certification class (California Department of Education, 2017b).

The intent of this study was to explore the learning experiences of successful adult learners at adult basic education school sites and the goal setting strategies utilized to complete their educational program. The goal setting strategies used by successful adults can help other adults in employing new strategies to successfully complete their own educational goals. Aldridge and Tuckett (2011) found adult learning had positive effects on career and employment opportunities, so it is important to understand adult learner experiences and the goal setting strategies used in order to successfully complete their educational goals. It is also important to understand adult learner experience and

goal setting strategies because the experiences adults have in education and learning has effects on other adult learners as well (Aldridge & Tuckett, 2011).

Historically, the goal of adult basic education has changed. What started as a concentration on better adult literacy skills to increase employment rates (Belzer & Kim, 2018) evolved into a place of learning with instruction in the basic knowledge and skills necessary to complete a GED/High School Diploma or further their career. In summary, the programs offered at ABE sites now can meet the needs of the individual adult learner seeking the opportunity to complete educational goals relevant to their life (Knowles, et al., 2015).

Opportunities for meaningful learning experiences given to adult learners are key in assisting learners in reaching their educational goals (Belzer, 2017). Much of the literature on successful adult learners is focused on those adults enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year university (California Department of Education, 2015). Khiat (2017) and NCES (n.d.) concluded that adult learners use predictors of success (adult learning experience, facilitator-learner interaction and types of learning methods) to achieve their educational goals. The published literature is centered on successful adults who exhibit positive temperaments, practice effective study strategies, and can set goals and reflect on their progress (Choi, 2017; Jordan et al., 2015). Researchers showed that when positive and supportive relationships are developed with facilitators, family members, or peers, adult learners are successful (Aydin, 2017). Along with supportive relationships developed with facilitators, a facilitator considers creating an effective instructional environment to help adult learners achieve their educational goals (Steyn & VonTonder, 2017).

As self-directed learners, adults bring with them their prior learning experiences and are successful when those experiences include decisions about their learning as well as developing relationships with others (Knowles et al., 2015). Knowles outlined the importance of the *teaching-learning transaction* between a facilitator and an adult learner that contribute to successful and meaningful learning experiences (Knowles et al., 2015). According to Knowles et al. (2015), the transaction is a cooperative learning experience, where the facilitator knows the content, is enthusiastic about the subject matter, and fosters a sense of growth for the adult learner. Knowles et al. (2015) wrote facilitators had a responsibility in helping adults learn through a process of organized activities that contribute to the personal growth of the adult. In the learning experience, the adult learner develops a reflective plan in regard to individual goal setting and expected achievement (Knowles, 1950).

Successful Adult Learners

Positive dispositions. According to Aydin (2017), adult learner success is shaped by the disposition of the adult learner. A positive disposition, in turn, helps adults to successfully meet educational goals while simultaneously maintaining multiple responsibilities in their daily life. Successful ABE learners who exhibit positive dispositions while managing work and family commitments, financial obligations, and who can regulate their emotional responses have a more positive attitude towards their learning experiences and a greater belief in their ability to set goals (Choi, 2017). Osam et al. (2017) wrote ABE learners manage many responsibilities, such as part-time or full-time work commitments, greater family commitments, and other competing

responsibilities while enrolled at an academic institution. These daily life responsibilities affect an adult learners' emotional disposition, and, with their belief, they can set high expectations to meet their learning goals (Osam et al., 2017).

One example of a successful adult learner with a positive disposition is demonstrated through emotional self-regulation (Choi, 2017). An adult learner practicing emotional self-regulation can identify a problem, develop different approaches leading to a solution, and then apply this process to consistently reach their academic goals (Choi, 2017). When adults experience high levels of stress because of responsibilities and obligations during their learning experiences, successful adult learners will begin to self-regulate their negative emotional responses (Kellenber et al., 2017). This technique is a reflective practice that manages the emotional response to stress and increases a learner's belief in their personal learning competency (Kellenber et al., 2017).

Another example of a positive disposition of successful ABE learners is resiliency. An adult learner who exhibits resiliency, or the ability to recover from negative emotions or experiences, will experience an increase in their motivation to accomplish their learning goals (Tinto, 2017). Resiliency is a learned trait that an adult learner acquires through appropriately and successfully navigating through challenging circumstances (Kate et al., 2015). A learner who can stay resilient despite life's emotional challenges and responsibilities is more successful at achieving their educational goals (Johnson et al., 2015).

Research from Steyn and Van Tonder (2017) found nursing students have multiple responsibilities yet can complete their educational goals when they are able to

manage emotional responses and demonstrate resiliency. When adult learners experience stress because of work commitments, family commitments, or financial obligations (Steyn & Van Tonder, 2017) and are still able to regulate their emotional responses (Johnson et al., 2015), adult learners are more likely to achieve their educational goals. Findings from Barnett (2013) found adult learners who are unable to regulate their emotional responses, felt insecure, lonely, doubtful, or guilty from their life responsibilities were less likely to finish their educational goals. As adult learners gain life experience, navigate through stress, and demonstrate positive emotional responses, they associate the learning experience with a positive attitude (Barnett, 2013). In turn, the adult learner attempts to replicate that positive feeling through regulation, resiliency, and continuing to implement goal setting strategies (Barnett, 2013).

Supportive relationships. Adult learners are successful in meeting their educational goals when they establish supportive relationships with others (Aydin, 2017). Adult learner success is also dependent on the relationship an adult learner builds with a facilitator, a family member, or another individual that helps an adult learner achieve their educational goals. Those adult learners who interact less with peers, family, or facilitators feel less familiar with academic routines and struggle more with health issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression (Dudley et al., 2015). Chen (2017) found adult learners are successful when a system of care and social support is provided by the institution or by an individual. A facilitator, a family member, or other individuals help adult learners achieve their educational goals through supportive relationships. Adult learners feel supported in positive relationships and this support can directly affect a

learners' tendency to demonstrate resiliency, goal setting, and completing their educational goals (Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2015). ABE learners are often employees, spouses, parents, or caregivers (Osam et al., 2017). When ABE learners have these relationships, goals are set and accomplished, and they eventually complete their educational program (Osam et al., 2017).

Successful adult learners also have interactions with their peers. Research from Hilsdon (2014) showed peer-to-peer interaction increased the emotional belonging connection to learning as well as increased the likelihood that adults will complete their educational goals. Similarly, when adult learners are supported by their peers and families, ABE learners do better (Osam et al., 2017). Ollis et al. (2017) stated that peer-to-peer support in positive, easy-going, and supportive environments helps adult learners achieve their goals even while the adults were simultaneously managing other responsibilities and obligations.

Peer-to-peer support is built through interactions and relationships developed through learning communities (Lundberg, 2014; Paige, et al., 2018). Learning communities are a networking approach to pair groups of adult learners together who share common academic and/or social experiences (Paige et al., 2018). The interaction among adult learners, who are focused on the same academic topic, leads to peer teaching and study groups (Lundberg, 2014). Adult learners participate in peer teaching and study groups to clarify their own understandings by teaching others and this cyclical relationship increases the likelihood an adult learner will complete their educational goals (Lundberg, 2014).

Research published about facilitator-student interaction maintains the most powerful impact on adult learners is the experience from their relationships with facilitators (Writ & Jaeger, 2014). Typically, facilitators initiate the interaction and begin to develop the supportive relationship, however, both facilitator and student must take responsibility for developing the ongoing relationship (Writ & Jaeger, 2014). This relationship is outlined in the research as when a facilitator gives their time, energy, and academic resources to a learner attempting to complete their goals (Writ & Jaeger, 2014). Again, adult learners are more likely to complete their educational goals when their academic experience included increased contact with facilitators both inside and outside the classroom (Dudley et al., 2015).

When the adult learner considers the facilitator to be accessible and approachable, the learner is more probable to succeed in completing their educational goals (Ingraham et al., 2018). Facilitators can provide encouragement as one of the behaviors that increase positive relationships with adult learners (Dudley et al., 2015). Facilitators who interacted positively with adult learners, by validating their knowledge and skill, saw increased completion rates when adult learners felt they received assistance from their facilitator mentor (Lundberg, 2014). When facilitators engage adult learners in the learning process and value the contributions given by the learner, the long-term effect of this supportive relationship increases the likelihood that an adult learner will complete their educational goals (Ingraham et al., 2018).

Once the relationship is established, effective facilitator-learner interaction continues to play a central role in adult learner success (Lancaster & Lundberg, 2019).

The sense of belonging and support that an adult learner receives from the facilitator has a positive impact on students' success (Ingraham et al., 2018; Lancaster & Lundberg, 2019). According to Merriam and Baumgartner (2020), if facilitators develop supportive relationships with adult learners, the relationship empowers the adult learner, creates a safe learning environment, and promotes the overall success of the student.

Learning environment. Successful adult learners perform best in learning environments when they are a contributing member instead of simply receiving information as a passive member in a learner/teacher hierarchy (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). ABE learners are more successful at completing their educational goals when the classroom culture supports and extends relevant learning (Steyn & Van Tonder, 2017). In this environment, the learner is responsible for acquiring those learning skills they need to be successful. These self-directed behaviors are related to the learner's success in goal setting (Knowles et al., 2015).

When the facilitator creates a learning environment that promotes respect for adult learners, the learning experience becomes relevant and effective for them (Dudley, et al., 2015; French, 2019). A facilitator can construct a respectful learning environment with instructional practices, teaching skills, and approaches to integrate a learners' motivation (French, 2019). Hill and Thrupp (2019) wrote adult learners who are a part of caring and respectful learning environments feel a sense of belonging. The feelings of belonging make the adult learner more trusting and feel emotionally safe in the learning environment (Hill & Thrupp, 2019). Trust and emotional safety are tied to adult learner motivation and achievement of educational goals (Hill & Thrupp, 2019).

The environment is the responsibility not only of the student but also is the responsibility of the facilitator. A facilitator is a person whose role is to assist the learner in achieving their primary, self-determined educational goal (Pappas & Jerman, 2015). The facilitator must prepare the learning environment in response to the objectives of the course. Morlaix and Suchaut (2014) reported 86% of the learning experiences ABE learners participate in will influence the adult learner's success. The success of adult learners in the classroom is determined by a facilitator's ability to effectively create a supportive learning environment that facilitates adult learning (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). The faculty member must adopt instructional practices that prepare the learning environment for adults (Cottrell, 2019). This is the continuous process of preparing a supportive learning environment created by the facilitator for the adult student (Semer & Harmening, 2015).

Content or a skill that is new or unfamiliar to an adult learner must be presented initially in a traditional instructional manner, such as a lecture format (Knowles et al., 2015). However, when the learning objectives become more complex, and the learner exhibits critical thinking, problem solving or creativity, the facilitator must respond to this change by adapting the instructional strategies used in the course (Knowles, 1975). Instructional strategies are the most effective approaches or activities used by the facilitator to increase retention (Pappas & Jerman, 2015). By changing the best practices used with instructional strategies, the facilitator can adapt a learning environment from a basic skills training course into a course with more advanced objectives. These courses then become the important meaningful learning experiences for adult learners that need to

learn advanced skills such as how to understand the interconnectedness of their work with others, how to handle larger tasks, and how to adapt to changing circumstances (Knowles et al., 2015).

Study Strategies

Within the literature about adult learner success, how an adult learner acquires and uses study skills can influence their educational success. Study strategies are a set of core skills and competencies consisting of time management, effort regulation, organization strategies, study environment, note-taking, and recalling/applying new knowledge to real-life scenarios that impact achieving academic success with adult learners (Jordan et al., 2015). Jordan et al. (2015) indicated study strategies are beneficial at any age and adult learners may find themselves developing these skills later than average. As facilitators understand the strategies that lead to greater academic success, adult learners will benefit from these study strategies.

A successful student exhibiting the study strategy of time management contributes to a learner's academic success (Pappas & Jerman, 2015). ABE learners consider their educational experiences, like their employment, tasks that need to be completed within certain blocks of time (Zhang et al., 2013). Effective time management among adult learners include avoiding procrastination, managing their study periods, and prioritizing their tasks (Dembo & Seli, 2016). Learners who exhibited self-directed success strategies such as managing time and reducing the number of distractions were more successful in completing their educational goals (Dwarika-Bhagat et al., 2017). Successful adult learners can alter their course by implementing time management to determine a better

pathway (Savitz-Romer et al., 2015). When learners practice study strategies, such as time management, research has shown that adult learners equipped with these strategies tend to earn higher grades and graduate with a better grade point average than those adult learners who do not (Jordan et al., 2015).

Adult learners reported that their persistence in meeting their educational goals is also attributed to the level of preparation they do prior to class (Dudley et. al., 2015). Adult learners who institute time regulation strategies, like managing, scheduling, or planning time when preparing for coursework, associate learning with positive experiences and thus leads to a higher self-efficacy (Lin & Wang, 2018). When adult learners read the material prior to the course session, they can direct their attention to determine what is important and are able to engage in meaningful interactions during the session (Dembo & Seli, 2016). Also, adult learners who exhibit effort regulation, or the ability to maintain a level of commitment to their goals are likely to achieve a goal (Ling & Wang, 2018). When learners have completed the assigned readings, homework, or have prior knowledge about the topic they are more likely to participate and therefore more likely to have a positive academic experience (Dudley et. al., 2015).

Another study strategy, when the learner attends to optimizing their surroundings when studying for a course, has been linked to academic success (Morlaix & Suchaut, 2014). The study strategies related to organization and study environment were found to increase educational success among the diverse adult learner populations found at 2-year or 4-year university counterparts (California Department of Education, 2015). An indicator of success is whether an adult learner can establish conditions, or a study

environment, to facilitate their learning (Lin, 2019). Adult learners have more control over the time in which they dedicate to studying and take more responsibility to identifying barriers and creating structures to effectively study (Cottrell, 2019). Adult learners create a positive study environment by diminishing distractions during a developed routine in a designated space (Brooks, 2019).

Adult learners adapt the learning environment to fit their needs (Dembo & Seli, 2016). For example, sitting closer to the facilitator or away from distractible noises. Some adult learners need to designate a study space with limited socializing with others (Dembo & Seli, 2016). Recognizing the best place to complete the task while in class and not missing opportunities to interact with the facilitator or peers during class is also an indicator of successful adult learners (Cottrell, 2019).

The study strategy of notetaking is also effective for adult learners completing their educational goals (Dillon, 2018). Note taking is the system in which an adult learner encodes, stores, and reviews presented material (Waite et al., 2018). According to Waite et al. (2018), quality note taking was positively related to adult learner performance and if the adult learner eventually met their educational goals. Kim and Ra (2015) provided evidence that note taking will improve academic performance when students write notes on paper and were not distracted in doing so. Dembo and Seli (2016) consider mapping the material as an effective note-taking strategy for adult learners. Since learning occurs when adults construct meaning by combining ideas, adults who can map the material through hierarchies of ideas, sequencing of information, or a visual diagram of the material are more successful learners (Dembo & Seli, 2016).

Adult learners have the motivation to understand, direct, and control their own learning (Lin, 2019). Therefore, they place an importance on being able to recall and apply new knowledge to real-life scenarios (Lin, 2019). Adults are successful in completing their goals when the learning involves instructional practices that use real world problems to master the content and they can prioritize task and distinguish between relevant and irrelevant activities (Cottrell, 2019). Adult learners are more likely to complete their educational goals when they know the attempted tasks have real life application to the goals they have set (Lenkaitis & Hilliker, 2019).

Goal Setting

Goal setting is the process of establishing a standard for performance (Dembo & Seli, 2016) and is an effective student success strategy that improves an adult learner's academic success (Aydin, 2017). There are two main types of goals in adult education: (a) learning goals, or goals for self-improvement; and (b) outcome goals, or those goals to demonstrate competence by meeting a standard (Welsh et al., 2019). Goals affect academic performance by serving a function (Schippers et al., 2020). When an adult learner sets a goal, the learner knows which activities in which to focus upon and which activities are irrelevant. Secondly, successful adult learners exhibit effort and persistence when setting high goals as goal setting leads to complex tasks and then the adult learner can control the time they spend on a task (Alessandri et. al., 2020).

ABE learners are "driven by specific goals such as the desire to obtain degrees or certificates, to advance their careers, or to strengthen their working skills…" (Lin & Wang, 2018, p. 6). Therefore, goals and goal setting have a significant impact on student

motivation and academic performance (Ling & Wang, 2018). ABE learners can use learning goals and outcome goals together with peers or individually to practice goal setting. Welsh et al. (2019) wrote learning goals and outcome goals shape the adult learner's motivation; however, the learner must focus on the process of planning, evaluation, and reflection when goal setting. Since learning goals emphasize goal attainment for self-improvement and personal growth, adult learners often set these types of goals at the outset of their educational program.

Knowles (1975) described adult learners as learners who enter into learning with more purpose and motivation in order to retain and make longer use of what they learn. In Knowles' research self-directed learning is a process where the adult learner takes the initiative to formulate a goal identified from their individual need and chooses the appropriate learning strategies and environments to achieve those goals (Lin & Wang, 2018; Knowles, 1975). Strategies such as self-evaluation, organizing materials, goal setting, and planning, have been identified in studies and are reported to increase educational achievement (Ling & Wang, 2018).

Adult learners are self-directed learners who are accountable for their actions during learning experiences (Knowles, 1975). Roberts (2019) found adult learners who reflect on their learning in relation to their goals are more likely to complete their educational goals. With the use of the planning, evaluation, and reflection cycle, the adult learner then begins to set outcome goals to emphasize a successful outcome related to their educational goals (Welsh et al., 2019). Effective goals are relevant, provide direction and focus for the adult learner, and are a method to measure accountability and

progress (Roberts, 2019). Alessandri et. al. (2020) summarized that specific, relevant, and challenging goals result in a higher self-efficacy for the adult learner and an increased likeliness of achieving the goal.

Hochli et al. (2018) found adult learners who set specific, concrete, and challenging smaller goals make the long-term goal more attainable. This is a practical system which includes planning, flexibility, and evaluation against the criteria needed to achieve a goal (Hochli et al., 2018). When goal setting, an adult learner sets a specific educational goal, accepts feedback from the facilitator and/or their peers, and finally, reflects on individual progress in meeting their educational goals (Alitto et al., 2016). For example, a successful adult learner uses specificity to define and rank the importance of the task in fulfilling the urgency of a goal (Alessandri et. al., 2020). Then, if the learner determines the goal has high relevance to the educational goals they have set, the adult then prioritizes the activities to achieve those goals (Alessandri et. al., 2020). Researchers have shown learning goals support the performance of adult learners if there is a goal setting system in place, where the learner evaluates achievements against a specified outcome (Welsh et al., 2019).

The progress of the individual is both a facilitator's responsibility as well as the adult learners. The personal responsibility of the learner is an internal characteristic while the external characteristic of the instructional process is determined by the facilitator (Saks & Leijen, 2014). Facilitators have an impact on the learners' success by helping the learners reach the outcomes of the course. The facilitator helps the adult learner set specific goals aligned with the course objectives containing clearly defined standards for

the learner (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). The facilitator monitors the progress of the learners through assessment and tailor instruction in response to these assessments (Petty & Thomas, 2014). Learners need this feedback to monitor their progress in relation to their goals and adjust the level of effort to match what the goal requires (Schippers et al., 2020). Likewise, the learners monitor their own progress by ensuring they are meeting the requirements of the instructional activities so they can achieve their educational goals (Petty & Thomas, 2014; Savitz-Romer et al., 2015).

Implications

Learning experiences and goal setting strategies are imperative for adult learners to successfully meet their educational goals (Knowles et al., 2015; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020) so implications for possible project directions will be based on the findings from the data collected through interviews with adult learners at a local adult basic education site. The experiences and strategies identified from the research could inform projects such as virtual professional development trainings for facilitators. The implications for the project deliverable could provide adult learners at adult basic education sites with a specific set of identified goal setting strategies, an understanding how to alter and/or adjust pathways after evaluating their progress, and finally, possibly lead to a pathway that will allow them to complete an educational program offered at the ABE site.

Summary

In section one, I identified the local problem of low completion rate percentages of adult learners at an ABE site. To address this problem, it is important to explore the

learning experiences (RQ 1) and the goal setting strategies of successful adult learners (RQ2). Prior researchers attribute goal setting as one of the reasons successful adult learners complete their program (Alessandri et al., 2020). The literature review includes a description of the selected conceptual framework, or Malcolm Knowles' theory on andragogy, as the constructs of Knowles' theory are relevant to adult learners. Furthermore, the literature review includes a description of the purpose of ABE sites and the indicators of successful ABE learners. Successful adult learners demonstrate positive dispositions, establish supportive relationships with others, participate in their learning environment, implement study strategies, and exhibit goal setting techniques.

Thus, in Section 2, I present the methodology with its design and justification. I will use a basic qualitative research design to explore the learning experiences and goal setting strategies of successful adult learners. The data collection process will be discussed alongside the procedures for gaining access to the participants. For this study, the targeted group was 12 adult learners at two local adult basic education sites. Finally, the roles of the researcher and methods that will be used to ensure confidentiality are outlined.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

This study used a basic qualitative design, with phone interviews, which was suitable for researchers who were addressing a problem in a natural setting (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A basic qualitative design approach is an exploration and focus on the experiences of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My purpose in the study was to explore the learning experiences successful adult learners had and what goal setting strategies they used to successfully complete their educational goals.

Quantitative research is an investigation of an event by which a researcher gathers quantifiable data to interpret and then validate observations made from prior research (Creswell, 2017; Wienclaw, 2013). I considered a quantitative approach, and I found this method would not be effective to use in my research because I was not planning on testing a hypothesis (Savela, 2018) but was asking adult learners about their experiences. Other qualitative research designs were considered, but those approaches would not be effective for this study. For example, a researcher using a research design involving a case study would investigate contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Aczel, 2015). Case studies are used when there are large numbers of variables or when the data collection is developed over time (Aczel, 2015). In qualitative case study research, the researcher explores and analyzes a single case to describe the phenomenon under study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In grounded theory qualitative research, a researcher uses themes to build a theory (Aczel, 2015). This was not a feasible option as I was not attempting to develop a theory

from the data. Also, the phenomenological design was rejected for this study, because this is an approach which builds around common lived experiences, such as divorce or death and requires prolonged engagement with the participants to explore their lives (Goulding & Lee, 2005). A phenomenological design would not be an effective choice to answer the research questions because I was seeking participants' experiences in relationship to a practical problem (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described a basic qualitative approach as an exploratory opportunity for a researcher to learn about adult experiences. A basic qualitative design is best when the researcher intends to explore an adult learner's report of their opinions, attitude, belief, or reflection upon their experiences (Percy et al., 2015). Therefore, a qualitative methodology was best for this study to address the two research questions because it allows for successful adult learners to offer their reflections on their learning experiences and goal setting strategies.

Participants

The participants for this study were adult learners in the last two sessions of their selected program at an adult basic education site. Participants met the following criteria: (a) were at least 18 years of age; (b) may have had a prior history of breaks in enrollment, however, participants were in their final two sessions of study; and (c) applied for graduation or a completion certificate. The participants were from any of the offered programs at their sites, including the Adult Basic Education, Career/Technical Education, English as a Second Language or Citizenship, Health Science Education programs.

A sample size of 12 participants was selected to participate in this study. With purposeful sampling, I intentionally selected participants from two sites who provided rich information about successful adult learners (Creswell, 2012). A small sample size is appropriate in qualitative studies when the sample size is representative of the population under consideration in the study (Boddy, 2016). Therefore, a sample size of 12 participants was acceptable because a qualitative researcher can demonstrate data saturation, or the point at which no new themes are observed in the data, with this sample size (Boddy, 2016).

The procedures for gaining access to participants included (a) seeking IRB approval from Walden University (IRB# 05-27-20-0670700), (b) contacting the site administrators by email to ask for permission to email facilitators, (c) contacting the facilitators by email to distribute my participant interest flyer to the adult learners in their final two sessions of study, (d) then sending the cover letter email and informed consent form to each adult learner volunteer who responded to recruit participants. I prepared an Excel spreadsheet with the contact information (phone number and email) of potential participants, who volunteered to participate in my study by contacting me via phone or email. The initial timeframe for participant recruitment was two weeks from the initial interest flyer email and at the conclusion of one week, I had not reached the number of participants desired for the study, so I contacted the site facilitators again. An administrator from a second site was contacted to recruit more participants and I followed the same protocol of emailing the cover letter and consent form to each adult learner who

responded. Volunteers knew they had been selected to participate in my study via email confirmation, as stated in the informed consent form.

To build a researcher-participant relationship, I informed the participants, by interest flyer and by email, about the purpose of the study and the data collection method. In addition, I provided information about the measures I would take in maintaining participants' rights and the confidentiality of data and participant information. Participants were notified of their obligations through the informed consent form and also included in the form was the procedure for contacting me with questions.

The measures that were taken to ensure the protection of participants' rights were stated in the informed consent form. The information included in the informed consent form was: (a) background information of the study, (b) procedures, (c) voluntary nature of the study, (d) the risks and benefits of being in the study, (e) payment, (f) protection of privacy, (g) contact and questions, (h) obtaining consent from the participants. To protect participants' confidentiality, I did not identify any adult by name, race, age, or site identifier number. Participants were advised that only I will know the identity of the participants and only I had access to the data collected for this study.

In the narrative of the study, the participants' identity was protected using a 4-digit identifier instead of the names of participants to further ensure confidentiality. The Excel spreadsheet created during the initial contact phase that contains the participant identifier numbers is stored in a password-protected computer program to maintain confidentiality for the participants. Notifying the participants of these efforts was in the informed consent form but I also reviewed this information prior to the start of the

interview with participants. The participants received notification in writing that they may drop out of the study at any time, without consequence and again, were notified at the start of the interview that those same rights would be extended throughout the process. Data will be kept for five years beyond completion of the study with the intention to erase all digital files and shred all paper files related to this study.

Data Collection

During this qualitative study, I collected data on the learning experiences and the goal setting strategies successful adult learners believed assisted them in completing their educational goals. I selected phone interviews with adult learners at adult basic education sites as the data source for this study. Interviews were a justified method of data collection in qualitative studies because if the researcher cannot directly observe the phenomenon with the participants, an interview allows for the researcher to draw out specific and detailed information from the participant, through a series of questions (Creswell, 2012).

The data collection instrument was an interview protocol (Appendix B) consisting of 21 researcher-produced, open-ended questions about the participant's learning experiences and goal setting strategies that assisted them in completing their educational goals. Creswell (2017) wrote to establish sufficiency of data collection, interview protocols should include four to five questions aligned with each of the research questions, followed by concluding statements or probing questions. Therefore, the 21 questions included in the protocol for this study included four background questions, seven questions associated with RQ 1 regarding the learning experiences of successful

adult learners, six questions associated with RQ 2 regarding goal setting strategies, and four follow-up/probing questions.

The data collection process included interviews with 12 participants and were conducted in a telephone format. Each individual interview lasted between 12-40 minutes to ask and answer 21 questions. The time frame for data collection was over a duration of six weeks and the interview setting was over the phone. I selected a quiet room in my home to conduct the interviews and asked the participants to select a quiet room at their home as well. To ensure privacy during the interview, I posted a sign on my door stating, Please Do Not Disturb, Interview in Progress.

At the start of the interview, I introduced myself and reviewed the purpose of the study. Next, I read the opening narrative in the interview protocol and asked for the participants' permission to use a recording device during the interview. The interviews were audio recorded using the Otter application, an application downloaded on my computer. I had a back-up voice recording device to document the interview in case was a malfunction with the app and/or the computer, however, the device was not needed. At the start of the interview, I reviewed the participants' rights, and I reminded the participants, they could stop the interview at any time, skip questions, or refuse to answer a particular question.

After I read the beginning narrative of the interview protocol and confirmed the participants' agreement to have the interview recorded, I started the interview with the background questions from the interview protocol. This established the educational goals of each adult learner and assisted in orientating the adult learner in thinking about their

experiences as it pertains to the research questions in the study. Next, I asked the seven questions regarding learning experiences, and when necessary, I asked one (or more) of the probing questions for any necessary clarification. I repeated this process for the six questions regarding goal setting strategies and again, asked one (or more) of the probing questions for any necessary clarification. Finally, I thanked the participant for coming to the interview and I reviewed how they will receive the token of appreciation by email within 24-48 hours from the conclusion of the interview.

After the individual interviews were completed, I reviewed the automatic transcriptions of the interviews within 24 hours. The transcriptions were then transferred into one document and kept on my password protected device. I used an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of the four-digit ID numbers as confidential identifiers instead of names to protect the participants' identity. The Excel spreadsheet with the identifiers was also used for the organization of the data during the open and axial coding processes of data analysis as well as organizing theme development.

As a researcher, I assumed the role of the interviewer, data collector, and data transcriber. Although one of the adult basic education school sites used in this study is a part of the school district where I am currently employed, I had no past or current professional roles at the site. Similarly, although one of the study sites was within the district in which I am employed, I had no previous professional roles associated with adult learners at the site nor was I ever a facilitator for the adult learners. Since I did not have any facilitator-learner relationship with any of the potential participants, to limit this effect on data collection, I maintained a high level of confidentiality, discretion, and

transparency through the email communication in order to build trust with participants for the duration of the study. I had no prior experience with educational goal setting for ABE students and therefore, had minimal bias as a researcher. I still maintain, however, that ABE learners would be successful in completing their goals if they set educational goals. In order to maintain quality of the study, however, during the study I conducted an audit trail and member checking.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began within 24 hours following the completion of the transcription. I used a thematic analysis of the transcriptions, using open and axial coding strategies to analyze the data. Thematic analysis was a valid data analysis method for this study. According to Creswell (2017), thematic analysis was appropriate because I derived the meanings from the participants and accurately portrays what the researcher is studying.

Creswell (2012) outlined a general pathway a researcher follows when analyzing transcriptions. The path of data analysis process consisted of three phases. In phase one, precoding, I started with reading and rereading the data to become familiar with the data. In phase 2, open coding, I searched for repeated words, concepts, and phrases. Labels were given to the repetitions to give meaning to the code. Axial coding was phase three and was a two-step process to determine themes (Creswell, 2012).

Phase One: I conducted an initial read of the data and that enabled me to obtain a general sense of the data. Ravitch and Carl (2021) wrote it is important for a researcher to obtain this perspective of the data by participating in the uninterrupted reading of the entire transcription. This read, in turn, helps the researcher become familiar with patterns

not evident when reading the transcriptions for a specific purpose. As I continued with the multiple readings of the data, I made margin notes as I noted points relevant to the framework.

Phase Two: During open coding of the data analysis phase, I searched the transcriptions for repetitions of words, phrases, and concepts. I used different colors to color code the repetitions, then grouped the repetitions together, and finally assigned a label to give meaning to the open code. I used a summary table of responses on an Excel spreadsheet to assist with moving from open coding to the next phase of analysis.

Phase Three: After open coding with the raw data, axial coding is the third phase of data analysis. Axial coding was a two-step process: I formed categories of the open codes and relevant data based on a relationship among the open codes. For example, in a transcription excerpt from Participant 1105 stated, "… encouragement from many different people in my support system…" and from Participant 1111, "I am extremely lucky to have the support system." Also, Participant 1112 stated, "I have to acknowledge my support squad." From these three excerpts, the open code of *support system* was derived. Then, I searched for patterns among the categories to form temporary themes or themes (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) suggested that a researcher keeps the number of emerging themes between five and seven that occur most often within the data.

To assure accuracy and credibility of the findings, I completed an audit trail and member checking. A researcher uses an audit trail to provide evidence that recorded raw data went through a process of analysis, reduction, and synthesis (Creswell, 2012). Secondly, I completed member checking. I gave the participants a 2-page summary of the

findings, with the instructions to review the findings and return back to me within one week with their feedback.

Since discrepant cases occur during data analysis (Miles et al., 2014), discrepant cases should be identified if one data set is conflicting with the rest of the themes derived from the coded categories. Once analysis was completed, there were no discrepant cases.

Data Analysis Results

In this section, I provide a review of the process by which the data were generated, gathered, and recorded. My initial contact was with the site administrator at the study site. In the narrative of the email, I introduced myself, briefly explained the nature of the study, and asked the site administrator for the emails of the facilitators with adult learners in their final two sessions of study. Also, in the email to the site administrator I attached my interest flyer and permission to conduct research from both the district IRB and Walden University IRB. My interest flyer was a one-page document that contained study information and used for the purpose of recruiting volunteers. After receiving the email addresses of the teachers, I emailed each facilitator individually requesting that they distribute my interest flyer to the adult learners in their courses. Originally, I had anticipated distributing my interest flyer in-person to adult learners in their class. Because of the school closures due to COVID-19, my interest flyer had to be distributed by email from the facilitators to the adult learners instead. After one week from the initial contact with the facilitators, I had not met the desired number of 12-15 participants, so I sent follow-up email messages to the facilitators that contained the interest flyer. With the school closures and limited number of course offerings, I had only

three potential volunteers two weeks from the initial email sent to adult learners in the courses.

Prior to starting data collection, I met with my committee to discuss strategies in recruiting the number of participants for this study. It was determined that since a local problem had been established in the narrative of the proposal, I could recruit adult learners from multiple adult basic educations sites to suffice for potential volunteers. Therefore, with only three out of the desired 12-15 participants committed to participating in the study, I contacted an administrator at another local ABE site. I requested that my interest flyer be distributed to adult learners in the last two sessions of study to gain more potential volunteers. Over one month of time, I continued to recruit volunteers from both sites. I received emails or text messages from potential volunteers, and I would email them my consent form with a request that they reply 'I consent' to the email. Once I received their consent email, I would then email each participant to set up a time for an interview.

I scheduled and conducted interviews with 12 adult learners. Seven of the participants were from Site A and five of the participants were from Site B. All participants met the participant criteria. In consideration of COVID-19 safeguards, interviews were changed from face-to-face to phone interviews. Each interview was recorded after receiving confirmation of consent from the participant through email. The duration of each individual interview ranged from 12-40 minutes and were conducted over the course of six weeks, with two to three interviews occurring each week. Data collection took longer than originally anticipated as site closures, social distancing

protocols, and Stay-At-Home orders made it difficult to coordinate the interviews with participants. All participants chose phone interviews although Zoom interviews were offered.

At the start of the interview, I read the narrative in the interview protocol. This portion was not recorded. The last sentence of the opening interview narrative asked the participants to confirm their permission to have the interview recording and after each participant said yes, I verbally acknowledged that I started the phone recording using an application on my password protected laptop. I began the recorded portion of the interview with background questions and then proceeded into the questions regarding learning experiences. If the participant gave an answer where I needed more explanation or if I wanted to garner more details about an experience, I used the probing question, "Can you tell me more about that?" The recorded interview continued with questions regarding educational goals and again, for explanation or details, I asked the participant probing questions. The interview ended with me thanking the participant for their time and notifying them that I was ending the recording of the interview. The recorded data were stored on my password protected laptop, organized by the 4-digit participant number I assigned to each participant, using sequential order as interviews were completed.

Data analysis began once the phone interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in real time using the Otter application on my password protected device. I reviewed the automatic transcriptions generated by the application within 24 hours from the conclusion of the interview. The

review of the transcription was only to correct spelling errors, lack of punctuation, and/or spacing errors that would assist in the ease and flow when reading the document during data analysis. I analyzed the qualitative data inductively in three phases: precoding, open coding, and axial coding. I precoded data from 10 interviews at the end of week four and then precoded data from the final two interviews at the end of week six. Once the precoding process was complete, I began the open coding process followed by the axial coding.

Precoding

The transcribed interviews were reviewed for convention errors within 24 hours of completing each interview. Then, transcriptions were transferred from multiple documents to one document in Word to begin phase 1 of analysis using a computer and the tools in Word. Using one document, with transcriptions organized by participant identifier, kept all margin comments in one document as opposed to twelve multiple documents. This helped me keep an organized and containable system during data analysis. In Phase 1 of the analysis, I read the transcriptions several times. During the initial read, no margin notes were made since the first read was meant to orient myself with the data. Ravitch and Carl (2021) refer to this initial read as the unstructured read and is the first step for a researcher to immerse herself in the data. During this initial phase, I read each transcription twice before making margin comments on the third read. The margin comments were relevant to the framework and were about the key points of the research questions.

Open Coding

The procedure used during Phase 2 was an open coding process. During this phase, I searched through the margin comments for notations regarding any repeated terms and phrases. I grouped the repetitions together based on alike topic and assigned a label to give meaning to the open code. Each open code was assigned a different color. The next step was to narrow the data from the larger transcription document with margin comments and into a new document with only the open code data. I created a spreadsheet in Excel with three columns. The first column was for the open code, the second column was for the participant id number, and the final column was for the excerpt of what the participant had said from the transcript. On the spreadsheet, I grouped related excerpts from multiple participants under one open code. A sample of open codes derived from the data are shown in Table 1 and the full list of open codes can be found in Appendix C.

Table 1

Open Codes Example Derived from the Data

Open Codes	*Participant ID*	*Excerpt*
Support system	1105	…encouragement from many different people in my support system…
	1111	I am extremely lucky to have the support system.
	1112	I acknowledge my support squad.
Study Habits	1102	I feel study habits I formed my senior year of high school really played a role in how I managed my studies.
	1108	…sleepless nights staying up late to study.
	1109	…any distraction… actually radio on helps me for some reason; Studying, I have to completely be by myself focused.
	1110	Okay, well, incorporate things that I liked and incorporate it into what I am studying.
	1111	…best studying at a bookstore/coffee shop listening to classical music.
Positive Attitude	1104	Keeping a positive attitude helps but it can be difficult to maintain.
	1107	I know anybody can do anything. It is just belief in themselves; They could positively. I always stay positive.
	1109	I always try to have a positive attitude, no matter how hard times are, there's you know, there's always a good time so always focus on the good things and that helps me have a good attitude towards everything no matter what.

Axial Coding

Axial coding was the final phase for data analysis. In the first step of axial coding, I searched for relationships among the open codes and related data to form categories. Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained this is the process of going from chunks of data to see how the codes can be clustered together based on common relationships. In a new Excel document, I created four columns. The first column was for the participant identifier number, the second column for the excerpt from the transcript, the third column was for the color-coded open code, and the last column was for the axial code. First, I took the color-coded open codes and arranged those codes by common relationships to develop the axial code. The common relationships developed to group the open codes are derived from the concepts in the framework and the research questions. Table 2 contains an example of axial codes derived from the open codes with a full complete list in Appendix D. Next, I searched among the axial code categories for patterns in relation to the framework and related literature and research questions to generate temporary themes.

Table 2

Axial Codes Example Derived from Open Codes

Open Codes	*Axial Codes*
Siblings Kids Spouse/Significant Other Relationships Support system Parents Family Connection to others	Having a relationship with other individuals
Encouragement Positive attitude Persistent outlook/mindset	Maintaining a positive attitude
Test taking Flashcards Note taking Attention Daily preparation Study Habits	Use of study strategies
Goals because of a work promotion Work required certification	Goal setting because of work
Prior learning experiences Work experience	Using their past experiences for motivation

Theme Development

To begin developing themes, I aligned the 25 axial codes with the constructs of the study's framework to create general statements about the data. From the patterns in the data, I generated six temporary themes (Table 3). Themes are generated from seeing

the patterns between the data and then answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Table 3

Temporary Themes Derived from the Axial Codes

Axial Codes	*Themes*
Having a relationship with other individuals Challenges and successes while raising children Receiving help from mentors Support from student study groups	Adult learners report that supportive relationships with family, peers, and faculty are crucial to achieve academic goals.
Maintaining a persistent attitude Maintaining a positive attitude	Adult learners have positive dispositions to achieve their academic goals.
Using language to communicate with others Utilizing a real-life application	Adult learners apply communication and life skills in real life settings.
Lack of goal setting Challenges, stress, or negative experiences	Adult learners set priorities and unwind when encountering negative experiences.
Good management of time A desire to be a lifelong learner Use of study strategies High level of preparation to understand the content	Adult learners apply study habits to maintain progress towards academic goals.
Using grades and/or evaluation to determine if they had met their goals Strategies for goal setting and planning Determining what their goals would be	Adult learners create schedules, make lists, and use a planner for goal setting and planning.

Once temporary themes were generated, I determined the patterns across themes that answer the research questions. I combined temporary theme one and two to answer RQ1 and temporary themes three through six to answer RQ2 (Table 4).

Table 4

Temporary Themes to Answer Research Questions

Temporary Themes	*Research Question*
Adult learners report that supportive relationships with family, peers, and faculty are crucial to achieve academic goals.	RQ1 - What learning experiences do adult basic education learners contribute to completing their educational goals?
Adult learners have positive dispositions to achieve their academic goals.	RQ1 - What learning experiences do adult basic education learners contribute to completing their educational goals?
Adult learners apply communication and life skills in real life settings.	RQ2 - What goal setting strategies do adult basic education learners identify that assisted them in completing their educational goals?
Adult learners set priorities and unwind when encountering negative experiences.	RQ2 - What goal setting strategies do adult basic education learners identify that assisted them in completing their educational goals?
Adult learners apply study habits to maintain progress towards academic goals.	RQ2 - What goal setting strategies do adult basic education learners identify that assisted them in completing their educational goals?
Adult learners create schedules, make lists, and use a planner for goal setting and planning.	RQ2 - What goal setting strategies do adult basic education learners identify that assisted them in completing their educational goals?

Based on the findings that addressed the research questions, two themes emerged from the analysis.

1. Successful adult learners believe if they have supportive relationships with others and a positive disposition, they are able to achieve their academic goals.
2. When successful adult learners apply a set of life skills or study strategies, they are more likely to complete their educational goals.

For the first research question, successful adult learners believe if they have supportive relationships with others and a positive disposition, they can achieve their academic goals. Regarding the second research question, when successful adult learners apply a set of life skills or study strategies, they are more likely to complete their educational goals.

Theme 1: Supportive relationships and positive dispositions. Participants shared that having a relationship with others, such as family members, helped the learners achieve their academic goals. Participants described these relationships as motivation and encouragement needed to persist in their achievement. For example, Participant 1105 said, "…encouragement from many different people in my support system…" and Participant 1110 said in the interview, "… family kept me motivated." Another supportive relationship from the findings was the relationships adult learners had with their peers. The participants believed that having other students to collaborate with on the course material or share common frustrations or successes also contributed to their achievement with academic goals. Participant 1108 commented in the interview, "…a lot

of support from your fellow classmates and in helping you grasp the information that you needed."

Positive dispositions were also a common theme among the participants. Participants mentioned keeping a positive attitude during difficult times was crucial to achieving their academic goals. In relation to the framework, an adult learner who exhibits resiliency experiences an increase in their motivation when accomplishing their learning goals (Tinto, 2017). Participant 1109 said, "My goal is to show them that no matter what, you can always do good in life." The participants believed that maintaining a positive attitude created a persistent outlook or mindset that helped them with assisting in their academic goals.

Theme 2: Life skills and study strategies. According to the participants, when they utilized skills in a real-life application, such as communicating with others, they were more successful in completing their educational goals. Also, when participants were able to set priorities during negative experiences, they believed they were more likely to complete their goals. Participant 1110 said, "I would manage my time; …just staying focused especially at that time in my life where it was like, extremely stressful…" Study strategies were also an indicator of success. Nine of the participants identified at least one study strategy in the interview that they had used to achieve their goals. Participants 1102 and 1105 commented that making lists helped them stay organized and set goals. Participant 1105 also said, "Planning it out really helps me get my assignments completed on time" and "…easily forget so the paper helps keep me on track." When adult learners use time management strategies, create schedules, make lists, and use

planners for goal setting and planning, they are more likely to achieve their educational goals.

Within each theme, participants shared experiences about the different types of supportive relationships they have formed with others. Additionally, participants spoke about specific examples about how they maintained a positive attitude and resiliency in times of stress or added responsibility. The adult learners in the study disclosed the numerous like skills or study strategies that kept them organized, focused on their goals, and were relevant to use in their daily habits. When adult learners have these relationships and the skills or strategies are in place as well, the participants believed that they were able to achieve and complete their educational goals.

Limitations of the Findings

A limitation of the findings was identified with the interview conducted with Participant 1110. The 12-minute length of the interview may have influenced the findings. The interview was short perhaps because the participant misunderstood the interview questions. Also, another reason for the short duration of the interview may be because of the limited number of probing questions from me during the interview. This was my first interview, and I was unsure of what to expect. When asked a probing question, the participant simply restated the same answer from the interview question I had previously asked. As I continued with the interviews, I understood a little more of how to integrate the probing questions to ask for clarity or more details and, therefore, all subsequent interviews were longer in length.

Summary

In summary, supportive relationships, such as with family members, were integral in helping the adult learners achieve their educational goals. This construct was supported by the framework as Aydin (2017) wrote adult learners are successful when they have established and supportive relationships with others. This is in also in alignment with the framework of the study as positive relationships help learners feel supported and thus, more resilient (Shaunessy-Dedrick, et al., 2015). Adults who receive positive affirmations from others achieve their goals (Osam, et al., 2017).

Participants restricted positive relationships to family and adult peers. One relationship from the framework constructs that was not evident in the findings was the relationship adult learners may have with facilitators. Writ and Jaeger (2014) published an article on the notion of supportive relationships with facilitators. When adult learners were in consistent contact and communication with facilitators, met with students to discuss grades or assignments, plus considered the feedback from facilitators to complete their assignments, they were more likely to achieve their goals. According to Knowles, et al. (2015), the interaction between the facilitator and adult learner is important and contributes to academic success. The success of the adult learner is often driven from the facilitator through a process of organized activities that contribute to the personal growth of the adult learner (Knowles, 1950). Developing supportive relationships with facilitators will be a feature of the project to broaden the concept of positive relationships.

Another part of the first theme from the findings was positive dispositions. The participants reported staying persistent even when times were hard and their persistence led to achieving their academic goals. Choi (2017) confirmed that an adult learner who reflects upon and manages their emotional response to stress and negative experiences exhibits a more positive disposition. Participant 1111 said, “In times of stress or negative experiences I would step away; …depending on what was going on, to clear my head.” Participants shared the importance of positive dispositions but did not reveal how they maintained a positive mindset when experiencing continuous failure or negative experiences. As mentioned above, Choi (2017) confirmed the idea that reflection and management of response to stress and negative experiences results in a more positive disposition. Participants did not allude to the strategies upon which they used to develop and maintain their positive dispositions. Knowing strategies that assist adult learners to reflect and manage their responses to negative experiences would be useful in achieving academic goals.

The second theme that emerged in the findings was about life skills and their application. Adult learners were motivated to retain and make use of what they were learning because of the relevance to their career, which was also supported by the framework (Knowles, 1975). Relevant life skills fit into the constructs of the framework as adult learners achieve their educational goals when the tasks are organized and applicable to a real-life setting (Lenkaitis & Hilliker, 2019).

Life skills alone are not sufficient in successfully attaining academic goals and reflect what the adult learner would use to achieve success in reaching academic goals.

Hill and Thrupp (2019) described the importance of a positive learning environment on campus. This can be achieved by a facilitator, who provides a caring and respectful learning environment, where the adult learner experiences a stronger sense of belonging and trust. When an adult learner feels safe in the learning environment, they were more likely to achieve their goals (Hill & Thrupp, 2019).

The study strategies adult learners used to achieve their educational goal were the final finding from the analysis. For example, time management was a recurring finding from the participants. Aligning with the literature from Dwarika-Bhagat et al. (2017), when the participants managed their study periods through creating a schedule and prioritizing tasks by creating schedules or making a list, they were able to complete their goals. The participants reported they felt more success when they prepared prior to the class/course by reviewing notes or the reading material. This level of preparation is supported by the framework and makes adult learners more likely to have a positive academic experience (Dudley et. al., 2015). These strategies helped adult learners meet daily, short-term goals, however, how the participants set long-term goals were not evident in the findings. If the adult learners set specific, long-term goals, there would also be a sense of urgency to complete their goals (Alessandri et. al., 2020).

Conclusion

Adult learners are successful in setting learning goals if they develop and maintain supportive relationships with others, have a positive disposition, and apply life skills and study strategies. However, learners could have a better experience if school facilitators were involved. This involvement includes developing a supportive facilitator

relationship and a positive learning environment, facilitators teaching adult learners how to regulate their emotional responses, and how facilitators can assist adult learners in setting long-term goals. The project deliverable to address these topics will be through a 3-day, professional development (PD) presented online to the facilitators at adult basic education sites. Providing a PD to the facilitators at ABE sites assist in meeting the needs of the adult learner population since facilitators reach a larger population of adult learners.

In Section 3, I will describe the project and discuss the components that support the design of the PD.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In this section, I will discuss the literature regarding the development of a project to address the research problem described in Chapter 1. Based on the data analysis, the project selected was a virtual, synchronous PD for facilitators at adult basic education sites. Since facilitators at the sites seem to be the most successful in assisting adult learners in completing their goals, and can reach a larger number of adult learners than my efforts alone, it is justified to use facilitators as the audience for the PD. The research problem focused on low completion rate percentages of adult learners at ABE sites. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the learning experiences and goal setting strategies of successful adult learners at ABE sites. The result of the data analysis answered the research questions with two themes: (a) successful adult learners believe if they have supportive relationships with others and a positive disposition, they can achieve their academic goals and (b) when successful adult learners apply a set of life skills or study strategies, they are more likely to complete their educational goals. From the data analysis, participants only responded with some constructs from the conceptual framework. Since there is a need to aid adult learners in meeting their short term and long-term goals (Gagliardi et al. 2015), the purpose of this project is to present the findings of the study to the facilitators at ABE sites and provide participants with a PD on how facilitators can develop supportive relationships, how facilitators teach adult learners to regulate their emotional responses, how facilitators construct a learning environment

conducive to the adult learner, and how facilitators can assist adult learners in setting long-term goals.

Knowles et al. (2015) wrote that it was the responsibility of the facilitator to help adult learners acquire the skills to be more successful, thus, showing facilitators how to create a system of care and support for the adult learner is justification for the selection of this audience for the PD. Since the framework addresses the success of the adult learners driven by the facilitator, the purpose of the professional development was to provide facilitators with the understanding on how to develop relationships with adult learners and the best practices with strategies adult learners need to achieve their academic goals. The timeframe for the PD will be 3-days with material presented online to the facilitators at adult basic education sites. During the PD, the facilitators will be allowed time to collaborate and reflect with their peers as to how to incorporate these sills into their adult basic education courses with adult learners. There will be opportunities for participants to plan and implement the best practices presented during the PD into their course structure.

Rationale

A virtual PD for facilitators at ABE sites is considered appropriate since the facilitators have the greatest opportunity to reach a larger population of adult learners with the information they learn from the PD. I selected a virtual PD because, even if COVID-19 safeguards are lifted, large, in-person gatherings will most likely continue to be heavily restricted. The global pandemic has accelerated PD from an in-person setting to a virtual setting and, according to Dulude et al., (2020), offers a benefit of access and delivery. Therefore, selecting a virtual PD is appropriate for the current setting.

When developing a PD, a presenter should identify the objectives for teacher learning, structure the PD in such a way that the participants learn and be able to evaluate if the participants have learned enough (Kennedy, 2019). Effective PD for facilitators is centered around one or more components, such as, classroom procedures, content knowledge, or strategies and insights (Kennedy, 2019). In Section 2, I developed two themes successful adults believed to be effective completing their educational goals as a result of the data analysis. Using the results of the study, I constructed a project for the facilitators at ABE sites. I will provide facilitators with what their role can be in developing a system within their classroom environment to better meet the needs of their adult learners. By training the facilitators on these strategies and insights from the findings on successful adult learners, the low completion rates of adult learners at ABE sites may be addressed. When facilitators know how to better serve the learners enrolled in their courses, they are more likely to implement best practices into their classroom procedures (Kennedy, 2019).

Review of the Literature

The content of this section involves a review of the literature associated with PD for adult learners. In this review, the adult learners are considered the facilitators from ABE sites. The purpose of the literature review was to frame the planning and design of the project within the context of what constitutes an effective PD. A search of current literature of peer-reviewed articles and books associated with PD for facilitators was conducted. Search terms used in this review were online PD, teacher PD, faculty PD, and

adult education. Saturation was achieved by exploring a variety of databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, ProQuest, and Sage Publishing.

Professional Development

Professional development is a period of "professional learning that results in a change in teacher practice and an increase in student learning outcomes" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. v). Typically, PD is structured to provide content knowledge to participants in a traditional classroom-like environment. Participants listen to a lecture, engage in question and answers with the presenter and perhaps other participants, and then meet in small groups to discuss the material (Kennedy, 2019). However, the most effective PD is strategic by presenting the participants with new research and giving them opportunities to make sense of the research within the context of their own classroom (Gersten et. al., 2010; Kennedy, 2019). Liang et al. (2020) wrote high quality, online PD has carefully structured timed components throughout the module and participants are immersed in authentic tasks combined with personal feedback.

Elements of effective PD include seven characteristics: (a) content focused, (b) active learning, (c) job-embedded contexts, (d) model best practices, (e) coaching and support, (f) feedback and reflection, and (g) sustained duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 4). The PD must have observable and measurable progress toward an ambitious standard as well as give participants an opportunity for reflection on that progress (TNTP, 2015). Additionally, PD that is aligned with the beliefs of the individual participants, occurs over time, and as is led by a presenter who accepts the variance in everyone's willingness to try new strategies is effective (Soto & Marzocchi, 2020). Planned activities

during the PD that allow for participants to work cooperatively and experience best practices from others illicit instructional change in the participants.

Adult Learners

Assumptions about adult learners have been primarily the work developed by Malcolm Knowles and his theory on andragogy. His six assumptions about adult learners included: (a) adults have an established sense of self, (b) prior learning experiences influence their learning, (c) adults learn through real-life application, (d) adults choose learning experiences willingly and based on relevance, (e) adults are self-directed by internal motivation, (f) adults expect to be involved learning process (Knowles et al., 2015). This framework was used to guide the study and will also be used in this review of literature since both the study participant group and the participant group for the PD are adult learners. The framework was used in the first literature review to provide reference to situate the problem in the study and using Knowles in this review of literature is to support the design of project.

Ozuah (2016) wrote adults are motivated to learn when the knowledge is presented in the context of real-life situations. This assumption is important component to the design of the PD as the intention of the PD is to provide adult learners with immediately applicable and relevant strategies and tasks. PD and learning activities for adult learners that are holistic, coherent, and strategic are more likely to increase the individual's understanding and shape their pedagogy (Foley, 2020). Compounded with the extensive prior knowledge the adult learners come with, the PD experience will have direct influence on the learning process of the adult learner (Babacan et al., 2020).

Lakey (2020) encouraged researchers to consider the relationship between the individual and the group; understanding that each participant in the PD is unique and offers benefits to larger group. The participants and the presenter become a learning group who set collective goals that guide the intentions and provide an indication of progress throughout the PD (Lakey, 2020). The adult learner's innate motivation will contribute to the development of the learning group and common goals for PD. Also, the relevant content will make the adult learners more willing to participate and implement the best practices (Leslie, 2019).

The facilitators who will be participating in this PD play an important role because they are able to reach a large number of adult learners through their courses. Roberts (2020) wrote facilitators use PD to enhance their role, or position, as a course instructor. The facilitator position is bettered because of the opportunity to focus on best practice strategies during the PD. These best practices influence adult learner success because it gives their students greater and equitable access to the course content and facilitators felt more supported to meet the needs of their students after participating in PD (2020).

Facilitators use PD to create effective learning environments for the adult learners enrolled in their courses and thus, use PD to strengthen these skills (Mohr & Shelton, 2017). Mohr and Shelton (2017) suggested that PDs are most effective when the training uses multiple teaching modalities, offers participants to establish and develop relationships with peers also in the training, and are given time to apply the principles taught during the PD.

Project Description

The purpose of this project was to provide facilitators, who work directly with adult learners, with the understanding on how to develop supportive relationships as well as provide facilitators with the best practices adult learners need to achieve their academic goals. In this section, I outline the components of the project, potential barriers, and solutions to any barriers identified. There is a need to aid adult learners in meeting their short term and long-term goals (Gagliardi et al., 2015) and therefore, presenting the findings from the study to facilitators at the ABE site will provide facilitators with the understanding on how to assist adult learners with developing relationships with others and the best practices with strategies adult learners need to achieve their academic goals. After data analysis and literature review, a virtual, live PD is best to present the information to the facilitators. To achieve the project outcomes as well as contribute to positive social change, it was necessary to identify the mode of presentation, intended audience, and necessary materials.

Potential Barriers

The greatest potential barrier to the implementation of this project is the ongoing and ever-changing, COVID-19 protocols currently in place in the state. Large, in-person gatherings are currently prohibited and thus, many PDs opportunities have moved to a virtual, synchronous module format. The barrier in holding a synchronous PD is the lack of immediate feedback and support a presenter can give to their participants, plus a slower presenter reaction time when gauging the needs of the participants (Bickle & Rucker, 2018). Another barrier could potentially be the minimal value the facilitator

participants hold in learning how to implement a new component in their courses (Lane, 2020). With COVID-19 impacting not only the face-to-face gatherings but also the financial aspects of education, facilitators are given a smaller number of courses with a reduced number of registered adult learners. With the added number of stresses, this may leave facilitators less likely to implement new strategies at this time (Lane, 2020).

The barrier of poor response time to the participants from the presenter can be resolved by allowing for more pauses during the presentation of the material. Another solution strategy is for me to check for understanding from the participants more frequently than during in-person PDs. To address the potential minimal interest in implementing a new strategy in upcoming courses, a solution would be to present the material in smaller, manageable parts (Lane, 2020). The key in this solution is to show the participants that the best practices are easy to incorporate and, with the support of the collaboration with their colleagues, they may feel confident in implementing the change in their pedagogy.

Implementation

This project will be designed as a virtual PD with facilitators from a local area in a western state. The duration of the PD will be 3 days, with participants meeting for 6 hours per day. Day 1 will focus on the presentation of the material, Day 2 will focus on skills and strategies, and Day 3 will focus on the implementation of the strategies. The projected date for this project will be in June 2021, which marks the conclusion of the sessions at the ABE sites for the 2020-2021 school year. This timeline would ensure facilitators have enough time to plan before the start of the following set of sessions, but

it also takes into consideration any delayed planning of PD because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Roles and Responsibilities

The site administrators will recommend the facilitators who will attend the PD. The site administrators will also be responsible for providing funding for the facilitators if the PD is outside of their instructional day and extra duty payment is required. One of my responsibilities is to gain approval from the sites to conduct the professional development with their facilitators. I will also create the PD activities, including the Google Slides presentations on the material, agenda, and evaluations.

Project Evaluation Plan

The type of evaluation I selected for this project is outcome based and intended to be responsive to the immediate needs of the participants. Each participant will be asked to complete a survey evaluation at the end of each of the first two days. Two evaluations were created, and I utilized a linear scale and short answers to illicit participant feedback and responses. One survey evaluation will be given to participants at the conclusion of Day 1 and Day 2. The surveys will be used to adjust the presentation of material, if needed, as recommended by the participants. The second evaluation is for Day 3, and will be used for an overall evaluation of the PD. Some of the guiding statements on the evaluation are listed below.

1. Over the past three days, I feel I understood all the material presented, even if it was new knowledge.

2. The material shared during the three days was relevant to my role as a facilitator.
3. I feel the deliverable I was asked to create was immediately applicable in my courses.
4. I feel the responsibility to teach the skills/strategies presented are primarily the responsibility of the facilitator.
5. If you disagree with the above question, who do you feel holds the primary responsibility for teaching the skills/strategies presented in the three-day PD? (i.e., counselor, specialized course, etc.)

Linear Scale Survey

I will conduct an analysis of these data at the conclusion of Day 1 and then again at the end of Day 2. The final survey, used at the conclusion of Day 3, consists of questions about participants' feelings toward the overall PD. I used a linear scale on both surveys, with a scale of 1 to 5 showing their level of agreement with the statement or question. A score of 1 would mean strongly disagree and a score of 5 would mean strongly agree. The survey focused on the content and its application or relevancy to the participant.

Short Answer Prompts

In addition to the linear scale, each evaluation ends with short answer prompt type statements or questions. Participants will be able to explain more about their sentiments outside of the static number assignment on the linear scale portion of the evaluation. The answers and feedback provided in this section of the evaluation could be instrumental in

guiding future PD and effective, strategic revisions to the existing PD. The information from the evaluation will be summarized and provided to the site administrators at the ABE sites.

Key Stakeholders

The project was designed to meet the needs and concerns of the stakeholders by providing the perspective from the successful adult learner. The primary stakeholders identified for this project are the facilitators at adult basic education sites. The secondary stakeholders are identified as the site administrators, other instructional leaders, and finally, the community. The results of this study will be shared with the site administrators at both adult basic education sites.

Project Implications

The purpose of the PD was to provide facilitators on how to assist adult learners with developing relationships and the best practices strategies for adult learners to successfully achieve their academic goals. One group who will benefit from this project are the facilitators that teach adult learners at ABE sites. The results of this project will effect positive social change for not only facilitators but also for other adult learners. Other adult learners who have not yet finished their program may benefit from having a facilitator who understands that which helps adult learners successfully set their own educational goals and complete their programs.

Possible social change implication is the implementation of the best practices for assisting learners with developing relationships and best practices strategies adult learners needed to achieve their academic goals. Facilitators at ABE sites will become

knowledgeable in the insights revealed from the data analysis and, as a result, implement these practices into their courses. Adult learners will benefit as the facilitators will be more prepared to meet the needs of this group of adult learners. On a larger scale, an additional benefit may incorporate more adult learners setting goals and complete their programs.

Conclusion

This section contained a description of the design, implementation, and evaluation of the project. As a result of the data analysis, I designed a virtual PD that will address the research problem. This PD was designed for the facilitators who teach adult learners at ABE sites and promote best practices for assisting adult learners in completing their educational goals. Those who will benefit from the project are not only the facilitators but also the adult learners enrolled in their courses. The implications for social change are a group of facilitators who are better prepared to meet the needs of the adults in their courses and perhaps an increase in the number of adult learners who complete their educational program. In Section 4, the narrative will be on the strengths and weakness of the project.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this section I address the strengths and limitation of the project as well as the recommendations for alternative approaches. The study has implications for positive social change, and I will also cover what this means in various settings, both for the local community and for the broader community. Additionally, I will reflect upon the importance of the work and discuss how this study might inform future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The project design was grounded in Knowles' andragogy which is consistent with the approach to the study since both have adults as the intended audience. The research problem was the low percentage of adult learners completing their program. The purpose of the study was to understand what learning experiences successful adult learners had and what goal setting strategies were used to complete their programs.

Strengths

Strengths of the project lie in the use of interviews with successful adult learners. Queiros et al. (2017) wrote that the use of interviews in a qualitative study provide rich information and allow for a researcher to probe for additional information or details and may make participants feel more comfortable in conversation. It appeared that participants felt at ease during the interviews and thus, a stronger sense of trust between me and the participant. This is important because the feelings of uncertainty and anxiety surrounding the current global pandemic could have impacted the participant's willingness to share about their experiences.

Limitations

A limitation of the project could be the single, isolation event of a 3-day PD. Findings from Dulude et al. (2020) suggested that a single PD influenced facilitator knowledge but was unlikely to have an impact on student outcomes. Participants may perceive the PD as only presentation of information instead of applicability to their pedagogy. Another limitation of the project is allowing for implementation time. Participants need time to implement what they learned, have opportunities to follow up so they may celebrate successes, discuss challenges, and find answers to their questions (Soto & Marzocchi, 2020). For a change in the pedagogy of the facilitator, it will be necessary for the facilitator to use the best practices with adult learners and be able to reflect and redesign based on their feedback from their success. This is a cyclical process that is ongoing and needs extended time past the 3-day PD in order to be effective.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

A researcher may need to consider other alternative approaches for addressing the problem based on the limitations of the study. The problem is the low completion rates of adult learners at adult basic education sites. I could have approached this problem by investigating the effectiveness of the current curriculum presented to the adult learners during their courses. Also, I could have approached the problem by looking at the facilitators' perceptions of what was lacking or not provided to the adult learners. These alternative approaches might have slightly changed the focus of the study. The solution to the local problem is the identification of the strategies used by adult learners that might help other adults be more successful in completing their educational goals.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

The doctoral journey from coursework to final project was a 6-year process for me as a scholar. Higher Education and Adult Learning (HEAL) was a field of expertise that was new for me and there was a high need for my attentiveness during the coursework. Without the knowledge and feedback from my instructors, I would not have been successful enough to complete this journey. The resources provided by the Walden Writing Center, Walden Library, and Walden Center for Research Quality provided explicit structure and direction when embarking upon the final project and research journey.

My greatest growth came during the journey in writing the final project. At the Walden residency, one of the faculty members commented, that we, as novice researchers, should stay mindful of the number of life changing events that may occur during our writing process since these events could dramatically impact our project finish line. In reflection, I remember slightly dismissing this recommendation, unaware and naïve to the enormity of the writing to come. Three weeks later, my father-in-law passed away. Following his passing, and over the course of the next 2 years, the life events kept coming. I passed a rigorous certification assessment to become an administrator, I accepted a promotion as a K-12 grade instructional leader for my district, had a change in one of my committee members, purchased my first home, and navigated my family through the effects of the natural disasters in my state, all through a global pandemic. The grit needed to preserve through it all was immense. The journey was not as simple as placing words on the paper any longer.

Through the assistance of my committee members, with their constant guidance and feedback, I have developed the skill to write with clarity and conciseness so readers of varying backgrounds can understand my research. I have refined my practice of collecting, organizing, and coding qualitative data that started in my coursework. The interviews I conducted allowed me the opportunity to improve my communication skills with other adults and my comfort level as a researcher grew with each interview. Many times, I found I would try to rush the process or be disappointed when receiving feedback asking for revisions but in retrospect, it was necessary to produce work at a doctoral level. My committee always had the confidence in me but seeing that part for myself came only as the final chapters were written.

As a project developer, I gained an understanding on the type of PD that was necessary to impart change in an existing system. I kept the perspective of the adult learners from the study in mind while developing the training for the key stakeholders. My knowledge regarding the appropriate PD grew through the literature review and I selected the most appropriate project for the facilitators at adult basic education sites.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

I decided to pursue this doctoral journey because of personal experience. My mother was an adult learner who returned to school to complete her GED as a single mother, working full-time. I grew up knowing the improbability of my own success as a product of a teenage, single parent home. Therefore, I have always had an invested interest in learning about what made nontraditional adult learners successful.

My work throughout this journey centered on successful adult learners at adult basic education sites. At the start of journey, I planned to conduct my research study around nursing students, however, selecting such a small subgroup in a much larger community of adult learners would narrow my selection. By opening up the definition of successful adult learners in other fields, a larger sample size was included and thus, resembled the larger community of adult learners. Through the literature review I noticed that the focus of successful adult learners was mostly those enrolled at 2-year or 4-year university level and little, current research on the adult learner at adult basic education sites. I believed that research on the perspective of adult learners at ABE sites might make a difference for the population of Career/Technical Education (CTE) and high school diploma/GED adults.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

It is important to know what experiences and strategies successful adult learners used to complete their educational goals. I framed this study using the conceptual framework of Knowles' andragogy, or adult learning theory. I attempted to address the gap in practice on what meaningful learning experiences successful ABE learners had and the strategies those same adult learners utilized to set goals to complete their educational goals. After my data analysis, two themes were developed about what the adult learners perceived to be effective. My plan is to share what was missing from those findings with facilitators at adult basic education sites through a 3-day PD. Potential implications for positive social change may include the increase of other adult learners completing their educational goals.

All the participants met the criteria for the study and were from adult basic education sites, therefore, facilitators can apply this project to all adult learners enrolled at ABE sites. I hope facilitators and other site administrators will apply the findings from this project study when structuring their course offerings and meeting the needs of adult learners.

Researchers could focus future studies and research from topics explored in this study. Supportive relationships and positive dispositions were evident in the data and needed for the adult learners to achieve their academic goals. Researchers could investigate how an adult learner achieves their goals in the absence of supportive relationships or how an adult learner responds if they have a general sense of self-doubt. Researchers could also investigate how facilitators introduce life skills or study strategies to adult learners through curriculum and content. Furthermore, researchers could deconstruct these topics into individual studies related to supportive relationships, positive dispositions, life skills, study strategies.

Conclusions

My interest in adult learners, specifically those at adult basic sites, was the driving focus in the development of this project study. From reading the literature, I learned there was a need for more research on this group of adults as opposed to their 2-year or 4-year university counterparts. The local problem was situated at ABE sites in a Western state where the low completion rate percentages of adult learners were an issue. The purpose of the study was to better understand the meaningful learning experiences successful ABE learners had and the strategies those same adult learners set goals to complete their

program. As a result, the aim of this project was to share the findings with a group of people who can create the necessary change by reaching a large amount of adult learners and assist them in achieving their goals.

The study was grounded in Knowles' theory of andragogy, or adult learning theory and a basic qualitative approach was used in research design. Two research questions were constructed and were used to guide the data collection process. The data collection process was through interviews with 12 participants and coding was used to organize the data and identify patterns. As a result of this process, six temporary themes emerged. Patterns were identified across the temporary themes and two final themes emerged. These themes were used to identify a gap in the findings and construct a professional development for facilitators at adult basic education sites.

The project I developed to address the gap in practice is a virtual, synchronous PD. This PD will be for the facilitators at the ABE sites from this project study. The purpose of the PD is to share what emerged from the findings and how the facilitators can assist more adult learners in completing their goals. An evaluation plan was created to gauge the effectiveness of the PD in getting facilitators to implement some of the strategies into their coursework. My intention is to contribute to positive social change by sharing research about successful adult learners, which may, in turn, increase the number of adult learners completing their program.

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Appendix A: The Project

Supporting Adult Learners: Creating Experiences and Developing the Strategies Essential for Their Success

Purpose

The aim of this project is to provide participants with specific experiences and set of strategies that successful adult learners believed assisted them in completing their educational goals. The project deliverable is a 3-day, PD presented online and synchronously with facilitators at adult basic education sites. Through this PD facilitators will understand how to assist adult learners with developing relationships and practice with strategies adult learners have used to achieve their academic goals.

The participants will be presented with the findings from the study but also gain knowledge on how to incorporate best practices into their adult basic education courses with adult learners. Each component of the PD will be defined and shared with participants through a Google Slides presentation. Participants will be provided with examples of best practices. Participants will be allowed time to collaborate with others in the training through breakout rooms. In the breakout rooms, participants will reflect on the application of the strategies into their course structure and be prepared to share out with the whole group. The presenter will circulate through the breakout rooms, but each room will have a designated participant leader as well. This participant will assist with guiding the discussion if the presenter is not currently in the breakout room. When participants are brought back together as a whole group, the presenter will ask

participants to provide specific details of where they will incorporate the material into their course syllabi.

Goal

The goal of the training is to contribute to the professional growth of the facilitators at adult basic education sites. Facilitators at the ABE sites vary in amount of training specifically related to newer curriculum, and updated strategies, or goal setting techniques (Mohr & Shelton, 2017). The overall goal of the PD is to outline a common practice among facilitators that will help them assist adult learners in completing their educational goals. Participants will be provided with learning opportunities to collaborate, practice, and implement the material presented.

Learning Outcomes

I developed measurable learning outcomes to assess the effectiveness of the PD and to structure the evaluations given to participants at the conclusion of the training. I proposed four learning outcomes: (a) participants will define the specific relationships and skills/strategies associated with successful adult learners, (b) participants will observe and analyze the best practices for teaching the skills and strategies to successful adult learners, (c) participants collaborate and reflect upon the application of the strategies into their course structure during the course of the PD and (d) participants will plan the implementation of the strategies into their course syllabi.

Target Audience

The targeted audience will be the facilitators at adult basic education sites from a local area in a western state. The initial intended audience will target the small number of

facilitators from the two study sites with the objective to start with the small group and then invite others later. The participants will be invited by their site administrators to share the material and strategies learned with others at their sites.

The project will require 3 days, with participants together virtually and synchronously with the presenter, to meet the requirements for the implementation of the PD. Day 1 will focus on the presentation of the material, including an overview and development of learning objective 1. Day 2 will focus on skills and strategies and the reflection of best practices, related to learning objective 2. Finally, rounding out learning objectives 3 and 4, Day 3 will focus on the implementation of the strategies through collaboration and planning.

Supporting Adult Learners PD – Day 1	
Timeline	Activity
8:00 – 9:00	Welcome Virtual Meeting Norms Overview of the PD Schedule of the PD
9:00 – 10:00	Google Slides presentation of the material (Time for group discussion and/or presenter clarification will occur within the natural flow of the presentation and in gauging the needs of the participants.)
10:00 – 10:15	Break
10:15 – 11:00	Whole group discussion of material presented thus far with a whole group share out and reflection.
11:00 – 12:00	Lunch Break (Participants on their own due to social distancing requirements potentially still in place). Presenter will be available for 30 mins to answer questions or clarify the material in a break out room.
12:00 – 1:00	Presentation continues (group discussion and check for understanding, as needed)
1:00 – 1:15	Small break

1:15 – 2:00	Presentation continues (group discussion and check for understanding, as needed)
2:00 – 3:00	Whole group discussion of material presented thus far with a whole group share out and reflection. Day 1 Evaluation

Supporting Adult Learners PD – Day 2	
Timeline	Activity
8:00 – 9:00	Welcome Back Review of Virtual Meeting Norms Review Schedule of the PD
9:00 – 10:00	Continued presentation on skills/strategies (Time for group discussion and/or presenter clarification will occur within the natural flow of the presentation and in gauging the needs of the participants.)
10:00 – 10:15	Break
10:15 – 11:00	Whole group discussion of material presented thus far with a whole group share out and reflection.
11:00 – 12:00	Lunch Break (Participants on their own due to social distancing requirements potentially still in place). Presenter will be available for 30 mins to answer questions or clarify the material in a break out room.
12:00 – 1:00	Presentation continues (group discussion and check for understanding, as needed)
1:00 – 1:15	Small break
1:15 – 2:00	Presentation continues (group discussion and check for understanding, as needed)
2:00 – 3:00	Whole group discussion of material presented thus far with a whole group share out and reflection. Day 2 Evaluation

Supporting Adult Learners PD – Day 3	
Timeline	Activity
8:00 – 9:00	Welcome Back Review of Virtual Meeting Norms Review Schedule of the PD

9:00 – 10:00	Review of the material presented from Day 1 and 2 with a whole group share out and reflection.
10:00 – 11:00	Small break to begin the hour Participants discuss the implementation of material. Participants will independently develop a tentative outline of course syllabi incorporating the material from the PD. Presenter will be available for assistance or feedback.
11:00 – 12:00	Lunch Break (Participants on their own due to social distancing requirements potentially still in place). Presenter will be available for 30 mins to answer questions about incorporating the material into their syllabus in a break out room.
12:00 – 1:00	Participants exchange syllabi and provide feedback to peers in small groups.
1:00 – 2:00	Small break to begin the hour Participants return to their syllabi and make revisions based on feedback through Share Screen features.
2:00 – 3:00	Whole group discussion of course syllabi that was created and final wrap up of the PD. Day 3 Evaluation

This Google Slide presentation was designed to give participants an overview of the learning objectives for the PD.

Supporting Adult Learners: Creating Experiences & Developing the Strategies Essential for Their Success

Professional Development Training
Amanda Sobremesana

Learning Objective 1

Participants will define the specific relationships and skills/strategies associated with successful adult learners.

Learning Objective 2

Participants will observe and analyze best practices for teaching the skills and strategies to successful adult learners.

Learning Objective 3

Participants will collaborate and reflect on the application of the strategies into their course structure.

Learning Objective 4

Participants will plan the implementation of the strategies into their course syllabi.

After the introduction and overview of the learning objectives, the presentation of the specific relationships and skills/strategies will begin. This Google Slides presentation will be used to organize the PD in a systematic way. Each relationship will be defined, and examples will be provided to the participants. After each topic is presented, the participants will have an opportunity to discuss and ask for clarification.

Supporting Adult Learners: Creating Experiences & Developing the Strategies Essential for Their Success

Professional Development Training
Amanda Sobremesana

Introduction

The presentation includes the specific relationships and skills/strategies successful adult learners have identified when completing their educational goals.

Supportive Relationships

- The supportive relationship could be from:
  - Family
  - Peers
  - Facilitators
- A relationship within one group is necessary but success increases when there is a supportive relationship across multiple groups
- Supportive relationships were attributed to the positive thinking and mindset from the participants
- Positive affirmations from the facilitator encourage trust
  - Affirmations are specific and make connections to the learners goal

Regulating Emotional Response

- Even despite numerous responsibilities, successful adults exhibit:
  - A consistent, positive attitude
  - Demonstrate resilience
- Adults must learn to self-regulate emotions
  - Acknowledging negative feelings, emotions, or reaction
  - Self-reflecting on behavior & emotions
  - Acknowledging growth after failure
  - Consistently engage in cyclical, reflective practice
- Facilitators can assist adult learners through dialogue with the adult learner, guided reflection during meetings, and goal setting

Learning Environment

- Create learning communities
  - Pair groups of adults together who have common experiences
- Facilitators are responsible for the learning environment
  - Use instructional practices & teaching pedagogy that integrates learners' interest and motivations first
- Start with presentation of material through lecture. As course progresses, then move to critical thinking, problem solving, and creative activities by changing instructional strategies continuously
- Teach adult learners how to optimize their surroundings
  - Diminish distractions
  - Develop a routine in a designated space
  - Consider teacher proximity to adult learner
  - Maintaining deadlines and understanding expectations

Long-Term Goal Setting

- Facilitators should initiate the contact with adult learners
- Facilitators should give attention, energy, and resources to the adult learner continuously and consistently over time (i.e., meetings, office hours, email, etc.)
- Facilitators must:
  - Be accessible
  - Be approachable
  - Encourage
  - Mentor
  - Give validation

Long-Term Goal Setting

- Facilitators should guide adult learners to begin with the “end in mind” and deconstruct short-term goals from that end goal
- Facilitators must initiate meeting with the adult learner and provide ongoing feedback
  - Assist adult learner with prioritizing goals
  - Teach adult learners to plan, execute, and assess their own goals
  - Consistently involve the adult learner in the process of goal setting
- Facilitators align the course objectives with the specific goals of the adult learners in their courses
  - Facilitators monitor the progress of the learners
  - Tailor instruction in response to the needs of the learners

Closing Thoughts

- When best practices are incorporated into instructional strategies, the facilitators’ course is no longer a basic skills training course but now is a course with more advanced objectives.
- Adult learners then begin to see the interconnectedness of their coursework to their careers, begin to believe they can handle larger tasks, and continuously adapt to changing circumstances.

Materials

The information provided to the participants will be through a Google Drive folder that will be shared with the registered participants. Since the PD is designed to be held virtually, it would be difficult to get paper copies to the participants. The share

settings on the documents in the folder will allow for participants to print the materials, if they so choose. The folder will contain: (a) the 3-day agenda, (b) a copy of the Google Slides presentation of the learning objectives, (c) a copy of the Google Slides presentation of the skills and strategies information. Other materials needed for the implementation of this PD are an Internet connection, a device to connect to our video conferencing link, a headset or speaker connection to be able to communicate with others, and participants should bring a copy of their course syllabi. Participants will need to upload their final deliverable to the Google Drive folder and/or be able to share their screen to fully collaborate with other participants.

Implementation Plan

I will assume the role of the presenter for this PD. The project has been designed to be virtual with COVID-19 considerations in mind. The implementation plan is to present this PD over a period of three consecutive days, in June 2021, which marks conclusion of the sessions at the ABE sites for the 2020-2021 school year. This timeline would ensure facilitators have enough time to practice and plan before the start of the following set of sessions.

Again, a Google Drive folder will be shared with the participants and I will present using the Google Slides presentations included in that folder. During the presentation of the material, group discussion and check for understanding will be based on the needs of the participants. I plan to stop the presentation at natural pauses to allow for the material to resonate with participants. The plan is for the facilitators to feel these strategies are easily implemented into their courses.

Evaluation Plan

There will be two types of evaluations that occur. One will be a daily evaluation to help me reflect on how I best met the needs of the participants for the day and to gauge how well they understood the material presented to them. This type of evaluation will occur at the end of Day 1 and at the end of Day 2. It will be used to adjust the agenda the next day if needed. The evaluation for the first two days will be through Google Forms, using a combination of Likert Scale questions and short answer questions. On the last day of the PD, the participants will be asked to complete a final evaluation regarding their thoughts and feelings from all three days as well respond to a reflection question. This final evaluation will also be through Google Forms, using a combination of Likert Scale questions and a paragraph question.

Survey Statements

Supporting Adult Learners

Please complete this form at the conclusion of Day 1 and Day 2

I feel I understood the material presented today.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

The material shared today was relevant to my role as a facilitator.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

I feel the material presented today was immediately applicable in my courses.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

Please share one strategy you feel you can integrate into your classroom and give a reason why.

Your answer

Please complete this sentence. Something I learned today was _____.

Your answer

Please complete this sentence. Something I still have a question about today was _____.

Your answer

Supporting Adult Learners

Please complete this form at the conclusion of Day 3

Over the past three days, I feel I understood all of the material presented, even if it was new knowledge.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

The material shared during the three days was relevant to my role as a facilitator.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

I feel the deliverable I was asked to create was immediately applicable in my courses.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

I feel the responsibility to teach the skills/strategies presented are primarily the responsibility of the facilitator.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

If you disagree with the above question, who do you feel holds the primary responsibility for teaching the skills/strategies presented in the three day PD? (I.e., counselor, specialized course, etc.)

Your answer

Please share what you liked best about the PD as well as what you would change about the PD.

Your answer

Would you encourage other facilitators at adult basic education sites to participate in this PD? Why?

Your answer

Submit

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Welcome. First, thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. Your experiences are greatly valued, and I would like to take this time to remind you that all your information will be kept confidential. Also, if at any time, you would like to stop the interview, please tell me. You may decide to skip questions, refuse to answer a particular question, and/or also decide to drop out of the study at any time without negative consequences. During the initial volunteer process, you agreed to have this interview recorded. Do you still agree to have the interview tape recorded? Now, before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

Background Questions

1. To begin, please tell me the educational program you are currently enrolled in.
2. What made you want to choose this particular program at the adult school?
3. What are your educational goals?
4. Out of all the educational goals you set, how did you determine which goal you would start with first?

Learning Experiences

1. What prior learning experiences do you believe were relevant to assisting you in completing your educational goals?
2. What interactions with facilitators or support from facilitators assisted you in completing your educational goals?

3. What interactions or support from other individuals (such as peers or family members) assisted you in completing your educational goals?
4. What experiences in completing your educational goals have been the most challenging?
5. What is your motivation for reaching your educational goals?
6. What strategies have you used to keep yourself motivated while completing your goals even while managing life and work responsibilities?
7. How did you keep your focus on meeting your educational goals during times of stress or during a negative experience?

Educational Goals

1. Throughout the sessions, what goal setting strategies did you use to maintain focus on your educational goals?
2. Please explain how you used feedback from facilitators and/or peers to adjust your path to achieve your educational goals?
3. What time management strategies did you use to complete your educational goals?
4. What study strategies did you use to complete your educational goals? For example, study strategies could be active listening, note-taking, or prior preparation for your assignments.
5. Explain how you evaluated your performance against the desired outcome of successfully meeting your educational goals.

6. Is there anything you would like to add that helped you near the completion of your educational goals?

Follow-up/Probing Questions

1. Can you tell me more about that?
2. What eventually happened?
3. In looking back, what would you do differently now, if anything?
4. Compare this to what you have observed others have done. What was the outcome?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. I appreciate you sharing your story with me. If you have any questions after this interview, please do not hesitate to contact me through email or telephone. Again, thank you for coming today.

Appendix C: Complete Open Codes Derived from the Data

Table 1

Complete Open Codes Derived from the Data

Open Codes	*Participant ID*	*Excerpt*
Spouse/Significant Other	1110	…Wife suggested that I do this whole school thing; wife was very influential…
	1112	I couldn't have done this without my husband.
Parents	1101	My parents helped me financially in the early part of my career; …they helped me…
	1111	I received financial support from my parents.
	1112	My mom is my motivation.
Support system	1105	…Encouragement from many different people in my support system…
	1111	I am extremely lucky to have the support system.
	1112	I acknowledge my support squad.
Family	1101	I purposely put work away on the weekend and focus on my family.
	1102	My family was a lot of help as well.
	1103	Having friends and family in the fire services has made a huge impact; …support of my family with everyday tasks.
	1107	They support me a lot. My family's abroad.
	1109	First then, will always be obviously, my family.

	1110	…family kept me motivated and positive; My family was influential in helping me get through it.
	1111	…most support from peers and family members…
	1112	My family allows me to miss things without making me feel bad.
Ask Questions	1101	…ask many questions…
	1109	…ask the doctor like 10,000 questions…
Absence of goal setting	1101	I didn't really set a game plan.
	1110	I scraped enough to get by; I was purely winging it.
Time	1101	I learned to have my weekends.
	1106	…the time it took to go do it…
Time management	1102	Time management; …trying to manage my studies…; …help me work on time management for the test…
	1110	I would manage my time; …just staying focused especially at that time in my life where it was like, extremely stressful…
	1112	I am not so good at time management.
Student Study Groups	1102	My classmates were a big help; …classmates were sounding boards for each other.; …finding fellow students who I could collaborate with…
	1108	…a lot of support from your fellow classmates and in

		helping you grasp the information that you needed.
	1111	…study group at school…
Motivation because of kids	1102	…to set an example for my son.
	1104	…tell myself... I will be better for it and for my daughter.
	1108	The kids, the kids, the kids, set an example; My motivation for all the hard work and stress that comes along with being a single parent.
	1109	Because, you know, I want them to see that anything is possible; I wanna have a good life for my kids.
	1112	My kids are always my motivation.
Goals	1102	My first goal was to get accepted.; I had a personal goal to maintain a 3.5 GPA.
	1109	My goal was to be top in my class.
	1112	I used the checkpoints the school gave me to see if I was meeting my goals.
Grades/Evaluation	1102	…by my grades for one; …what score I needed to achieve the grade I want.
	1103	…achieve one of the highest grades in the course…
	1105	…performance…
	1110	I need to pass.
	1111	I evaluated myself against myself.

Course scheduling	1106	…every single day of the week for about five hours; …making it work for us…; …nice to split it up…; …classes that fit my scheduling; …splitting up your classes into segments.
	1109	…change my job schedule at the time.
Flashcards	1102	I would make flash cards.
	1108	…flashcards.
	1110	…flashcards, go back and look at the flashcards.
	1111	Flash cards were also a great tool for me.
Attention	1101	I would find out what areas I was struggling in and where I needed to focus my attention.
	1104	If I pay attention and perform my work diligently, I will be fine; …it is a learning experience so pay attention.
	1106	…just consistent of doing the work.
	1110	I have a very short attention span so I can listen for a good 10, 15 minutes and then I get distracted.
Planning	1103	…complete one course at a time and not get overwhelmed by looking too far ahead.
	1112	I could probably be more efficient if I planned and only worked on one project at a time.
Reading the material	1101	I read daily; Now the first thing I do when I wake up is read my books.

	1104	…reread a lot of literature; …reading the specifications of each task.
	1105	I don't like to read in big sections; I read first then I go back and take notes; I feel like that reading class really helped me overall in school for learning how to read material and to become a better test taker.
Study Habits	1102	I feel study habits I formed my senior year of high school really played a role in how I managed my studies.
	1108	…sleepless nights staying up late to study.
	1109	…any distraction… actually radio on helps me for some reason; …studying I have to completely be by myself focused.
	1110	Okay, well, incorporate things that I liked and incorporate it into what I am studying.
	1111	…best studying at a bookstore/coffee shop listening to classical music.
Daily preparation	1106	…prepared daily. So big picture didn't really think about it like that just day to day; …what do I have to do the day before to make sure that everything's ready; …make sure I have everything in my life ready; Meals ready, clothes ready; supplies ready; …being consistent with routine; …having everything organized ahead of time.

	1110	I made sure I went to sleep at a decent time I made sure my eating was you know, on point, because all of that helped me focus.
Reviewing the material	1102	I would go over, see if I have a final that day, my questions were in order I would study before I go to class; I would get to school early before tests and review and study beforehand.
	1103	…few hours a day on studying and understanding what was learned for that day.
	1105	I set up time to review the reading before my assignment was due; I read my discussion questions before I read the assigned reading to help me know what information I was looking for; …doing a quick look over a second time before I complete my assignments.
	1109	…may cut a few hours from work so I could finish class.
	1110	I would go over all my homework, just to make sure it was on point.
Note taking	1101	I use note taking for courses consisting of online audio and lectures.
	1105	I have to take notes.
	1106	I took a lot of notes during class…pay attention and write things down…try to rewrite the notes from memory; The best way I

		learn was to rewrite all of my notes that I would take in class.
	1111	We had to learn over 1100 different types of drugs and I bought a white board because of all the re-writing I was doing.
Explaining the material	1106	…learning something during the day and overnight they would ask us to try and practice it to talk about it the next day; …where if I felt comfortable that I could talk about it I felt like that was a success.
	1108	Once I explained what I was taught to someone else that I knew that I knew that information; …trying to step back and say yes or no questions just answer your question versus trying to give my reasoning.
	1109	You know just let me do it. Let me prove to you that I can do it and if I mess up, you'll know I'll fix it however, let me try; That's what always kept me you know, like going to learning something new
Making Lists	1102	Lists, schedules, a vision board, staying focused on the end goal; I was big on lists and staying organized
	1105	I wrote down my goals and I check them off; …making lists because it helps me stay organized; …tracking my progress with pie charts

		and color-coded lists keeps me motivated.
Using a planner	1105	Planning it out really helps me get my assignments completed on time; …easily forget so the paper helps keep me on tract.
	1112	Just writing everything down in a planner; I use it as a check off list
Personal Challenges	1102	…doubting myself and questioning if I was competent enough.
	1103	It was the first course I had taken in a few years; I was unemployed and it was really, really stressful.
	1104	EMT course was most challenging because it was a field I was not familiar with; …never done welding before made it difficult; I had no prior knowledge to fall back on.
	1108	…sacrifice a lot of sleepless nights.
	1110	…had no idea what any of that was.
	1111	School never came easy for me; working full time while finishing both of my programs.
Stress or negative experiences	1104	…stress and negative experiences are only temporary; Just take things one step at a time.
	1111	In times of stress or negative experiences I would step away; …depending on what was going on to clear my head.

	1112	…remember nothing good will done when I am under stress; …take a step back.
Connection to others	1104	…lives are dependent on us.
	1106	…process of receiving work from needing recovery work; …physically touch people; …learning people's preferences and just being able to touch.
	1111	…to keep a clear head; …show up on any one person’s worst moment and have a positive effect.
Hard work	1104	Hard work ethic.
	1107	And I know if I work hard, I will get what I want.
	1108	Anything hard to get is worth hacking in anything is easy to get is usually not worth having.
Encouragement	1103	I'm a self-motivated type of person so knowing what the outcome will be if I continue down this path is my motivation.
	1104	Words of encouragement has always helped me; Prayer helped a lot.
Positive attitude	1104	Keeping a positive attitude helps but it can be difficult to maintain.
	1107	I know anybody can do anything. It is just belief in themselves; They could positively. I always stay positive. That’s all.
	1109	I always try to have a positive attitude, no matter how hard times are, there's you know, there's always a

		good time so always focus on the good things and that helps me have a good attitude towards everything no matter what.
Effort	1103	…put the effort in on completing those tasks.
	1108	Bottom line? Being able to be self-sufficient.
	1111	I truly believe that the best way to learn is to make mistakes and learn from them.
Outcomes	1101	I evaluate my performance based on the measurable outcomes of my athletes.
	1102	…seeing the finish line in sight
	1103	Again, knowing what the outcome will be if I just continue with what is in front of me.
	1108	I try not to overthink things. …maybe we'll make it more complicated.
	1112	I am afraid to not complete goals because I know what set backs are.
Persistent Outlook/Mindset	1106	…showing up everything day and knowing that you had to get it done.
	1107	Learn as much as possible and finish the program; …done so it has to be done. I don't know. That's what has to happened so I do it; I was thinking about that for a while for several years, and now I went I realized I really want to do this, so nothing can hold me back I

	1108	wanted so I'm going to achieve that.
	1109	Just push through because brighter days and better days are coming.
	1110	I was looking at the big picture; My goal is to show them that no matter what you can always do good in life.
		They would sit me out like hey, you need to focus, ‘cuz if you want to get this done just get it done now.
Goals because of family	1102	My goal was to have a career I loved and be able to provide for my son and get out of the living situation I was in so I could live a more authentic life.
	1108	The ability to have an actual career and just better for my family was my main motivation.
Bachelor’s degree	1103	…receive a bachelor’s degree.
	1105	…BSN later at a university but with kids and working full time it was easier to start at this school then go to a university.
Help others	1102	I wanted to work in the medical field and the ability to help others gain more independence.
	1106	So I could help people hands on.
	1107	I want to be, uh, a therapist. Because I enjoy the therapy myself. And I hope I can

		provide the best possible service to people.
Goals because of work promotion	1104	We currently only have 2 welders certified and I volunteered to learn the skill; …complete the certification and attain as many certifications as possible to be a well-rounded technician at Space X; …most knowledge in order to be a valuable worker and also increase income.
	1105	I wanted to change my job; LVN license then my associate's degree in nursing to become an RN.
	1106	…reaching out to the office to get the certificate and then get the interview for work.
	1108	…get the certificate to work in the field while I was in school.
	1109	I chose this because that I'm already in an office and if I become a registered dental assistant, I have more job opportunities, and I could make more money
	1110	…to become a licensed technician but I plan on being licensed
Responsibilities	1101	…status within the community. Only a handful of international coaches; consistent determination, desire, and reminder of how far I had come aided in my ability to strive and complete my goal.

	1104	…demonstrate that you are willing to work and produced then you will be recognized and given more responsibilities.
Continue learning	1101	…to continue learning.
	1106	I'm doing extra educational courses as an adult when you still need to work and have a life.
	1107	…thinking about massage therapy for a while. And last year I decided to go to for it and I found this program.
	1110	At this point in my life at my age, and seeing the fact that I do own multiple cats. I, you know, I figured might as well just keep working out for myself, but help animals instead so here I am.
Work required certification	1101	Weightlifting is my profession, so naturally I'd like to get certifications within their umbrella; …actually apply to my work and/or one that will help me earn more.
	1103	The process of becoming a firefighter starts with a series of prerequisites.
	1111	Paramedic school would be a great stepping stone to get the job; This particular paramedic program is 10 months long, however, I got hired with my fire department while I was still in school and went through a fire academy and yearlong

		probation. After these were completed, my department sent me back to finish my paramedic license.
	1112	I need to finally get a career because prior to that I was lifting boxes all day in a warehouse for years and years I just my body couldn't really handle it anymore.
Prior learning experiences	1103	With going to the military after high school, I didn't have a chance to earn a degree of any kind; this being my first educational experiences outside of that makes it very special to me.
	1105	In middle school I had to take a reading class as an elective because I was behind in school.
	1107	I went to school Russia good at chemistry so we study anatomy, biology, and stuff.
	1108	…essentially like that I gone right out of high school, it would have, it would have been the same thing. It felt like I was in 10th grade.
	1110	I was barely scraping by with division.
	1111	I went to a community college directly out of high school, so to me it felt like '13th and 14th grade."
	1112	Failing out of university was a big learning experience that helped me now in completing my goals.

Work experience	1108	…pharmacy technician, at least I can do that within a year and work in the field.
	1110	…assisted me was getting my HS diploma; So, technically for not really being in school since 1999. I didn't miss any days; …all my homework was turned in.
	1112	I wish I would've known more careers to go into. I wasn't into school probably would've had a different path if I knew what I wanted to do or what was an option from a younger age.
Other responsibilities	1103	My career experience work in different refineries… also my construction background on how buildings are constructed; …getting use to the school atmosphere with working a full-time job took some getting used to.
	1106	Because I'd often like to go to school and then have to go to work.
	1107	Just interested in learning and understand if I learned right now. I can, I can be a good one good professional when I'm done; …get a job with some big company to get work experience.
	1109	Once I did the job training, that's when I learned I mean, most of what I know.
Mentorship	1101	I would pick their brains and follow them as they coached. I would ask as

1105	many questions as I could and help in any way I can; I spent a lot of time traveling and meeting with other coaches who have far more experiences and knowledge than me. …advice from a peer who explained that going to the private college so I decided to start small and will move from there. …going through as a younger person when you don't have other responsibilities.

Appendix D: Complete List of Axial Codes Derived from the Open Codes

Table 2

Complete List of Axial Codes Derived from the Open Codes

Open Codes	*Axial Codes*
Siblings Kids Spouse/Significant Other Relationships Support system Parents Family Connection to others	Having a relationship with other individuals
Time away from kids Challenges with kids Motivation because of kids	Challenges and successes while raising children
Mentorship	Receiving help from mentors
Help Student study groups	Support from student study groups
Hard work Effort	Maintaining a persistent attitude
Encouragement Positive attitude Persistent outlook/mindset	Maintaining a positive attitude
Learning the language Ask questions Communicating with others	Using language to communicate with others
Hands on experience	Utilizing real life application
Absence of goal setting	Lack of goal setting
Personal challenges	Challenges, stress or negative experiences

Assessing and adjusting the path Stress or negative experiences	
Time Time management	Good management of time
Continue learning	A desire to be a lifelong learner
Test taking Flashcards Note taking Attention Daily preparation Study Habits	Use of study strategies
Reading the material Review of the material Explaining the material	High level of preparation to understand the content
Goals Grades/Evaluation	Using grades and/or evaluation to determine if they had met their goals
Schedules Making lists Planning Using a planner	Strategies for goal setting and planning
Outcomes	Determining what their goals would be
Program structure Hours Location Choice Price Class size Course scheduling	Components of an Adult Basic Education (ABE) site
Goals because of family	Goals to better their family situation

Bachelor's degree	Goals to obtain a bachelor's degree
Help others	Goals because of a desire to help others
Goals because of a work promotion Work required certification	Goal setting because of work
Responsibilities	Added responsibilities at work
Prior learning experiences Work experience	Using their past experiences for motivation
Other responsibilities	Acknowledging the outside responsibilities adults have besides their ABE program