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Examining Barriers to Retention of Adult Learners in Rural Education Programs

Tiffany Minyon Spivey
Walden University

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Tiffany Spivey

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Examining Barriers to Retention of Adult Learners in Rural Education Programs

by

Tiffany M. Spivey

MA, University of Phoenix, 2007

BS, Fort Valley State University, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

April 2016

Abstract

The retention of adult learners in rural educational settings throughout the United States is challenging for adult education instructors. Adult learners in rural areas encounter internal and external barriers, including lack of self-efficacy and minimal transportation. Research exists regarding the retention of adult learners, but little is known about the barriers to persistence among adult learners in rural areas, or the motivations experienced by students and instructors. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify perceived barriers to retention at a rural adult learning center in Georgia and to provide suggestions to improve adult education and literacy initiatives. Knowles' theory of andragogy was used to guide this investigation. The research questions examined instructors' and students' perceived and experienced barriers, motivations, and recommendations for better strategies. Responses were recorded from semistructured interviews with 3 instructors and 9 adult students who represented the various levels of Adult Basic Education or General Educational Development within the rural setting. Data were coded and sorted by themes using inductive thematic analysis. The participants' detailed narratives indicated that situational hardships were a perceived barrier and personal investment was a motivator. Based on participants' recommendations to improve time management and incorporate technology-based instruction, a professional development training program for learning center instructors was created. The training may promote positive social change by providing research based techniques, which may increase retention and graduation rates at the local site.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this doctoral study to my amazing family. Thank you for allowing me to set aside time out of our routines over the past four years to complete this manuscript. I am grateful for a family that has shown encouragement and understanding throughout this entire process. JaMya and Jaden, I hope that I have displayed a true example of perseverance that will encourage you to accomplish your goals.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Retention is a primary concern in the field of adult education. Many adult learners, younger adults (18-24 years old), working-age adults (25-64 years old), and older adults (65 and older), presumed to obtain at least part time employment while attending school (Wlodkowski, 2008), enrolled in adult education programs experience a sense of failure because of barriers that prevent them to persevere (McGrath, 2009). These learners often begin General Educational Development (GED) and literacy programs with immense anticipation; however, they often fail to finish these programs due to barriers such as learning deficiencies, lack of self-assurance, and the inability to commit (Lester, 2012). For these reasons, it is important for instructors to know more about these issues in order to improve retention rates for adult learners. Facilitators and administrators need research to assist them with (a) skills for improving retention for adult basic education (ABE) and GED learners, (b) strategies for effective retention practices, and (c) a broader understanding for retaining adults in rural communities.

Research conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) indicates that education and training beyond high school are important for securing opportunities for high-wage jobs in the United States. Between 1990 and 2012, the U.S. unemployment rate was generally higher for individuals who did not complete high school in the following age categories: 20–24 years old, 25-34 years old, and 25- 64 years old (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). In 2012, for example, the

unemployment rate for young adults between 20–24 years of age who did not complete high school was 27% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

Lack of student persistence in completing a high school diploma or GED hinders learners' literacy success, graduation rates, and employability skills (Blackburn, 2010). The lack of sufficient academic skills is one hindrance to learners' persistence within educational settings (Lester, 2012). Additional issues and personal problems that are unrelated to their studies also complicate persistence (Fowler & Boylan, 2010).

Adult education instructors endure a plethora of challenges. The persistence of adult learners in rural communities has been particularly challenging for adult education stakeholders (e.g., local staff, partner organizations, workforce development organizations) (Bourgeois, 2012; Lester, 2012). Despite numerous approaches, adult education instructors, recruiters, and administrators have made unsuccessful attempts to implement methods and incorporate strategies to retain adult learners (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). Student retention is essential for educational institutions to be successful in their missions. High attrition rates imply that an institution is not meeting its objectives (Blackburn, 2010).

There are several proposed strategies to begin addressing the problem of retention in the adult education sector (McGrath, 2009). One proposed strategy relates to understanding how adults learn. The idea that adults learn differently than younger students is well documented in the literature (Taylor & Koth, 2009). Those working in higher education use the term *andragogy* to describe how adults learn (Taylor & Koth, 2009). *Andragogy* describes how students learn and is an approach to empower them to

take possession and control of their own education, thereby giving them more ownership in their daily educational endeavors (Bowman & Plourde, 2012). According to Bowman and Plourde (2012), students who participate in curriculum design have more motivation for completing their educational goals. The integration of the adult learning theory into curriculum might assist instructors in their strategies to improve learner retention.

Evaluating the reasons why some adult learners are not persistent in their education can provide adult education stakeholders with critical information for helping adult learners persist and achieve their educational goals and help improve retention rates. If retention rates are increased, adult learners may have more opportunities to succeed in the workforce and in educational settings. The objective of my project research was to provide a more thorough understanding of the experiences of adults in GED and ABE programs in rural settings. Understanding why adult learners drop out and do not persist in obtaining their GED is critical to increasing their retention and persistence. Moreover, this study has the potential of expanding the research literature on factors that contribute to and hinder the success of adult learners enrolled in ABE and GED programs. In addition, the study has the potentiality of heightening exposure and awareness of other facets of literacy, such as health and economic issues. Likewise, this research has implications for the improvement of the study site's attainment and sustainability.

Section 1 contains an overview of the current study. The first section of the proposal presents the local problem, the rationale for the study, and operational terms. The subsequent section explores the significance of the study and the guiding/research

questions. The final segment of Section 1 includes the theoretical framework, current literature, implications, and a chapter summary.

Definition of the Problem

Retention of adults in rural settings is a dilemma for instructors. Despite recruitment efforts that include surveys, flyers, community events, and collaborative community group attempts the ALC has enrolled less than half of its target number of students (Georgia Adult Learners Information System, 2014). Not meeting projected fiscal benchmarks (i.e., enrollment of 100 adult learners and 25 GED graduates) may lead to a reduction in state and federal funding (Prins & Schafft, 2009).

. The research site for this study was within the adult education division of a technical college in rural Georgia. The site offers ABE, GED, and adult secondary education (ASE) courses at an adult learning center (ALC) housed within the local board of education. Through ABE courses, instructors are able to assist learners with basic literacy and remediation in specific subject areas (e.g., reading, math, and/or language). Students are promoted to GED or ASE learners as they display signs of progression and indicate readiness to take one or all of the four sections included in the official GED examination. Learners can receive ABE and GED services at no cost to the learners, and incentives such as scholarships for both the practice and official GED tests are also available.

The ALC that prompted this study was established in 2009. The center is located in rural Georgia, an area in which residents grapple with challenges related to geographic remoteness and poverty (Prins & Schafft, 2009). Minimal skilled employment

opportunities exist within the local setting (e.g., retail trade, manufacturing, and construction) (Georgia Community Profile, 2014). In addition, many of the local opportunities that were available in this community have been interchanged by technology, transferred overseas, or terminated. Though jobs are scarce within the local setting, this community is located in the geographic center of its state and is surrounded by several flourishing cities; therefore, there is potential for the adult citizens residing within this setting. Within a range of 20-30 miles of the county are seven technical colleges, four-year colleges, and universities. Moreover, numerous forms of employment opportunities, (e.g., education, health, marketing, and law enforcement) exist within nearby cities (Georgia Community Profile, 2014). However, many adults within the community may be unable to obtain substantial employment or further their education because they lack a high school diploma or GED (S.B. Devero, personal communication, September 26, 2014). The goal of the ALC is to improve literacy rates and assist students in completing GEDs to secure more stable employment in positions that require a GED (S.B. Devero, personal communication, September 26, 2014).

There were 35 students enrolled in the site at the time of this study. Services are provided by a full-time adult education instructor, an adjunct instructor, and a part-time recruiter. Students can attend classes during morning, afternoon, and evening hours to provide convenience for learners. Learners also have the option of online instruction as an alternative to students desiring to learn within a self-paced environment. Although students can choose from various options, retention rates remain low in this adult education setting. At the time of this study, only nine of the 35 enrolled students met the

minimum requirement of 15 hours of class attendance per week (Georgia Adult Learners Information System, 2014).

In an effort to shed light on the current recruitment and retention strategies in ABE, this qualitative study investigated the perceived barriers and experiences that adult learners encounter. Understanding why adult learners drop out and do not persist in obtaining their GED is critical to increasing their retention and persistence. Moreover, this study has the potential of expanding the research literature on factors that contribute to and hinder the success of adult learners enrolled in ABE and GED programs. In addition, the study has the potentiality of heightening exposure and awareness of other facets of literacy, such as health and economic issues. Likewise, this research has implications for the improvement of the institution's attainment and sustainability.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The adult population in this rural county is 7,850, and more than 30% of those adults have less than a high school diploma (United States Bureau of Statistics, 2013). The population consists of 58% Black, 36% White, 1% two or more races, .5% other, .4% Asian, and .1% American Indian individuals. The median resident age is 46. The median income of \$19,921 for this rural community is significantly below the state's average of \$46,007 (Georgia Community Profile, 2014). Despite recruitment efforts that include surveys, flyers, community events, and collaborative community group initiatives, the ALC has enrolled less than half of its target number of students (Georgia Adult Learners Information System, 2014). Not meeting projected fiscal marks (i.e.,

enrollment of 100 adult learners and 25 GED graduates) could lead to a reduction in state and federal funding (Blackburn, 2010). Adult education stakeholder cannot afford reduced funding as this could hinder them from preparing adult learners to enter postsecondary institutions and the workforce. Therefore, it is vital that programs for increasing literacy and GED completion thrive.

The adult learners described for the study are required to complete three phases prior to the official enrollment date. The first step of the process, intake, requires the learner to complete an application which provides information regarding demographics, previous educational experiences, and special accommodations. The next step entails an orientation in which the learners are acclimated to the institution and made aware of its policies. The final phase requires learners to take a placement assessment to determine his or her entry level. Students take the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), an assessment that a number of adult education programs use (Greenberg, Levy, Rasher, Kim, Carter, & Berbaum, 2010).

Administrators assign adults one of six levels according to a grade equivalence (GE) scale assigned by the TABE. The grade equivalences mentioned here are comparable to students in the K-12 educational arena. The levels are as follows: ABE 1 (learners functioning on a GE of 0-1.9), ABE 2 (learners functioning on a GE of 2.0-3.9), ABE 3 (learners functioning on a GE of 4.0-5.9), ABE 4 (learners functioning on a GE of 6.0-8.9), ASE 1 (learners functioning on a GE of 9.0-10.9), and ASE 2 (learners functioning on a GE of 11.0-12.9).

Once an adult learner completes the aforementioned process, he or she commits to attend class for a minimum of 15 hours per week. The orientation staff discusses barriers to participation during the orientation phase; however, the student is responsible for their attendance and combating outside factors. Evaluating the reasons why some adult learners are not persistent in retention can provide adult education stakeholders with critical information that is essential for future and current learners as they make effective future decisions to pursue enhancing their literacy skills and obtaining their GED.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Completion rates for rural learners are considerably low compared to practically every other demographic group, and are linked with low levels of achievement and extreme rates of absenteeism (Jackson-Barrett, 2011). Adults with minimal educational achievement often comprise populations with low levels of income, high levels of unemployment, in rural and isolated regions, and in areas with high levels of social welfare needs (Jackson-Barrett, 2011). Deficits in retention rates are often a result of low literacy skills (Yildiz, 2011). An estimated 21-23%, or some 40- 44 million of the 191 million adults in the United States, demonstrate low literacy skills (United States Department of Education, 2013). Hence, the need to increase adult literacy is apparent (Yildiz, 2011).

Attendance rates of rural adult learners could be improved by offering distance learning opportunities. However, skills in technology has also been identified as an area that needs development, particularly in rural settings (Wagner & Venezsky, 2009). Moreover, an inability to find appropriate material for adults with no or minimal

computer skills may further implicate individuals' motivational desires to use technology, and the technological rewards for adult learners with minimal literacy skills can only be accomplished by disabling challenges related to literacy (Cullen & Cobb, 2011). Thus, the main factors affecting achievement at a national level in adult education are low levels of academic achievement, geographic situation, and minimal skills in technology. The purpose of this study was to help adult education instructors, recruiters, and administrators understand the barriers to success in adult education programs experienced by adult learners who reside in rural communities.

Definitions

The following terms and operational definitions will be used throughout this study:

Adult Basic Education (ABE): An instructional level in which learners can read and perform everyday literacy skills at the basic level (MacArthur, Kono, Glutting, & Alamprese, 2012).

Adult learner: Chronologically, adults can be divided into three groups: younger adults (18-24 years old), working-age adults (25-64 years old), and older adults (65 and older). Participants relative to this study are working-age adults, presumed to obtain at least part time employment while attending school (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Adult learning center (ALC): The specific site where classes are held for adult learners enrolled in adult education programs (O'Toole & Essex, 2012).

Adult Secondary Education (ASE): An instructional level that describes learners who arrive in adult education programs with basic skills that are equivalent to a junior/senior in high school (Georgia Adult Learners Information System, 2014).

Drop out: A learner formerly enrolled in a post-secondary educational setting, who is no longer actively enrolled, and enters an adult education program (MacGregor & Ryan, 2011).

External barriers: Barriers that are beyond adult learners' control, (i.e., lack of time and money or problems with childcare and transportation) (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

General Educational Development (GED): A curriculum prescribed for adult learners who have not obtained a high school diploma; upon successful completion, learners are awarded a certificate, equivalent to a high school diploma, which acknowledges that they have satisfied all requirements (Malkus & Sen, 2011).

Internal barriers: Barriers that reflect adult learners' personal attitudes (e.g., self-confidence or interest) (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

Retention: Sustained participation in adult education both inside and outside of the instructional setting (Kefallinou, 2009).

Rural: As described by the United States Census (2013), encompasses all population, housing, and territory of less than 50,000 people in particular regions, settings, or communities; in this proposed study, a rural instructional setting is comprised of adult learners, having multiple general equivalency level, in one classroom where

instruction and assessment occur simultaneously (Donehower, Hogg & Schell, 2007; Reid, Green, Cooper, Hastings, Lock & White, 2010).

Significance

The purpose of this study was to identify potential problems so that learners may be better prepared to take advantage of the free services provided by the adult education program. Furthermore, the intent of the research was to provide the adult education site with data to support efforts to retain students and help them proceed to graduation. Cognizance of the identified barriers and analyses of practices could allow current and future learners to be better prepared to overcome these barriers. Thus, a literature review will inform stakeholders of the barriers that similar communities have faced, note how these challenges were confronted, and provide strategies that could improve overall retention practices.

Guiding/Research Question

I addressed the following central research question for this qualitative multiple case study:

What are the stakeholders' perceptions and experiences relating to the lack of student persistence?

Three questions guided this qualitative study:

Research Question 1: What are the perceived and experienced barriers that adults enrolled within these ALCs have encountered?

Research Question 2: What are the perceived opportunities or achievements that adult learners have experienced in these ALCs?

Research Question 3: What are the recommendations for better strategies, offered by adult education instructors, recruiters, and administrators, to confront barriers?

The central research question guided the study design, method, and interview questions. The subquestions aimed to address the issues relative to rural adult learners' perception of barriers to retention. This qualitative multiple case study was designed to identify the barriers that discouraged adult learners within rural learning communities from persisting in ABE and GED courses so that future recruits, current learners, and stakeholders are made aware of these barriers and provide suggestions to overcome them as necessary.

Previous literature has identified the challenges for stakeholders and both the barriers and motivators of adult learners in rural communities. Unlike their urban counterparts, and despite many initiatives and incentives to attract learners to attend class, instructors in rural communities face the obstinate liability of ongoing matriculation and retention of existing students. Identifying the reasons that adult learners fail to persist could aid in the implementation of strategies that may possibly enable this population to overcome barriers and could prevent further restraints.

Review of the Literature

This section is comprised of the theoretical framework and a thorough review of significant research that is relative to student retention and persistence. Studies focusing on the retention of adults in postsecondary and graduate programs were plentiful; however, few studies focused primarily on learners enrolled in adult education or GED programs. I used the following databases to conduct the literature review: EBSCOhost,

Education Research Complete, ERIC, and ProQuest. A Boolean search included the following terms: *adult learners, rural, adult education, persistence, barriers, and motivation*. I used Google scholar once I exhausted the aforementioned databases. Delimiters used were year and key words were included or excluded. The results included some information from rural adult education programs, but the majority provided minute contextual data, failed to provide the rich descriptions of the rural setting, and did not sufficiently report concerns in rural adult education. I was able to determine the main themes in the literature after saturation, which were reasons students drop out, barriers adult learners encounter, and motivational factors that contribute to retention. Thus, this literature review consists of three main components that support this proposed research study. The initial section addresses background issues that may influence rural adult learners returning to school. The second segment describes the external and internal barriers that associated with learner persistence in under developed communities. The final section discusses the factors that motivate adults of the aforementioned population to attend academic programs.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework to guide this research was Malcolm Knowles' (1968) theory of andragogy. The adult learning theory presents a challenge to stagnant perceptions of intelligence, standardized restrictions of orthodox education, and theory, which set limitations in learning environments (Knowles, 1989). The term "andragogy" was originally termed by German teacher, Alexander Kapp, in 1833 to explain Plato's idea that individuals continue learning into adulthood (Baumgartner, 2003). The term was

used more widely in Eastern Europe before Malcolm Knowles popularized it in the United States during the early 1960s (Chaves, 2009). Knowles introduced the concept of andragogy, a learning philosophy that distinguishes the ways in which adults learn from the ways in which children learn. In adult education, instructional design centers on the learners' needs and interests (Knowles, 1989). The practice of adult learning introduces a new, qualitative approach and optimize innovative motivation for learning (Knowles, 2005).

Though the education of adults has been of relevance for quite some time, for many years the adult learner was ignored (Knowles, 2005). Subsequently, in 1968, Malcolm Knowles set forth four key assumptions that he believed were crucial to both understanding and serving the adult learner; he added two more in his later writings (Hansman & Mott, 2010; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Wlodkowski, 2008). Today, andragogy is a widely accepted philosophical and theoretical concept guiding the instruction of adult learners around the world (Kelly, 2013). The model emphasizes the immersion of adult learners in a process of self-evaluation of learning (Knowles, 1970). Andragogy has been applied in recent research, according to Harper & Ross (2011), for best practices and a means for matriculation and retention in post secondary institutions. Moreover, the use of andragogy is common in social work education due both to the profession's humanistic orientation and the fact that self-learning traditionally has been encouraged in social work education (Kramer & Wrenn, 1994 as cited by Grodofsky & Bakun-Mazor, 2012). The theory is also used in the field of business education (McCarthy, 2010). The theory is appropriate for this proposed

study because it focuses on the specific characteristics of adult learners, depicting how they learn, their perspectives toward learning, and their motivation for learning. The learner's experience is the primary value in adult education. The process of learning becomes an individual investment, evoking the vicarious exchange of other's knowledge and experiences (Knowles, 1989).

Often a component in the self-concept of adults affects their role as learners. They may transfer from their previous experiences or education the perception that they lack intelligence. In the case of many adults, the recollection of the classroom is a place where one is treated with disrespect and the notion of failure is so intense that it becomes a major barrier to their becoming involved in adult education (Knowles, 1970). Knowles believed in the concept of self-directed learning in which individuals take the initiative in identifying their learning needs, establishing learning goals, identifying resourceful learning materials, employing relevant learning strategies, and evaluating learning objectives (Knowles, 1975). The theorists noted that proactive learners, individuals who take the initiative in learning retain more information, as opposed to reactive learners, learners who are passive. In contrast to reactive learners, proactive learners enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation, as well as put what they learn to practice (Knowles, 1975). In addition, self-directed learning is more in tune with learners' natural processes of psychological development. As such, an essential aspect of maturing develops the learners' ability to take increasing responsibility for their own lives and become increasingly self-directed (Knowles, 1975). Lastly, self-direction enables learners to manage new developments in education that require initiative. Many

adult learners enter into adult education programs without having acquired self inquiry skills; consequently, they will experience anxiety, frustration, and often failure (Knowles, 1975).

Knowles' theoretical work has been used by adult educators as an instrument that distinguishes the field of adult education from other areas of education (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The theorist's learning assumptions will be considered when designing the research instruments, and throughout the study. The approach focuses on six learning assumptions that are applicable to the adult learner and his or her life situations: (1) self concept, (2) experience, (3) readiness, (4) orientation, (5) motivation, and (6) relevance (Knowles, 1980, pp. 43-45). Knowles lists these six assumptions with the understanding that adults will have more experiences than children will and have created pre-established belief (Taylor & Kroth, 2009). Experience is the most important as adults are focusing more on the process rather than the content being taught (Taylor & Kroth, 2009). In adult education classes, students' experiences count for as much as the facilitator's knowledge (Knowles, 1989). Further, the theorist formulated the learning assumptions as foundational to designing programs for adults, and from each of the assumptions drew numerous implications for the design, application, and assessment of learning activities with adults (Merriam et al., 2007). Once adults discover that they can take responsibility for their own learning they experience a sense of release and exhilaration and enter into learning with deep ego involvement (Knowles, 1970). Based on the principles of Knowles' theory, this study may unveil some of the specific barriers and challenges that adult learners confront to persist in adult

education programs, offer suggestions that could contribute to an increase in enrolment and graduation rates, and display some of the motivations that contribute to adult learners.

According to Knowles (1984), andragogy encompasses three distinctive phenomena: (1) a collection of events (2) an academic practice that provides adults with opportunities to pursue learning, and (3) a social system consisting of investors of adult education. In concurrence with the theory of andragogy, adult learners need more than passive transfer of knowledge from a facilitator. Instead, they need to be actively engaged in the learning experience to generate their own knowledge, to make logic of the learning, and to communicate what is learned (Chan, 2010). Moreover, adult learners who have dropped out of school and later return might experience more motivation to learn because they will have the opportunities to relate activities and discussions from the learning environment to their personal lives (McGrath, 2009). Adult learners need to have an awareness of the reason they are receiving new information before they are motivated to engage in learning (Knowles, 1984). Adults would embrace the learning environment more readily if they had a consciousness for possessing new skills, an enthusiasm to participation (Marschall & Davis, 2012; McGrath, 2009). Adult learners undertake varied roles (i.e., employee, parent, guardian, volunteer, and learner) in their daily lives (Kelly, 2013). Every adult finds himself in specific situations with respect to his work, family, recreation, and community, which call for adjustment (Knowles, 1989). In an educational environment the adult learners not only anticipate, but often request that instructors expedite organized learning with adeptness, and permits achieving the

maximum quantity of learning for the minimal volume of time invested (Kelly, 2013; Koor, Greene, & Sokoloff, 2012).

Adult learners approach learning with a different motivation set, which therefore requires a different approach in teaching this population (Knowles, 1984). Students need to stay motivated to improve retention. As opposed to having instructors in educational settings, the role of the facilitator, a person who actively engages students with the content, is vital in the growth of intrinsic motivation among adult learners (Wlodowski, 2009). Adult education is a process through which learners become aware of significant experiences. This awareness leads to evaluation. Significances supplement experience when learners are aware of what is happening and realize the impact they have on their lives (Knowles, 2005).

The aim of this doctoral study is to focus upon these concerns as they pertain to matters that motivate adult learners to persist in ABE and GED programs. Critiques of the current situation in adult education often declare that the majority of adults lack interest in learning and are not motivated to pursue education, asserting that if they were motivated, they would take advantage of the numerous free educational opportunities provided by public agencies. Educators will fail to acknowledge the manner in which adults desire intellect as long as educational sectors continue to follow strict, traditional models of learning (Knowles, 2005). In exploring factors affecting motivation, a variety of motivational theories exist, and most theories pertain to the importance of or the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors. The focus among needs theories is on the fulfillment of internal and external needs. Examples of needs theories

include Maslow's hierarchy of needs, McClelland's needs theory, and Herzberg's theory of job satisfaction (Merriam et al., 2007). I referenced the previously mentioned theoretical framework in this study to serve as a foundation of understanding the various factors that influence adults' persistence to learn.

Factors that Influence Withdrawal (Drop Out)

Georgia's 2013 public high school graduation rate increased almost two percentage points over the previous year – from 69% in 2012 to 71% in 2013 – and over 4 percentage points from 2011 (67 %) (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Yet the graduation rate for the county being addressed for this study was 45% in 2012. The total number of students in the graduation class for the year 2012 was 74, of which 34 graduated from high school (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). The current unemployment rate for the county is 7% (Georgia Department of Labor, 2014).

Currently, the United States Department of Education publicizes five different measures of school dropout and school completion, each calculated differently (Cataldi, Laird, & Kewal-Ramani, 2009). According to the Rural School and Community Trust (2012), rural students graduate from high school at a slightly higher rate than their peers do nationally. The graduation rate among rural students in 2011 was 77%, compared to the national average of 74%. Nonetheless, 22% of rural students fail to complete their high school education, a rate that is particularly disturbing within declining rural communities confront decreasing numbers of stable, mediocre employment not requiring high school diplomas (ICF International, 2013).

Researchers acknowledge a number of circumstances that indicate why students did not graduate from high school. Among the reasons were teen pregnancy, poor decisions related to drug abuse and criminal activity, personal factors, and conditions beyond their control, such as family or personal illness (Zacharakis, Steichen, Diaz de Sabates, & Glass, 2011). Qualitative research involving adult learners from both rural and urban areas validated several degrees of awareness into the happenstance of events in high school that led to withdrawal. The noted reasons for leaving school included strict academic guidelines and lack of teachers' support, dysfunctional domestic life, and discipline referrals (Meeker & Fisher, 2009). Similarly, if parents are unconvinced of the relevance of schooling, they do not encourage attendance (Stelmach, 2011).

The inequality of men and women in Hispanic cultures has influenced women's decisions to graduate from high school. Because of the imposed value system that education would be useless after marriage, women of Hispanic cultures often neglect a formal education. Moreover, a higher share of Hispanic population decreased the likelihood of graduation in rural areas. In addition, median income is associated with high dropout rates in rural areas, and that lower income yields lower graduation rates in rural areas (Meyers, 2011). Yet many students leave high school because of irrelevant and pointless tests that inquire about factors that students are not concerned with or ask tricky, trivial questions (Eppley, 2012).

On the contrary, other research suggests that students do not drop out for reasons related to test scores and poor grades; instead, learners quit school due to low self-esteems, school quality, and the availability of work were determinants for withdrawing

from high school (Jordan, Kostandini, & Mykerezi, 2012). Additional studies provided explanations for why adults did not graduate and concluded that returning to adult education for several learners is a recurring event (Zacharakis et al., 2011). The findings of these studies can potentially provide background knowledge for to this study. The information provided could highlight the reasons that adult learners withdrew from high school and could aid in the prevention of further restraints.

Barriers Associated with Lack of Learner Persistence

Adult education has developed into a strong network of adult learning centers across the country working with individuals who seek to improve their literacy skills through ABE and GED classes. In the United States, over 30 million adults do not have a high school diploma and 20% of United States adults with a high school diploma have only beginning literacy skills. The United States ranked 21st in numeracy and 16th in literacy out of 24 countries in a recent assessment of adults' skills. Two thirds of adults in the United States scored at the two lowest levels of proficiency in solving problems in technology-rich environments. Yet, the publicly funded adult education system is able to serve only slightly over 2 million young and older adults per year (World Education, 2014). Researchers who study ABE students have identified several characteristics unique to adult learners as well as conditions that promote program completion. The research confirms what ABE and GED teachers observe—the educational trajectories of adult learners that are frequently complicated by negative personal experiences and social barriers (Zacharakis, Steichen, Diaz de Sabates, & Glass, 2011).

Some learners of rural communities have had to cope with low self-esteems, stress, and poverty. Academic and domestic resources, familiarities, and ventures could be considerably distressed by paucity (Bourgeois, 2012; Lester, 2012; Jordan et al., 2012). Still, the findings of another investigator's research revealed that this phenomenon is especially true for underprivileged groups afflicted with marginal educational profits from low property taxes, weakening economies, elevated unemployment rates, soaring percentages of minimum incomes, and insignificant numbers of organizations supportive of literacy (Lester, 2012). Disadvantaged learners often have family members, friends, and communities who fail to value education. This attitude towards education can affect learners' success in educational programs (Zacharakis et al., 2011).

The qualitative research of Howley, Chavis & Kester (2013) explored the manner in which adult learners and facilitators of a small, rural retention center for displaced workers in North Carolina viewed the role of rurality in postsecondary persistence. The primary research question was: In what ways, if at all, do staff and participants of the retention program for adult students and displaced workers think that rural context influenced their ability to persist? The major barriers noted by the participants of this research were academic and financial support. Other research identified the main issues for learner persistence as physical location and travel (Adie & Barton, 2012). Additional major challenges for individuals in regional and rural communities included family responsibilities to a child or other family members, financial and work commitments, and an overall lack of time to balance successfully these competing commitments in their lives (Townsend & Delves, 2009).

Adults possess an individual awareness of responsibility for their own choices and well-being; when adults arrive at their self-concept, they possess an inner desire for others to view them as self-directed beings (Knowles, 1990). Likewise, adults oppose conditions that involve impositions of their own motivation (Knowles, 1990). Some adults could possibly be wary of their philosophies being confronted, which might cause them to feel defenseless and refrain from attending classes; prior incidents might discourage new experiences due to their inability to accept their own misguidance (McGrath, 2009).

External and internal barriers. Current research identified both the external and internal barriers that adult learners experience. Those barriers included: the effects of aging, variations in well-being and unforeseen trials of life, gender roles and their influence on learning, and motivation factors. Adults are often challenged with many internal concerns when they entered into the educational setting, including: failing to explore various perspectives of learning, reliance on recalled details and learned abilities, concentrating on one aspect at a time, and being anxious of inability to flourish in an unfamiliar educational climate (Flynn, Brown, Johnson, & Rodger, 2011; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010)). The dire economic, political, and social situations, particularly those of women, often influence educational aspirations (Mein, 2010). Moreover, residents of rural communities are plagued with the stereotype that education is not valued in rural settings and can further implicate skepticism of returning to school. Thus, rural areas are often denoted as relatively powerless in political, economic, and cultural terms, and as a

result, rural ways of living, being, and knowing are devalued (Howley, 2009; Eddy, 2013).

Research has also identified instructors' roles regarding retention. The poor preparation of quality instructors to work in rural communities negatively affects retention (Adie & Barton, 2012). Setting a general standard for instructors is inadequate in rural communities; instructors in rural sites should possess an awareness of the setting in which they are facilitators and establish relationships (Eppley, 2012). Individuals residing in rural communities can perceive factors such as confidentiality, competence, and dual relationships to be barriers. Because of the remote location of rural college, staff members are often related and doing anything in a discrete fashion can be almost impossible (Eddy, 2013; Osborn, 2012). Gender is another compelling factor relative to adults' failure to continue with their education, particularly in rural settings (Stelmach, 2011). Rural males might view their futures on the family farm and not perceive the need for a formal education (Stelmach, 2011).

Geographic remoteness. Instructors in rural areas experiences are compound because not only do they encounter the problem of recruiting, retaining, and preparing diverse learners; but instructors have challenges with the issue of distance (Barley, 2009; Crookston & Hooks, 2012; Lohfink, Morales, Shroyer, Yahnke & Hernandez, 2011). The geographically remote location of housing developments, their distance from essential support services, and limited public transportation can make it very difficult for participants to attend classes after moving, limiting the ability to attend class and take the GED (Schafft & Prins, 2009; Twyford, Crump, Anderson, 2009; Wright, 2012).

Physical location creates barriers for rural education (Stelmach, 2011). In many rural communities around the world, students must walk long distances or over tough terrain to reach their schools (Stelmach, 2011). Researchers have shown that women living in communities with limited access to public transportation are less likely to participate in literacy programs, regardless of the number of programs that exist (Albertini, 2009).

While physical location is a known barrier in rural communities, researchers in favor of online learning argue that there are alternatives to the traditional learning environment for students residing in rural settings, and who experience hardships in mobility (Irvin, Hannum, Farmer, de la Varre, & Keane, 2009). Yet other studies contend that despite the fact that distance learning allows adult learners who have employment, family, and other responsibilities an alternative, adult learners are more likely to drop out of online courses when they do not receive support from their family and/or organization while taking online courses, regardless of learners' academic preparation and aspiration (Park & Choi, 2009). Some learners report dissatisfaction with the lack of tutor or peer support in online courses due to the disconnection from other likeminded students (MacIntyre & MacDonald, 2011). Additional research corroborates the disadvantages of adults in rural e-learning communities. Analogous to learners in traditional settings, many of these students are plagued with problems related to special needs. Rural communities lack resilient learning principles and rural residents may encounter deprivations of the literacy competences that are prerequisite to exercise in a self-directed educational setting (Steel & Fahy, 2011). Moreover, many hitches come along with distance learning such as technical difficulties and problems with hearing and

interacting with peers (Sitzmann, Ely, Bell, & Bauer, 2010; Twyford, et al., 2009).

Although three quarters of all households in the United States have Internet access, residents in rural areas are disproportionately likely to be without it (Erickson, Call, & Brown, 2012). Furthermore, they are less likely to have access to high speed, broadband services needed to use most current applications (Erickson et al., 2012).

Though distance learning appears to be an obvious alternative for rural learners, little is known about the ways they experience education, which could indicate their levels of satisfaction and show strategies to increase retention rates (MacIntyre & MacDonald, 2011).

Learning challenges. Adults with intellectual disabilities certainly are similar to other adults in that their learning is usually specific to a personal goal or tied to a particular occupational skill. They may need to acquire knowledge to learn a new job skill, to better their daily living, or to pursue a personal interest. They differ from most other teens and young adults however, in that they may be lacking in much of the accumulated knowledge and life experiences (Bowman & Plourde, 2012).

Further research illustrates the academic and remediation requirements of adult learners. Although all institutions are required to acknowledge deficiency of provision for academics, this is an especially dire dilemma for technical and community colleges, because these institutions are more susceptible to flexible admission guidelines.

Likewise, their affordable tuition, flexible hours, and convenient locations allow more accessibility to mature learners with families and employment; however, they do not necessarily possess strong academic skills (Blanchard, Casados, & Sheski, 2009). Adult

learners are often face coping with learning disabilities, and reveal lower rates of academic involvement and retention among this specific group of learners as paralleled with their non-learning disabled peers (Deggs, 2011; Shaw & Disney, 2012). Yet some learners enter the educational setting with only enough literacy skills to get by in the modern world (Eppley, 2012). These learners' lives consist of devotion to work and a comprehensive skill-based knowledge applicable to their employment. Moreover, a deficiency in mathematical skills of rural learners affects a number of adult learners, particularly senior adults. Many lack the ability to understand the differences between advanced mathematics and basic arithmetic (Lucas, 2009).

Several ABE students struggle with formal learning, are unsuccessful in school, and may have undiagnosed learning disabilities (Reynolds, 2012). Adults with undiagnosed learning disabilities are often undereducated, unemployed or underemployed, and often struggle with low self-esteem and mental health problems (Reynolds, 2012). Little research is published on the screening instruments themselves or how they are being utilized by ABE programs nationally (Reynolds, 2012). Adult learners with intellectual disabilities learn very slowly and need significant reinforcement and repetition; several adult students worry that they do not always remember or comprehend what they read, causing comprehension to be especially challenging for them (Bowman & Plourde, 2012).

Employment. Adult learners are confronted with the challenge of balancing employment and school. In numerous situations, families are dependent upon the sustained income for their well-being (Blanchard et al., 2009). Despite the potential

benefits, employment may interfere with persistence and academic performance (Taylor, Lokes, Gagnon, Kwan, & Koestner, 2012). Resigning from full-time employment to attend school is only a mere possibility for many families. The adult learner population depends on a series of jobs of limited duration, rather than on a durable career allied with corporate interests (Howley, 2009). Where poverty is deemed responsible for absenteeism from school, attempts are made to eradicate conditions that require learners to pursue employment instead of studies (Stelmach, 2011).

Employment has negative effects on academic outcomes that are mediated by reduced school involvement (Taylor, Lokes, Gagnon, Kwan, & Koestner, 2012). Working detracts from time that should be used for homework and commitment to the workplace is incompatible with a commitment to school and identification with school-related values (Taylor, Lokes, Gagnon, Kwan, & Koestner, 2012). Finding time to do coursework is a common challenge as learners who have jobs and obligations to family and community experience difficulty keeping up with deadlines and completing coursework (Rao & Guili, 2010).

Learner Persistence: Role of Self-regulation, Self-efficacy, and Cognitive Load

Self-regulation. Self-regulated learning refers to a degree to which students can regulate aspects of their own thinking, motivation and behavior during the learning process. Current research has identified that self-regulated learners set up their own learning goals and form strategies by generating more internal feedback, responding to external feedback, using resources and increasing efforts to achieve learning goals and produce outputs that can be compared and assessed (Bose & Rengel, 2009). The concept

of self-regulation in learning has gained importance with the study of factors causing academic failure of low skilled and underperforming students. Further research reveals that students with low academic success had lower levels of motivational strategies and used less learning strategies (Onemli & Yondem, 2012). In order to self-regulate their learning, students need to use different strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning activities (metacognitive strategies), as well as to control their motivation and emotion (volitional strategies) (Gonzalez, 2013). Students' effectiveness in their self-regulated learning process also varied depending on the academic environment and students' personal goal orientations. In yet another study, students requested individual feedback because it allowed them to gain information about what they do or do not understand, find directions and strategies that they could take to improve their knowledge and skills, and seek assistance to understand the learning goals (Bose & Rengel, 2009).

Self-efficacy. An important stimulus for actually using new learned skills is a person's self-efficacy belief concerning those skills. Self-efficacy beliefs are defined as beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. Within the framework of social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is relevant before, during, and after training since it influences the learning process in many ways (Hommes, Van der, & Henk, 2012). Students with a strong sense of personal competence in a certain domain approach difficult tasks in that domain as challenges to be mastered rather than as dangers to be avoided. Learners who have greater intrinsic interest in activities, set challenging goals and maintain a strong commitment to them. On the contrary, people with low self-efficacy tend to doubt their

capabilities and avoid circumstances where they think they will fail; oftentimes these individuals are struggling learners possessing low rather than high self-efficacy for academics (Costello & Stone, 2012). Students who do not perceive their level of efficacy to be high may tend to see new challenges as problems and dwell on the idea of not knowing how to handle such scenarios; nevertheless, self-doubt and fear of failure are common thought processes for students who perceive themselves as possessing low self efficacy (Velez & Cano, 2012).

Cognitive load. Cognitive load theory (CLT) is built on the notion that the cognitive structure of humans is composed of both long term memory and working memory (Rey & Buchwald, 2011). According to a recent study on adult learners and CLT, students learn best when they are provided with a model of how a skill, concept, strategy, or process is used. With the CLT model in their minds, students are guided in their learning as they begin to take on more of the cognitive load, with the support of instructors in complex matters (Ross & Frey, 2009). Cognitive load theory differentiates three unique systems to the over-all cognitive load. Intrinsic cognitive load relates to innate qualities of the content to be learned, extraneous cognitive load is formed as the result of the instructional material used to present the content, and germane cognitive is created through learning processes (de Jong, 2010).

Motivational Features Relevant to Andragogical Principles

Though research on motivation has persisted for many decades, research on adult learners is a relatively new phenomenon (Hegarty, 2011). Understanding what motivates adults to learn is linked to adult learners' persistence. If students are more motivated to

learn, then stakeholders would expect them to be less likely to drop out (Kim & Frick, 2011). Learners are more likely to experience increased motivation and satisfaction when they perceive the content to be relevant to their lives (Kim & Frick, 2011; McGrath, 2009).

Adult learners often arrive in classrooms with preconceived notions of learning that are hard for them to let go (Chulp & Collins, 2010). Understanding the motivation within adult learners is of great concern for the design, development, and operation of programs that service this population of the learning community. This understanding will also ensure fulfilling the mission of many adult education programs while also ensuring longevity of vital programs that service the needs of the adult learner (Hegarty, 2011).

The process of adult learning begins with the individual adult learners' motivation to solve a problem (Johnston, 2011). That motivation may emerge from the circumstances of adult living that includes job training, personal enhancement, or adult life transition (Bowman & Plourde, 2012; Johnston, 2011; Townsend & Delves, 2009). The student's prior experiences in high school, including curriculum, and the student's perceptions of his or her ability to succeed in class and to benefit from education play a role (King, 2012). Learners enroll in courses when the perception of a clear benefit of their community existed, and instruction is positioned in their routines and suggested social networks (Porrás-Hernández & Salinas-Amescua, 2012; Townsend & Delves, 2009; Wright, 2012). Moreover, adult education classes offered an auspicious framework for strengthening family engagement in education for parents of school-age children whose own formal education was halted (Woodford & Mammen, 2010; Vaccaro &

Lovell, 2010). Participation in an adult education class offers a set of conditions and experiences that provides parents with access to resources, content knowledge, and other provisions from the facilitator and peers. (Shiffman, 2011).

Other constraints involved with motivating students to get their GED include the belief that education increases access to items they desire, the need to prove that a GED is attainable, and an awareness of the effect that a lack of education has on others (Bradbury, 2012). Mothers receiving public assistance, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) often persist in classes if they count toward the work requirements (Woodford & Mammen, 2010). Moreover, learners of rural communities are often motivated to attend class because many of the learners know their peers, as well as staff, through multiplex relationships (e.g. church, acquaintances of other relatives, or sports events within the community). As a result, students are often embedded in webs of obligation and feel less threatened and are empowered to commit to attending class (Howley et al., 2013). Students are motivated by a bond a trust that is developed among peers (Mein, 2010). Literacy and numeracy sessions within the rural community often affect gender relations and disrupts norms in which women feel less empowered, and male students are frequently motivated by the hope that additional education and training could translate into additional pay and stable employment (Wright, 2012).

Adult learners residing within rural communities are often empowered by limitations. In many isolated communities, there is no place to go, outside of involvement in community organizations or church affiliation; therefore, attending school is a productive manner of consuming time. For these students, the absence of local

diversions enables retention. Student persistence is often strengthened by students' local obligations and economic restrictions.

In rural settings, displaced learners rarely feel obligated or are financially capable to relocate mainly due to family connections or other individual commitments; subsequently, these learners attend local post-secondary settings and strive for employment in the local area (Howley, Chavis, & Kester, 2013). Yet others strive for an education because they would rather become financially stable and avoid working in occupations familiar to rural residents (Bourgeois, 2012). Essentially, the implantation of rural adult learners prompts some learners because they have minimal alternatives and are, nevertheless, entrapped in traditional webs of obligation (Howley et al., 2013). The lower tuition, ability to stay at home and pay reduced rent, being able to continue working at an established place of employment are additional motivators (Wright, 2012).

Moreover, learners are motivated to persist when they meet peers that share backgrounds and interests, and feel empowered to engage in a program of study. (Holley, 2013). Identification of the unique needs of rural areas and fosters a sense of belonging. This sense of camaraderie provides a positive influence on academic abilities and confidence. Residents of rural Appalachia, as reported by King (2012) have lower levels of educational attainment than any other region in the United States; yet, visiting another college campus, offering various workshops and tutoring sessions, and providing transportation were some of the initiatives that motivate students to persist at a rural Appalachian community college.

Instructors play a pivotal role in cultivating student persistence (Schmidtke, 2009). Participants of Schmidtke's (2009) study responded to the following research question: What are the perceptions that some American Indian students enrolled in sub-baccalaureate programs at a mainstream technical college have of their experiences with their instructors that facilitate their learning and encourage them to persist in their studies and complete their degrees? Immeasurably, the most vital contributions to student success appeared to be instructor attitude and enthusiasm, mentioned by all participants.

The reasons adult learners are motivated to learn could provide the researcher with relevant information to understand why some learners do not persist in ABE and GED courses. This research will aim to reveal the aspects that motivate adults to persist in the improvement of literacy skills and the attainment of their GED.

Implications

Adult education faculty, staff, and administrators have been in pursuit to discover the motivational factors relative to learner retention, as well as explanations to the barriers that force some learners to persist and others to withdraw. Additionally, tactics to increase retention rates have been implemented, but to no avail. To that extent, this study has potential implications for social change, in addition to possible project directions. Based on anticipated findings of the data collection and analyses, the results could provide information for the implementation of a professional development workshop. Relative evidence regarding retention and student persistence, from both the literature and the research, would be presented to adult education administrators, faculty, and staff. The objectives of the workshop would be for adult education stakeholders to

discuss barriers to student persistence, explore solutions for current and future learner, and identify strategies to motivate adults to learn. The learning outcome of the professional development might provide stakeholders with strategies to increase the overall retention and graduation rates of adult learners aspiring to obtain GEDs. As a result, the local adult education program and the nation as a whole might benefit socially and economically.

Summary

There is limited experience and knowledge within the adult education spectrum that offers support for adult learners who face barriers when participating in ABE and GED classes. The retention of adult learners, particularly in rural communities, has been an ongoing challenge. With the low number of GED graduates, the impact has become even more evident within the learning environment for this study. The internal and external barriers identified in the current research could provide the investigator with relevant information that is pertinent to the participants of the proposed study. The participants of this study are analogous to the participants referenced in the summarized studies. The information might assist the researcher with constructing the research tools for the study. The aim of this study is to provide an understanding of these barriers in an attempt to improve retention, increase literacy and graduation rates, and enhance employability skills.

The structure, background, problem, purpose, nature of the study, research questions, definitions, limitations, and significance of the study is established in this section. Section 1 also included a brief explanation of the methodology, research

questions, study population, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, conceptual framework, and a definition of terms as they will be used in this study. The comprehensive review of literature for the qualitative multiple case study outlined the background factors that impact adult learners, the barriers to retain students, and the motivators for adult learners. The sections that follow will provide details for the methodology of the project study, including a description of the participants, data collection and instrumentation, and data analysis.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of adult learners in rural U.S. adult learning centers regarding barriers to completing their educational programs. The guiding research question was, “What are the stakeholders’ perceptions and experiences relating to the lack of student persistence?” I used a qualitative methodology to pursue my investigation of this question. In the subsections that follow, I outline my qualitative research design and approach, rationale for the design, participants, and data collection and analysis.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

To pursue my investigation of student persistence, I used a qualitative multiple case study design, which is an in-depth interpretation and analysis of multiple bounded spaces (Merriam, 2009). The goal of my research study was to form a thorough understanding of the issues regarding retention of adult learners. A case study method enabled participants to provide rich, in depth accounts of their experiences (see Creswell, 2012). I used multiple sites for this study because enrollment rates were low within the service delivery areas that are served by the technical college (Creswell, 2012).

Data for this qualitative multiple case study were collected by means of open-ended questions and semistructured interviews. I considered use of a quantitative design using a survey method for data collection, but data would have been of inadequate depth to explore the phenomenon of persistence of adult learners (Yin, 2009). Results of a

quantitative study might inform of participants' diverse views of retention (Creswell, 2012). Because the literature provides little information about the perceived and experienced barriers to retention in rural adult learning centers (Kim & Frick, 2011; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012; McGrath, 2009), I deemed a qualitative study as more appropriate in that it would enable me to identify, explore, and describe these issues in detail. As opposed to quantitative research designs, qualitative studies do not yield generalizable results but promote in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

An ethnography study would have been inappropriate for this study because the genre is suitable for researchers interested in studying one group of individuals, examining them in their particular setting, and developing a portrait of how they interact (Creswell, 2012). This is not a bound cultural investigation. Because my participants came from different cultures and backgrounds, I did not view an ethnographic method to be appropriate for this study. Phenomenology was also unsuitable for this study because when using this approach, researchers begin with silence in an attempt to grasp what it is they are studying by bracketing (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). Researchers act as if they are unaware of a subject and research to find out what is actually taken for granted (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). I did not consider grounded theory because researchers use this method to study a single group in which a number of individuals have all experienced an action, interaction, or process. The method is systematic and is used to generate a general explanation of a phenomenon and formulate a theory (Creswell, 2012). Because I am not seeking to form a theory at this point, I opted not to use this method. I used a multiple

case study method because my participants were able to provide rich, in-depth accounts of their experiences in rural adult education learning settings (Creswell, 2012). I am only looking for participants' opinions at this point.

Participants

I selected a total of 12 participants (two full-time and one adjunct adult education instructors and nine adult learners), from a various rural adult education sites, through the GALIS portal system to guide this study. The participants represented the ALCs within the 12 counties embedded in the service delivery area of the technical college. The sites represented ABE classrooms with three cohorts (a) one level learning environment in which all of the students are at the same ABE or GED level, (b) multi-levels, setting comprised of adult learners from all ABE and ASE levels, and (c) accelerated learners, ABE 4-ASE 2 learners who are dually enrolled in the adult education program and a certificate program within the technical college. All three cohorts were interviewed in order to provide a broad and thorough understanding of the perceptions of adult education students at all levels. Due to the small number of participants for this study, I used purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Adult learner participants were required to be at least 18 years of age and had been enrolled at an ALC for a minimum of 40 instructional hours. The instructors agreeing to participate were required to have been teaching or employed for two semesters to meet the criteria for the study.

Selection of Participants

Typically, qualitative researchers study only a few cases, ranging from 1-40 (Creswell, 2012). Because having a larger number of cases raises specific challenges for

data management and analysis (see Creswell, 2012), I opted to limit my sample size to 12 participants (one instructor and 3 adult learners from each of the identified cohorts). The participant pool comprised ABE and GED students who were currently enrolled and had completed at least 40 hours of instruction at the time of the study, as well as former learners who had received their GED or who had completed 40 hours or more of instruction, but did not graduate.

The researcher worked closely with the director of the adult education division, who served as a gatekeeper to supply a list of individuals most suited for this study. The 12 participants for the study included three full-time or adjunct adult education instructors, and nine ABE or GED students who are currently enrolled and former learners from rural adult education programs within the technical college. The participants were selected through purposeful sampling. The instructors had been working with adult learners for a minimum of 2 semesters. The students had participated in a new student orientation and advisement session, taken the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) entrance assessment, and attended class for a minimum of 40 instructional hours.

Procedure for Gaining Access to Participants

First, I contacted the director of the adult education program about gaining access to GALIS to select participants for the study. I maintained my communication with the director to ensure that the proper steps were taken to inform all stakeholders, as well as warrant transparency and clarity before participants were contacted. Creswell (2009) noted that it is important to gain access to research or archival sites by seeking the

approval of gatekeepers, individuals at the research site that provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to be done. For this study, the director was the noted gatekeeper because the role entails chief administration of GALIS. The director monitors updates to the system and ensures that information is reported to GALIS in a timely manner. Upon approval from Institutional Review Board (IRB), Approval # 01-23-15-0331679, and the Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness (individual whom approves research within this researcher's place of employment/proposed research site), the data collection process began. I retrieved participants' information, by means of purposeful sampling, from the GALIS database and participants were contacted via email.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

The faculty and staff involved in the study were the researcher's colleagues; however, I had no direct supervisory relationship with them. I established a researcher-participant relationship built on confidentiality in order to promote a degree of trust.

Ethical Protection of Participants

During an initial telephone call or email, the potential participants received information about the nature of the study (See Appendix B). The potential participants had the opportunity to inquire about the study and indicate whether they wanted to participate. The individuals who wished to participate received an electronic copy of the informed consent form via email (See Appendix C). The electronic copy of the informed consent form enabled the participants to preview the form prior to their interview. The names of the participants will not be revealed. When necessary, confidentiality will be

protected by de-identifying names; students and instructors were assigned a number to identify them. The numbers assigned did not represent the order of the interviews.

Participants may experience uncertainty about disclosing any negative reports of the ALC they are enrolled or employed and this might cause concern. Consequently, written consent was attained from each participant. Moreover, confidentiality was secured by replacing actual names with pseudonyms. Creswell (2008) noted the necessity to produce a compound image of the sample instead of an individual. The participants in the study were assured that any data collected during the interview would be protected and not released to any third party. Once participants completed their responses, only I had the access to view results.

A manual system was created to document information from the interviews. The security of a manual system can prompt ethical concerns; however, to offset this enigma, the data was kept in a locked filing cabinet until I was ready to process the data. Before the responses of the interviews were published, I removed all participant identifiers from their responses.

Data Collection

The collection of data for qualitative research can involve interaction between individuals on a one-on-one basis or individuals within a group setting. Qualitative research can occupy a large amount of time; therefore, data is usually collected from small samples (Merriam, 2009). The most typical forms of qualitative data collection are action research, focus groups, observations, and one-on-one interviews (Creswell, 2012). The participants of this qualitative study were contacted via emails. An email was sent to

participants explaining the purpose of the study and their rights to withdraw at any time should they experience any discomfort during the interview phase. The email included an explanation of the purpose of the study and informed the participants of their rights to withdraw at any time should they experience any discomfort during the interview phase. An in depth account of the study and the participants' role was explained to each participant and the acknowledgement of the decision to decline participation in the study, at any time, in the event that they encounter any distress, was articulated thoroughly.

The interviews were conducted through one-on-one interviews and included open ended questions to which participants provided their outlooks on the phenomenon. Participants were interviewed in quiet, suitable places to avoid distractions. All locations were mutually agreed upon as the participants' found that the ALCs were located in a central location and were easily accessible. The actual interview settings included instructors' classrooms and conference rooms within the ALCs or media centers of the technical college. As needed, follow up questions were asked for more detail or clarification. Every participant that was interviewed was included in the study.

Choices of Data Collection

Data for the research were collected by means of semistructured interviews (See Appendices D and E). Qualitative research involves examining how individuals interpret reality by collecting data directly through interviews with participants (Merriam, 2009). Data collection for this study included individual interviews. In an effort to control bias during the interviews, I maintained a research journal that entailed verbatim notes, as well as my own thoughts and feelings. The research journal was written into a Word

document and saved on a secured USB drive. I reflected upon the notes throughout the research to ensure that the data was being analyzed appropriately.

Appropriateness of Data Collection Methods

I elected to interview participants, rather than ask them to complete a questionnaire, because interviews allowed me to interact with participants in their natural setting at the ALC. All interview questions were open-ended, allowing me to gain in-depth experiences and perceptions from participants. I pursued participants' responses one on one by asking follow-up questions (Merriam, 2009). This method offered participants the opportunity to precede in any direction with the interview questions.

The data collected provided possible ideas to enhance current retention practices and minimize any barriers. Interview questions resulted in participants imparting perceived barriers and experiences, perceived opportunities and achievements, and recommendations for better strategies. Finally, during interviews, other questions evolved and changed based on participants' responses.

Number and Duration of Interviews

The interviews allowed the researcher to record information as it occurred in the settings (Creswell, 2012). The interviews occurred over a 3-6 week span and lasted from 45-60 minutes. Interview questions were modified to address the various perceptions specific to instructors and adult learners. Interviews were conducted Monday-Thursday between the hours of 12:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Procedures for Collecting and Recording Data

During the interviews, the participants received a hard copy of the informed consent statement and had the opportunity to ask questions. The participants who were satisfied with the answers to their questions and who still wished to participate signed the informed consent form before taking part in the interview. If participants did not agree, they were thanked for their consideration, and I selected other participants. This did occur with two initial participants selected for the study; however, I was able to recruit two additional participants for the study.

I used a tape recorder to facilitate the recording of the interviews, and I prepared hand-written notes. By using a tape recorder, I was able to avoid distractions from continual note taking (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Verbatim transcriptions of the interviews, with only the participants' codes as identifiers, originated from the notes and the tape recordings. I did not use a video recorder because videotaping may have caused some people to feel nervous, preventing them from providing detailed answers to the interview questions (Creswell, 2009). The interviewer sat close enough to the participants to hear them but not so close as to interfere with their personal space (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The initial questions pertained to background and demographic information about the participants and enabled the development of rapport with the participants. The beginning of the interview and casual conversation helped to put the participants at ease (Creswell, 2009). The inquiries that followed addressed the research questions. To ensure clarity of the interview questions, two adult education instructors (peers who work for the

same college system) who were involved in the main study participated in field tests prior to the research. The use of field tests was necessary in order to ensure that questions were clear and might yield data that was beneficial to respond to the research questions (Merriam, 2009). The two adult education instructors gave their consensus that the interview questions were clear and concise to the research questions.

I used an audio recorder, parallel with the interviews, to enable transcription after each interview was conducted. I acquired written consent from the participants to authorize usage of an audio recorder and conducted interviews during a time that was convenient for them at the current or former ALC center that they attended or provided instruction. Participants were interviewed in quiet, suitable places to avoid distractions. All locations were mutually agreed upon as the participants' found that the ALCs were located in a central location and were easily accessible. The actual interview settings included instructors' classrooms and conference rooms within the ALCs or media centers of the technical college. I asked follow-up questions, as necessary, for more detail or clarification.

Methods for Generating, Gathering, and Recording Data

Data were generated through the researcher's interaction with the data sources. I transcribed each interview within at least 24 hours. I listened to the tape recordings to clarify specific topics and to sustain that central themes were encompassed in the notes (Creswell, 2012). Textual analysis of the recorded interviews was performed as to ensure clarification of any trends and offer insight into the barriers to adult learners' persistence

(Bogdan & Bicklen, 2007). I reanalyzed the transcriptions after all interviews had been completed. A summary of the transcriptions is provided in Appendix H.

System for Keeping Track of Data

I collected and organized interviewer notes that were recorded in separate journals (Creswell, 2012). These journals contained notes from each interview. The journals obtained the researcher's recorded statements shared after each questions asked from the open-ended interviews. A summary of the journal is provided in Appendix 2.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

I contacted the director of the adult education program about gaining access to GALIS to select participants for the study. This communication also ensured that the proper steps were taken to inform all stakeholders, as well as warranted transparency and clarity before participants are contacted. Creswell (2009) noted that it is important to gain access to research or archival sites by seeking the approval of gatekeepers, individuals at the research site that provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to be done. Upon approval from IRB and the Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness, the data collection process occurred. Participants were selected from the GALIS database and were contacted by email.

Role of the Researcher

I am the Lead Adult Education Instructor of one of the rural adult learning centers within the technical college. I have served in this role for 2 years. Prior to this particular position, I worked as both an adjunct and full-time adult education instructor.

Unlike my current role, my former facilitation of adult learning occurred within a larger site in which retention was considerably less of a factor.

The examination of adult learner persistence has been the primary topic of my doctoral studies over the last two years. My interest was stimulated by experiences working in the adult education field. I have worked with adults in various arenas (e.g., government agencies, school systems) for 15 years. Ensuring successful gains in education and employment have been major roles within the titles I have held. In my most recent role as an adult education instructor, I have observed a continuous cycle of learners stopping in and out of the program. Even more unsettling, many learners demonstrate no desire to pursue their GED in spite of financial support in the form of scholarships; consequently, this lack of interest sparked both my involvement in the field of adult education and the topic of adult learner persistence in adult education programs.

I could form biases regarding motivation of learners based on geographical settings; however, to eliminate any biases, the participants for this study were selected from adult education sites in which the researcher had no affiliation. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the study and my role as an internal evaluator (Creswell, 2009). In an effort to control bias during the interviews, I maintained a separate research journal for each instrument. The journals entailed verbatim notes, as well as my own thoughts and feelings. I reflected upon the notes after each interview throughout the research to ensure that the data was being analyzed explicitly. Moreover, I annotated reflective field notes that pertained to my emotions throughout the interview process. I selected an instructor as a peer debriefer to review the notes, as well as listen

to the interviews for potential occurrences of bias. Within 5-7 days of analyzing data, audio recordings were destroyed.

The researcher maintained a researcher participant relationship based on confidentiality to warrant a level of trust. I worked closely with a gatekeeper to gain access to the participants. The gatekeeper aided the proposed research by identifying the participants appropriate for the study. The researcher analyzed the data and ensured participants' confidentiality was protected. Additionally, approval from the IRB for protection of the participants' human rights was obtained.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred after each interview. I analyzed and manually organized data after each interview. Merriam (2009) suggested that data collection and data analysis be collected synchronously. The procedure entailed reviewing the recorded interviews. Following the analysis of the interviews, verbatim information from each participant was manually transcribed into a Word document. A thorough data collection and analysis took over 8 weeks.

The objective for analyzing the data entailed categorizing, evaluating, coding, unfolding the research, and building themes. As a result, the organized data were explored and coded by similar descriptions that lead to the themes (Lodico et al., 2010). The collected data were organized for every participant in a manner that promoted the coding process. For example, each participant's response was sorted and highlighted. I used a manual system was used to document emerging themes and included code words that individual participants used.

I organized and prepared the data for analysis by transcribing the interviews, sorting, and arranging data into different types. The collected data were sorted and analyzed after each interview, and was transcribed into a Word document. Transcriptions entailed verbatim accounts from each participants' interview.

Organizing and recording the data were involved and arduous tasks. I reviewed the tape recordings repeatedly to clarify specific topics and to sustain that central themes were encompassed in the notes (Creswell, 2012). The data were read to obtain a general sense of the information and reflect on its overall meaning. Data from interviews were used to identify common patterns and themes. What are the stakeholders' perceptions and experiences relating to the lack of student persistence? The aim of the research questions was to obtain insight into this matter. The summary of the findings is expressed based upon each research question that guided the project study:

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, "What are the perceived and experienced barriers that adults enrolled within these ALCs have encountered?" To address this question, data were collected to explore the participants' perceptions and experiences that hindered persistence. Data from the adult learner participants indicated that situational hardships, lack of motivation, and minimal experience with technology were some of the barriers that adult learners confront. Instructors' perceptions were associated with those of the adult learners'. To improve learner retention, the adult education instructor participants indicated the necessity to incorporate instructional strategies that reflect on increasing learners' motivation and skills with technology.

The themes that emerged from Research Question 1 were situational hardships, personal investment: motivation, time management, and technology based instruction. The subthemes were childcare and inadequacy. The findings were consistent with the literature that revealed that adult learners are faced with a number of internal and external barriers.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was: What are the perceived opportunities or achievements that adult learners have experienced in these ALCs? To answer this question, data were collected to explore participants' perceptions about opportunities or achievements they had achieved (both in and out of school) since they had been attending an adult education program. The data from both adult learners and instructors indicated that the aid of technology-based instruction improved both the educational and personal lives of adult learners. Hence, the theme that emerged from Research Question 2 was technology-based instruction. The subthemes were GED attainment and prepared for college.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked: What are the recommendations for better strategies, offered by adult education instructors, recruiters, and administrators to confront barriers? To answer this question, data were collected from participants to explore ideas about the ways to improve adult learners' experiences. According to the data from student participants, opportunities that encourage the use of technology was one of the recommendations. Instructors' recommendation to enhance learners' experiences was identifying methods to motivate adult learners. Some of the suggestions included assigning group work and ticket out the door activities.

Textual analysis of the recorded interviews was performed as to ensure clarification of any trends and offer insight into the barriers to adult learners' persistence (Bogdan & Bicklen, 2007). Reanalysis of transcriptions occurred after all interviews had been completed. Initially, all the data collected was examined in an effort to gain a sound understanding of the information. Collective narratives of all the participants were divided by themes and allocated codes. (Creswell, 2009). Various perceptions and experiences were represented in the themes. I utilized the "coding for patterns" process to generate a description of the setting, participants, and themes for analysis (Saldana, 2013). Several strategic processes were implemented for the coding process including: capturing significant terms and associations between terms, identifying similarities and dissimilarities in views and notions, and term duplications (Yin, 2009). Coding involves assigning labels to data to more easily access specific parts of information (Merriam, 2009). A description of the coding categories is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes Related to Codes

Themes	Subthemes	Code
Situational hardships	Childcare	Former educational experiences
	Inadequacy	Current adult learner experiences
Personal investment		Improving educational experiences
		Necessary changes
		Motivation in general
Time Management		Challenges of adult learner
		Barriers
Technology-based instruction	GED	Adult learner advantages
	College-prepared	Ideas for improvement
	Homework	Strategies to assist with educational goals

From the codes, the information was categorized into themes based on parallelism to the research questions. Mutual codes were conjoined into connotative clusters and then clusters were analyzed to determine if all or the majority of the participants exhibited similar experiences and or perceptions. This was the selected measure for establishing the themes. Most of the themes were directly correlated to the research questions for the study. (A summary of each participants' response per question is

included in Appendices F (Adult Learner Summary of Interviews) and G (Adult Education Instructor Summary of Interviews).

Participants' responses were summarized throughout the coding process. After employing the method of recapitulating, theming, coding, and condensing, I was able to assess the data from various perspectives throughout several phases (Merriam, 2009). The procedure was an immense aid for sustaining objectivity during the data analysis process. After I analyzed the collected data, themes begin to emerge from the code categories. Merriam (2009) stated open coding involves marking any data pertaining to the study while axial coding includes honing codes into categories. I looked for similar or related words in the interviews, and compared interviews and noted emerging themes. Repetition helps researchers identify themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The themes were applied to the implementation of a narrative report to display the findings. Nonetheless, the outcomes are thematically illustrated.

In situations where participants repeated the identical or analogous expressions and phrases, specific themes were documented. I emphasized similar words and phrases using the same text highlighter color. After coding and establishing themes, I created a manual system to document emerging themes and included code words that individual participants used. After transcription, I reviewed each typed interview and coded it by searching for words and phrases that addressed this study's research questions.

The data were examined, verified, and thoroughly analyzed to ensure that no components had been ignored. I performed a detailed analysis with a coding process, the process of consolidating the information into segments of script before conveying

meaning of data (Creswell, 2009). I analyzed the data for material that could address: (1) codes on topics the researcher expected, (2) surprise or unanticipated codes, (3) unusual codes, and (4) codes that addressed broader hypothetical perceptions within the study (Creswell, 2009). Yet again, the data were categorized per participant. The coding processes was completed on a Word document. The method of coding the collected data was a conventional approach; however, coding tools such as ATLAS.ti and NVivo were considered. Using Microsoft Word tools, I emphasized similar words and phrases using the same text highlighter color. In addition, I divided text into segments with similar colors for each related theme.

The objective of the analysis was to display the data accurately in an effort to identify any standout themes. An inherent analysis, one that entails a description of the matters and occurrences that are embedded within the data, ensues as the investigator continues to detect major and minor themes in the coded data (Lodico et al., 2010). A comprehensive analysis of the data was performed to provide a profound assessment. A range of themes stood out in the coded data; nevertheless, the themes that emerged from the collected data are also relative to the three research questions. A process that involved comprehending the significance of the data was initiated once the primary topics were arranged and paralleled. This information will be discussed further in the results section of the study.

Conclusion

This section provided a detailed account of the sampling procedure that was prescribed for this research. In addition, the process that was utilized for data collection

was discussed. Lastly, the process for analyzing data was provided. The sections that follow will describe the participants, the interviews, and the findings and conclusions of the study.

Findings of the Study

According to Creswell (2009), the final stage in data analysis involves examining the results. The results were thematically reported, as the coding process encompassed generating topics. The thematic approach is one of the most common methods used for analyzing qualitative data (Glesne, 2011). Nonetheless, the election of the reporting structure emerged from the outcomes of the data analysis.

The objective of this study was to assess the extent to which barriers identified over time to adults in rural learning environments affect retention rates at various adult education sites. Moreover, I sought to identify strategies that can assist adult learners with overcoming these barriers and obtaining their GED. I collected data via semistructured interviews with nine current or former adult learners and three full time adult education instructors (See Appendices D and E). The presentation of the findings includes percentages, rich quotes, and summaries of the participant's statements during to the interview.

I engaged in the process of inductive reasoning in order to code data and identify themes. I reread the coded data multiple times to ensure accuracy of the themes. Consequently, the following themes emerged from the data: (a) situational hardships, (b) personal investment: motivation, (c) time management, and (d) improving technological skills (See Table 2).

Table 2

Connecting Themes and Subthemes to Research Questions

Research Question	Themes	Subthemes
Research Question 1	Situational hardships	Childcare
	Personal investment: Motivation	Inadequacy
	Time management	
	Technology-based Instruction	
Research Question 2	Technology-based Instruction	GED
		College-prepared
Research Question 3	Technology-based Instruction	Homework

The subsequent narrative provides an overview of the participants' demographics, characteristics of the participants, and responses to the research questions. Pseudonyms were given to protect the participants' identity and maintain confidentiality. The names of the learners participating in the study have been replaced with AL (meaning adult learner), followed by a number 1 to 9. The instructors' names have been replaced with IN (meaning instructor) and a number, 1-3. Tables 2-4 offer a synopsis of the demographic data that were collected during the semi structured interviews.

Adult Learner/ Adult Education Instructor Personal Demographics

The demographics of the adult learners and instructors participating in this study were diverse as exhibited in Table 2 and Table 3. In addition, the personal characteristics of the participants for this study were varied as depicted in Tables 3 and 4. The participants interviewed for this study included adult learner participants, ranging from ages 19 to 75 (See Table 3). Seven of the adult learners identified their ethnic identity as Black and two were identified as White. Seven of the students were females and two were males. Neither gender nor ethnicity was predetermined for the participants. A diverse population of adult learners attending programs in rural counties were invited to participate in the study; however, the first nine adult learners to respond were actually selected to be included in the study. Later, I was informed that a participant was no longer available for the study. I was able to recruit another learner who had agreed to participate. As a result, the total number of female participants outweighed those of male participants. In addition, the number of Black adult learner participants out-numbered those of White adult learner participants. This detection did prompt the researcher to investigate the total number of each described demographic, and according to GALIS, there are more Black students (59.1%) enrolled than White students (25.5%); more females (51.5%) enrolled than males (48.5%) (Georgia Adult Learners Information System, 2015). In addition, 18.8% of the learners are under 19; 33.2% are 19-24; 36.3% are 25-44; 9.3% are 45-59; 2.5% are 60 and over. Although demographics are displayed in this study as to provide a depiction of the participants represented in this study, the demographics are not directly referenced because they are outside the scope or purpose of

this study. My intention is not to draw conclusions based specifically on demographics, but rather the perspectives and experiences of adult learners and instructors, particularly in rural learning settings.

Four of the participants reported that they dropped out of school as a result of teen pregnancy. There were four participants who withdrew from high school during the 12th grade. Two reported that they were 16 when they dropped out of school. In addition, two of the participants were in the 10th and 11th grade when they withdrew, and one participant was 17 years old at the time of withdrawal. Table 3 displays the demographics of participants interviewed for this study. Participants included adult learner participants, ranging from ages 19 to 75.

Table 3

Demographics of Adult Learner Study Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Sex	Teen Pregnancy	Drop-out Age/Grade
AL1	31	Black	F	Y	12th
AL2	24	Black	F	Y	12th
AL3	39	Black	F	Y	12th
AL4	43	White	F	Y	9th/16
AL5	20	Black	M	N	11th
AL6	19	Black	M	N	10th
AL7	32	Black	F	N	12th
AL8	75	Black	F	N	17
AL9	36	White	F	N	16

I also interviewed one lead instructor, one full time instructor and one adjunct instructor. The instructors' experience in adult education ranged from 1 to 5 years (See Table 3). The three instructors identified their ethnicity as Black. The selection of instructors of the same ethnicity and gender was not predetermined. An email was sent to 10 instructors (both adjunct and full-time) that served in rural sites, served multi-level learners, or learners who were dually enrolled. Four instructors initially responded back to me via email, indicating that they would be interested in participating in the study. Later, one instructor decided that she would not be able to participate. I did not see this as a problem as I had only indicated three instructors would be interviewed in the proposal. Two of the instructors reported having 2 years of experience in adult education,

and one reported having 5 years of experiences. One of the instructor's background was in Business, while the other two were in Education. The intention of this study was not to seek a better representation of adult education instructors; therefore, I limited the demographic information collected from them to gender, ethnicity, job title, background, and years of experience. Table 4 displays the participants' demographics interviewed for this study. Participants included adult learner participants, ranging from ages 19 to 75.

Table 4

Demographics of Adult Education Instructor Participants

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Sex	Major(s)	Years of AE Experience	Employment
IN1	Black	F	Business	3	Full-time
IN2	Black	F	Education	2	Adjunct
IN3	Black	F	Education	5	Full-time

All nine of the student participants reported that they had received a level completion. Two of the learners had Educational Functional Levels (EFLs) at the Adult Secondary Education (ASE) level and 5 learners had EFLs at the Adult Basic Education (ABE) level. The EFLs of two learners who graduated are inactive and, therefore are not applicable. One of the participants reported that she had taken and passed the Reading section of the GED examination. Two of the participants reported that they received their GED. EFLs, level completions, and GED attainments were confirmed in GALIS. As seen in Table 5, the participants interviewed for this study included three former and six current adult learner participants.

Table 5

Academic Status of Adult Learner Study Participants

Pseudonym	Current Learner	EFL	Level Completion	GED
AL1	Y	ASE1	Y	N
AL2	N	N/A	Y	Y
AL3	Y	ABE 4	Y	N
AL4	N	N/A	Y	Y
AL5	Y	ABE 4	Y	N
AL6	Y	ABE 4	Y	N
AL7	Y	ABE 3	Y	N
AL8	Y	ABE 3	Y	N
AL9	N	ASE 1	Y	Partial

At the time of the study, Instructor 1 had a total of 59 students enrolled. Of those students, 23 attended class less than 12 hours, and 36 attended more than 12 hours. A total of 19 students received a level completion. None of the students had passed the entire GED. Instructor 2 had 58 students enrolled, 25 obtained less than 12 hours, 33 attended class for 12 or more hours, 24 learners received level completions, and none of the students were reported as having passed the GED. Finally, Instructor 3 had a total of 24 students enrolled. Of those students, five had less than 12 attendance hours and 19 had attended class for 12 or more hours. The total of level completions for this site was

15. None of the students had received their GED. Table 6 displays the learner retention of instructor who participated in this qualitative study.

Table 6

Student Retention by Instructor

Pseudonym	Enrollment	-12 Hours	+12 Hours	Level Completions	GED
IN1	59	23	36	19	0
IN2	58	25	33	24	0
IN3	24	5	19	15	0

Note. Students with <12 hours of attendance completed intake and/or assessment and orientation. Students with >=12 hours of attendance received instruction, obtained level completion, or both.

The four themes that emerged from the data: (a) situational hardships, (b) personal investment, (c) time management, and (d) technology based instruction (see Figure 1) will be illustrated exhaustively in the following section through rich quotes and summaries of the participant's statements during to the interview. As displayed in Figure 1, some themes are interrelated, for instance, situational hardships create situations where motivation and persistence are essential. Included within the sections that follow on themes are factors such as what surprised me, what I learned, and factors that appealed to my emotions as a learner, instructor, and researcher. The first theme that will be discussed is situational hardships.

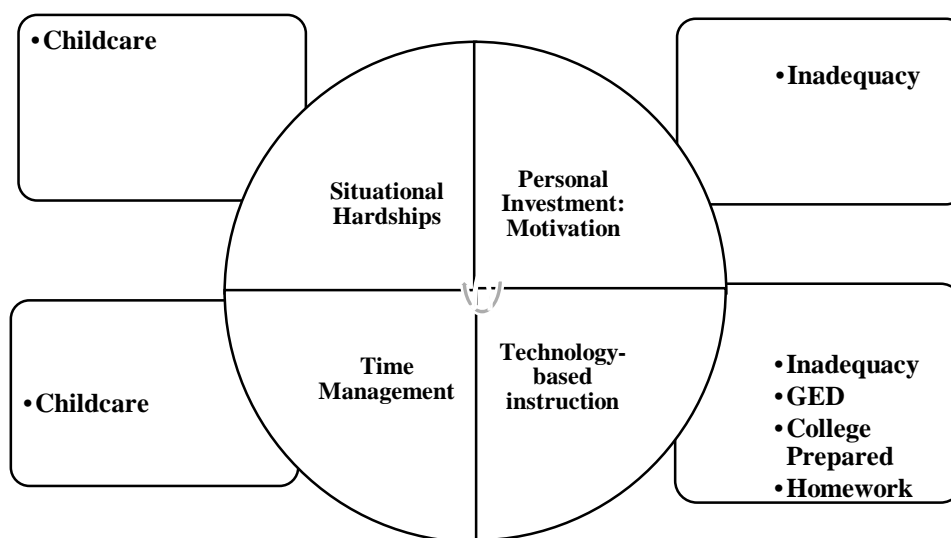


Figure 1. Connection between themes and subthemes.

Theme 1: Situational Hardships

Situational hardships was the first theme to emerge from the data. This theme was infused within all of the interviews. This section addresses the first research question: What are the perceived and experienced barriers that adults enrolled within these ALCs encountered? The information provided is based on participants' responses specifically to Interview Question 6, which asked about the barriers that impact student persistence.

Disadvantaged learners often have family members, friends, and communities who fail to value education. This attitude towards education can influence learner's success in educational programs (Zacharakis et al., 2011). Furthermore, some learners have had to cope with low self-esteem, stress, and poverty.

Some of the participants expressed how their past learning experiences played a role in their current academic progression. AL3, a 39 year old, Black female, detailed how she had been raised in a foster care environment in which there was minimal family support during the time that she was enrolled in school. Academic standards were set at a minimum in her home. She said, "It was fine if I just made a 70, as long as I passed." The student noted that because of that, she never took school seriously. There was never anyone available to help her with homework. It was not until she had her own child that she began to value education. The participant noted that she finally found the courage to enroll in the GED program after being out of school for 20 years. She has been attending a local adult education program for a year. Although she has not taken any part of the GED test, she noted, "I will pass my GED eventually, it's just going to be slow."

Similarly, a 43 year old former learner shared that she dropped out of school in the 9th grade because she never liked school. The student informed that when she was growing up, her family moved frequently. She expressed that with each school attended, there was a different set of problems that would be endured. Therefore, when the participant reached the age that she was not required to attend school, she made the decision to quit. Shortly after that, she became pregnant, left home, and started a family. As the participant aged, she realized the necessity of obtaining and starting a career.

Another participant, in her late 30s, shared her insight regarding situational hardships as it relates to students' persistence. This adult learner also dropped out of school in the 9th grade because she had gotten so far behind and could not catch up. The participant did not learn very well when she was a teenager because there were too many

distractions. The student also shared that she had been diagnosed with an attention disorder. With everything going on through her mind, what she termed the normal teenage struggles, as well as trying to get rid of the chaos that was going on around her, the student could not concentrate on what she was supposed to be doing.

Self-determination through hardships. During the interviews, two participants spoke of how effort and determination sustained them. AL8, who is 75 years of age, spoke about having determination. The last year that she attended high school was in 1956; the learner withdrew from school and got married at the age of 17. The student discussed how getting up early in the morning to attend the local GED was not a burden to her because she was trying to achieve her GED. The adult learner firmly stated, “When you want to achieve something bad enough, nothing can prevent you from achieving your goals.” The participant had attended an adult education program in the past; however, she stopped attending because the location of the adult learning center moved. The learner stated, “I have been here ‘bout a year. I like it very much and I’m very interested in trying to complete this time.”

Another former learner and single mother of one child informed me that she dropped out of high school when she was in the 12th grade. This learner experienced significant accomplishments while in school; however, she withdrew from school due to an unexpected teenage pregnancy, and soon her school attendance declined. Although she did not graduate from high school, she noted that she had an internal drive within her. The learner had the confidence that she could obtain her GED. “When I looked at my son, I was like I need a better life.” She stated that she wanted to continue her education

and decided that there was time for a change. This learner expressed that she loves to learn. After being enrolled for less than 3 months, she obtained her GED and transitioned into the same technical college in which the GED program is affiliated.

Instructors' impact. Each participant described how self-determination had affected them in some fashion. Even though there were participants who indicated that education was not always at the peak of their personal priorities, still they were able to sustain long enough to accrue enough hours and achieve one or more level completions. Furthermore, participants with higher levels of self-determination achieved their GED.

Participants spoke about how patience and encouragement from their instructors also gave them self-assurance to sustain. In one interview, the student expressed that patience was something that she personally believed the adult education program might need for people to succeed. She articulated the possibility of people being afraid to enroll into classes due to inadequacy. This also resonated with AL 8 because she spoke about how she felt that she lacked the intelligence to reenter school because she had been out of school for so long. The participant shared that the encouragement that she had received made her realize that it was not as difficult as she had thought it would be. As a result, not only has she accomplished a level completion, she has also passed the Reading section of the GED examination. The learner expressed:

Like before I came here, no lie, I felt stupid. Really stupid because I never could grasp math. I knew I was a good reader. I've always been told I was, but some of the other subjects they were just really foreign to me and I came here and I realized that it was not as difficult as I thought it was gonna be.

Another participant noted how her instructor pushed her to achieve her goals. The learner felt like she had gotten behind in math, but with her instructor providing one-on-one instruction, she was able to understand the principles better. As a result, the student received her GED. The learner noted:

Well, when I attended the center, I immediately got my GED. I immediately signed up for classes [with the technical college] with the help of a HOPE voucher that kind of got me a little more motivated. Um, and ever since then, I've been taking college courses.

Instructional competence. Participants also shared how instructors' knowledge of the subjects being taught and the way information was explained to them build their self-esteem. The variation of instructional techniques was also highly praised. Learners spoke of how their instructors provided different types of materials on specific subjects. This enabled different outlooks in their understanding of subjects, rather than being forced to learn a concept with one method. The adult learners spoke with pride about their accomplishments since they had been enrolled in the GED program. Several participants spoke with gratification about the level completions that they gained while enrolled in class. Not only had these accomplishments benefited them personally, but for several, their success also improved the lives of their children. One of the participants expressed:

With the math, I can help my daughter. Then the worksheets, they actually helped my third grader and my second grader done brought his grades up. Both of them like six points away from being honor students now.

Another student agreed:

Yeah it's [the work in class] helped me outside because sometimes my child comes home from school and she has work that we have done in class and I help her with it.

Instructors' perceptions. The instructors that were included in this study also provided their viewpoints on how the adult learners' situational hardships had affected their achievements in the classroom. IN1 has been teaching adult education courses for a total of 3 years. She began as an adjunct instructor and remained in that role for 2 years before becoming a full time instructor. This instructor noted that she has taught at various ALCs within the adult education division's service delivery area. She is now working in a rural ALC; however, during the interview with her, I was informed that many of problems relative to self-determination have been prevalent within rural and nonrural sites in which she was an instructor. The particular site in which this participant facilitates is comprised mostly of younger adult learners, ages 16-25. The instructor noted that the barriers that affect student persistence are both past and present; these barriers originate from external and internal conflicts between their own abilities and the social structure of their world. According to the instructor, some learners lack the support from their families and are confronted with personal and societal stereotypes. The instructor explained:

Barriers that influence student persistence are both past and present. They are unsure of themselves. They become their own worst enemies. They don't hold high expectations for themselves.

IN3 has been in the adult education field for 5 years. She concurred that many of the learners' barriers to persistence are related to poor self-esteem, minimal support, and lack of motivation.

IN2 started as a volunteer in the adult education department. She volunteered for 6 months, and discovered an enjoyment for working with adult learners. Shortly thereafter, she became employed as an adjunct instructor. The ALC that this instructor is assigned to is a building that is in a public housing complex. The majority of the students reside on the premises of the ALC; yet, retention is a significant problem at her site. Students expect to finish quickly, yet they do not want to attend class daily. Due to students' lack of individual persistence, the instructor explained how she sends "return to class" letters in addition to making phone calls to students whose attendance declines or ceases

Thus, within this study, self-determination through situational hardships was a substantiated factor in the persistence of adult learners. The data collected from the interviews indicated that encouragement, patience, knowledge of instructors, and variation in instruction are all essential to adult learners' determination. To that end, the determination of learners influences their personal investment in education. The topic will be addressed in the next section.

Theme 2: Personal Investment: Motivation

Personal investment was another theme that participants spoke of in the interviews. This section addresses the second research question: What are the perceived opportunities or achievements that adult learners have experienced in these ALCs? The

information is based on participants' responses to the following: Interview Question 7: What are the advantages of being an adult learner? Interview Question 4: What motivates you to learn in general? Interview Question 2c: Are there any opportunities or achievements you have experienced while attending the center? I was especially surprised, as a researcher, of the way that many participants spoke so freely about difficult and painful experiences. A single mother noted:

The first time I quit, I quit in 2001. That was because I had a baby. Then I went back and I quit in 2003 because the love of my life got locked up for the rest of his life.

Some shared extensive stories about their childhood struggles. They spoke about how these factors had contributed to their decision to enter adult education. One of the adult learners did not receive her high school diploma because she was unable to pass a basic skills reading test. The learner was required to attend summer school to retake the test; however, her foster parents told her that they did not have the gas money to get her to school. The participant recounted a significant loss and her foster care experience. She shared:

I lost my parent when I was 8, and that right there was a big setback for like 2 years. I was raised in a foster home and so it was so many other kids. So then, I think like 9th grade I had a baby. Just different stuff kind of like really took me out of it [school]. I mean, I still maintained, but I just wasn't serious about school.

Even through a difficult childhood and raising her son alone, the adult learner still wanted to pursue her GED. After being out of school nearly 20 years, she decided to return. She remarked that it might be a gradual process; however, her aspiration is to receive her GED in 2 years.

While some of the participants spoke more candidly, I did notice that the youngest students provided fewer details during their interviews than the older adult learners. These learners, both of whom were males, formerly attended alternative schools as a result of being prohibited from attending school in a regular K-12 setting due to misconduct. I probed as needed for further explanations; however, I did not want the participants to experience discomfort, and therefore I did not become excessively persistent.

Instrumental factors. Participants spoke of the individuals who were instrumental in their persistence to continue attending class or obtaining their GED (i.e., family, friends, and children). Learners are more likely to experience increased motivation and satisfaction when they perceive the content to be relevant to their lives (Kim & Frick, 2011; McGrath, 2009).

Both current and former adult learners were asked if there is/was anything to motivate them to continue attending the center. Two of the participants were former learners who have both received their GED since being enrolled. Both have transitioned into the credit side of the technical college. One of the former learners stated that as a mother, her child motivated her. She went further to acknowledge that her young son was the reason that she pushed herself to get her GED. She received a full scholarship to

take the GED and passed all components of the test at her first attempt. It was important that she modeled for him the importance of receiving an education.

The other participant who received her GED informed me that she was motivated by the fact that her two adult children had succeeded in educational careers. She felt that she did not receive much education as she quit school when she was 16. She noted, “I just wanted to get back into the learning process and I seem to be kind of enjoying it [giggle].”

Self-motivation. AL1 is currently attending an ALC. She has a total of 7 children. For this student, her enrollment in the program is vital because she needs a GED to provide for them. After she obtains her GED, she wants to enroll into a technical certificate program to become a medical assistant. The learner believes that motivation comes from within. She noted that there really is not anything anyone can do to motivate others because it is all based on the individual and what they want to accomplish.

Still another participant credited herself as her motivating drive. She stated, “I feel like I would live better if I had a good job, a GED.” The participant described how she is currently living paycheck to paycheck and expressed the desire to one day own her home, as well as have the opportunity to purchase a vehicle that she desires.

Another participant, a senior adult learner, noted that the class itself and the instructor motivates her. She stated that the class keeps her looking forward to doing something every day instead of lingering around her home worrying about various problems. As unveiled in other research, instructors play a pivotal role in cultivating

student persistence; instructors' attitudes and enthusiasm play a significant role in the success of learners (Schmidtke, 2009).

AL4 noted that she has always had the desire to obtain her GED; therefore, her motivation was internal. She expressed that she did not think some students had that determination. Her perspective was based on her own learning experiences. Her claim was that when she was younger, she did not really have any goals or priorities that pertained to education. Her goal was to raise her children, but now that she has raised them, her goal is to better herself. In this participant's opinion, there are students who do not have a family life or do not have a job. They have perhaps become too complacent and they feel that pursuing a GED is not essential.

AL6 informed that he, along with his family and his friends, motivate him to attend class. The participant left school in the 10th grade. He feels confident that he can accomplish his goal of obtaining his GED. He conveyed:

[Adult education is] just like having a second way, backup plan like. Which like high school did not work out so [I have] like just another chance.

Improvement of mathematical skills and overcoming fear. A former adult learner stated that her children motivated her to attend class. She said that she liked being able to help her children with their homework, particularly math, noting that this was not possible prior to her enrollment in the adult education program.

Other participants spoke about how they were motivated to attend class just based on their new experience with math. One participant noted that she has mastered

concepts in math that she had never even approached in high school, adding that it has allowed her to become better at managing her money and calculating her bills.

Yet, another participant noted how she always felt that math was her biggest challenge. She had taken the GED test and passed all parts with the exception of math. When she decided to return to class, 10 years later, she had to pass the math test or else all her scores would become invalid. The test that she had taken was going to change the following year. She felt that she could never really learn well enough to pass the GED math course. The learner furthered explained that the first time she enrolled in GED classes she felt like she really wanted her GED; however, years later she discovered that it was not that she was unable to pass the math test. She later realized that she just was not motivated enough to grasp the concepts that were required to pass the test.

Another learner concurred:

I had lots of trouble in math when I was in school, even out of school. I've never been all that great at it. And I guess the way she [the instructor] breaks it down here, it makes it so much simpler that I've actually been able to catch on and I don't feel quite so dumb.

AL3 also recognized that she has had a new experience with math since her enrollment in the GED program. The learner spoke about how she had only received basic instruction in math as a high school student. She explained that she is learning much more about math now. The learner communicated that she is learning about mathematical concepts that she had never seen before.

Instructors' perceptions. Instructors participating in this study were not asked directly about motivation during their interviews; however, the theme did emerge with 2 of the instructors when they were asked about the barriers that they believed impact student persistence. Although other barriers were noted, all 3 of the instructors related students' lack of persistence to motivation. IN3 noted that retention is a complex problem. She stated that some students come and begin the intake process, but they never return. Others complete the intake process, and even obtain a level completion, but shortly after that, their attendance starts to decline and eventually, they stop attending all together. The instructor informed that she solicits her students for feedback regularly; however, some learners appear nonchalant about furthering their education. The instructor explained that when she first became an instructor how she had so many ideas about how to recruit and retain students, but the longer she taught, she saw a pattern of students arriving to class late and/or not coming regularly. She has a few students who attend regularly and are committed, but they are the students who show minimal progress, not enough to refer to take the GED. This instructor stated, "I encourage my students and try to motivate them so that they will remain persistent to obtain their GED."

The discussion of motivation with IN1 was generated when asked about current experience that were relevant for improving success amongst adult learners. The instructor noted that finding ways to motivate students to come to class daily is pertinent within her setting. She spoke about two methods that she has incorporated in her classroom to increase retention: assigning group work and ticket out the door activities, a strategy in which the instructor asks the learners summative or formative questions. The

responses are used as an informal assessment to drive instruction. According to the instructor, both methods have proven to open some enjoyable discussions that have allowed students to include their personal experiences on specific topics. IN2 also mentioned the use of an informal assessment strategy in her classroom; she referred to it as using exit tickets.

Frequently, investors in education assume that adult learners in GED programs enroll for reasons other than internal motivation (i.e., better jobs, promotions, higher salaries) (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012). Although some of the participants of this study expressed that they had enrolled for other reasons, their major reason for attending the program was due to personal satisfaction. Still, other revelations regarding motivation were revealed in this study; adults expressed the need to improve their skills in technology to become more efficient in society. The theme of technology-based instruction will be discussed further in the following section.

Theme 3: Technology-based Instruction

The theme of technology was presented consistently among both adult learners and instructors. This section further addresses Research Question 3: What are the perceived opportunities or achievements that adult learners have experienced in these ALCs. Via Interview Question 8a, adult learners mentioned technology when asked about the specific strategies used by instructors to help them improve their experiences. Technology was also identified as an accomplishment of achievement amongst learners. Instructors spoke about how they incorporated technology into their instructional practice

and how it could be used as a resource outside of the classroom for students who are unable to attend class every day or students just wanting a supplementary resource.

The literature revealed how technology could benefit students, particularly those in rural communities who might have problems with transportation (Irvin, Hannum, Farmer, de la Varre, & Keane, 2009). One of the instructors identified lack of transportation as a disadvantage of the current ALC. She noted that the downside of the location of the center was that students must have their own transportation to and from the center. There was no form of public transportation for those who have to walk. Another instructor indicated that transportation and childcare were both perceived barriers to persistence within her site. IN3 stated that childcare and transportation were minimal. Each of the instructors were candid in their thoughts about the use of technology to not only assist students with problems attending class, but also to improve their life in general through increasing their technological skills.

The literature review for this study addressed how technology could assist adult learners, particularly those who reside in rural communities and lack childcare or transportation. To my amazement, however, transportation and childcare were noted as minimal barriers within this particular study. All 9 of the student participants commented that the location was one of the advantages of the site in which they attended. Only two adult learners indicated that transportation could be problem for other students; however, this was not a direct problem for them. In addition, 2 participants acknowledged that the lack of childcare was a possible barrier for some adults.

The use of technology itself was noted as an area of improvement for many of the participants. One participant expressed her undesired feeling of incompetence due to lacking technological skills. The learner spoke about how technology has motivated her as learner. She noted:

Um, just the new age of technology. I mean it's not something that I really particularly like, but I'm in it and it's evolving and I don't want to be left behind. You know considering I am not too old, but old enough to forget if I don't keep learning.

Another participant stated that technology is what surrounds us today. She stated that world consists mostly of computers and electronics so it is very important for us to embrace technology and become familiar with how to use it. This adult learner stated how technology could improve her lifestyle and enable her to keep up with the happenings of society.

One of the participants noted that she had attended an adult education program in the past for 6 months, but she did not receive her GED. She spoke of how most of the work was done by hand when she attended; however now, most of the work is done on the computers. She stated that although this can be a challenge for her at times, it is also an advantage because she would not be exposed to as much technology if she were not enrolled in her local ALC.

Another student also felt that using technology is challenging, but she said that she just had to try her best. She noted that if you keep trying, you could learn how to use

it. The participant explained that she attempts to use technology outside of the classroom because it enables her to study and practice at home.

Within the adult learning environment, learners are typically discouraged from using any personal devices during instructional hours. This is seen as a distraction in the classroom. However, Instructor #1 explained how she takes advantage of her learners' insistence to stay tuned into their technological devices. Since students are so connected to their mobile devices, the instructor is in the process of implementing the use of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) technology into her classroom setting to support instruction. The instructor also uses Thinkbinder, an ideal platform to introduce collaborative group work to students. Students are encouraged to work together to solve problems and share their thought on what they have learned or what is currently being learned in the class. By allowing the use of technology into the class, the instructor hopes to peak students' interest and develop 21st Century skills such as learning to collaborate with others.

IN3 noted that she discovered that technology was a barrier to some of her students. Unlike IN2, whose site consists of mostly younger adult learners, her site consists of several older adult learners whom did not want to embrace technology. She noted how the current GED is a computer-based test and how her students have to be prepared for that. She stated that technology is incorporated into her instruction daily. Students are encouraged to use a program, Skills Tutor©, both inside and outside of the classroom. In addition to gaining basic skills in technology, adult learners are also afforded the ability to improve their academic skills. Students are able to assess a number of resources to aid them in increasing their technological skills. Moreover, with

the aid of technology, adult learners are afforded the ability to work on lessons outside of the classroom when they are unavailable to attend for reasons such as employment or no available childcare. They can utilize technology from almost anywhere, and at their own leisure. This could alleviate some of the burdens regarding time management that learners enrolled in adult education programs have expressed. The topic of time management is addressed next.

Theme 4: Time Management

The fourth theme that derived from the data was managing time and attending adult education programs. This section further addresses Research Question 2. Moreover, Research Question 3 is addressed: What are the recommendations for better strategies, offered by adult education instructors, recruiters, and administrators to confront barriers? The information is based on participants' specific responses to Interview Questions 2b (adult learners) and 8a (instructors).

As noted in the literature, adults have a number of circumstances surrounding their efforts to sustain in an educational program (Flynn, Brown, Johnson, & Rodger, 2011; Mein, 2010; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). Although other reasons surfaced from the interviews, the most common occurrence relative to the challenges that adult learners confront was finding a balance between learning and personal obligations. Most of the learners described how busy schedules can significantly affect attaining their educational goals. Raising children, maintaining employment, and attending class are difficult to balance according to the majority of the participants.

A participant who did manage to receive her GED had a full-time job; however, she did express that it took her longer than she would have liked to, primarily because she could not find a balance for employment and school. Another participant, whom is also employed full-time, stated that her job sometimes prevents her from attending class every day. She stated that she does not have any dependent children; her son is 24 years old. The participant noted that she drives a school bus, and some days she has to attend meetings. The student also informed me that sometimes she has to arrive late to class because she has to stay behind an additional 30 minutes on some occasions to take a drug test. The learner drives a school bus for the board of education where she resides. She emphasized that, in general, people just have a various events going on, different factors for different people.

Another participant, a single mother, noted that as an adult, the challenges of her family life complicate her ability to fully commit to her studies. The learner does not attend class regularly due to employment. Furthermore, she finds it difficult to work at home on assignments that will prepare her for the GED. The participant outlined the difficulties of maintaining her duties as a mother such as preparing meals and ensuring her children have clothes to wear. She expressed:

It's just, life's a hassle. It's like trying to balance what you know you know you need for the future with what you have to do with the present.

One participant spoke about helping her adult children. She sometimes babysits her grandchildren and great-grandchildren so that their parents can work and not have to pay for childcare. The adult learner also noted that sometimes she has to miss class to

babysit the children when they out of school during breaks. This has a significant impact on the learner's ability to complete assignments outside of the ALC setting. She has currently been attending the adult education program since November 2012, but she has not taken any parts of the GED. She said that she only misses class to babysit or if she has a medical appointment.

Another participant spoke about having to help her five school aged children with their homework, in addition to trying to find time to study for the GED. She also has two other children, both under the age of 3. They are too young to attend school and since she is an unemployed, single mother, she cannot afford to pay for childcare. Her family members provide childcare for her at no charge so that she can attend GED classes, but after class, she has to attend to them. Even though her school aged children have not yet arrived home from school after she leaves her GED class, having two toddlers at home makes it difficult for her to study at home.

The theme of time management emerged from the instructors' interviews as well. The instructors involved in this study noted that had students to complete one or more levels, as well as graduate from the GED program. However, a significant number of learners fail to obtain enough hours to make substantial gains. One instructor said that she has seen retention increase at different phases, but something systematic needs to be put in place. Currently, students are allowed to enroll in any of the adult learning centers during any time of the semester. In addition, an instructor noted they have had some successes within their classrooms. The instructor reported that one of the challenges regarding retention is that some students fail to attend class for a full session. Some

students prefer only to attend classes in which they are most interested in improving, rather than attending all required subjects that are pertinent to the GED test. While an open enrollment practice is allowed for the adult education program being addressed in this study, as a convenience to assist learners with maintaining school with their personal life, many students have yet to find a balance.

The instructors discussed the phenomena of helping adult learners balance school and their personal obligations as an idea for methods to improve their center. One instructor suggested that stricter guidelines regarding attendance should be made mandatory. She noted that the adult education program offers another chance for adults to obtain a free program. Similarly, another instructor commented that the program gives past, present, and future dropouts an alternative solution to complete their education. Therefore, if stakeholders could provide adult learners with solutions to balancing their personal obligations and educational goals during the initial phases of entering adult learning centers (i.e., intake and advisement) this might eliminate some of the retention problems that the centers experience.

Discrepant Cases

I only analyzed data from participants who completed the study. All interviews were completed with each participant, and I asked each participant if he or she had additional information to share after completing the interview question. This additional time allowed participants to discuss other information I might not have addressed. All interviews of participants were completed during a time selected by the participants. Incomplete data from participants were discarded from the study.

Quality Indicators

In qualitative research, the researcher pursues accuracy of the outcomes by engaging in specific techniques, while credibility suggests that the investigator's methodology is persistent throughout varying research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Yin (2009) suggested that qualitative researchers verify that their approaches are reliable and consistent by recording as much of the case study processes as possible, as well as establish a thorough case study procedure and database.

In the current study, the participants responded to identical initial interview questions, enabling triangulation (Creswell, 2009). Another method for enhancing research accuracy was to use a consistent, established method for conducting the research. Yin (2009) identified three stages in the case study method of research. The first is the descriptive and strategic phase, which involves selecting the theory under exploration, selecting cases, and designing a procedure for collecting data. Participants' confidentiality was protected. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to shield individual identity.

Bogdan & Biklen (2007) noted that triangulation can occur when multiple sources of data are incorporated into a study to provide comprehensive knowledge of the phenomena the researcher is studying. Various triangulation techniques were integrated into this study. First, the open-ended interview facilitated broad, in-depth responses unrelated to a particular theory of motivation. Furthermore, member checking warranted the accuracy and credibility of the investigation. Participants' feedback was solicited to reinforce credibility and warrant validity (Creswell, 2012). Participants were selected to

report the certainty of rational and descriptive interpretations (Creswell, 2012). Each participants received a transcript of their interview via email as to examine the accuracy of their responses. I informed participants that they would have 7 days to provide feedback regarding the transcripts. Although every participant did not respond, those participants who did found that their statements during the interviews were accurately reported. The next step was to have the transcripts reviewed by a peer.

I identified one colleague who was a non-participant of the study and had a thorough knowledge base of the subject for peer debriefing. As the director of the adult education division, this individual has over 20 years of experience of interpreting data. I emailed the transcriptions (with all participant identifiers removed) and results to her, and within 5 days, I received a response. The director agreed with my findings; however, she did make a minor suggestion, and that was to indicate the adult learners' current Educational Functional Level (EFL). The EFL describes the adult learner's entry level ability in language, math, and reading. This is not something that was asked of the participants, as I did not include it in my interview protocol. I did not ask this question mainly because learners may not be aware of their EFL. Since I did create a table with learners' hours and level completions, I did see the relevance of including this information. Therefore, current students' EFLs were added to the table, which references learners' demographics. I was able to obtain current EFLs from the GALIS portal.

One final means of ensuring accuracy and credibility was to reflect upon my research journal (See Appendix H). In an effort to control bias during the interviews, I maintained a research journal that entailed verbatim notes, as well as my own thoughts

and feelings. The research journal was written into a Word document and saved on a secured USB drive. I reflected upon the notes throughout the research to ensure that the data was being analyzed appropriately. In an effort to control bias during the interviews, I maintained a separate research journal for each instrument. The journals entailed verbatim notes, as well as my own thoughts and feelings. I reflected upon the notes after each interview throughout the research to ensure that the data was being analyzed explicitly. Moreover, I annotated reflective field notes that pertained to my emotions throughout the interview process.

Project Outcome

Data from interviews were used to identify common patterns and themes. What are the stakeholders' perceptions and experiences relating to the lack of student persistence? The aim of the research questions was to obtain insight into this matter. The summary of the findings is expressed based upon each research question that guided the project study. The results of 12 interviews conveyed that there are several factors that contribute to adult learners' lack of persistence in ABE/GED courses. A qualitative multiple case study was employed to identify the perceived and experienced barriers to retention within rural adult education programs. The participants responded to questions through semistructured interviews. Data from the interviews were analyzed through inductive reasoning. Several of the participants identified factors that contributed to their retention in the adult education program. Four themes emerged from the data: situational hardships, personal investment, technology-based instruction, and time management. The themes were relative to both the literature and the theoretical framework of the study.

Yet, many other factors need to be addressed to improve the quality of adult learners' overall persistence.

The results of the research study indicated that learners' attendance in GED courses are interrupted for various circumstances. In addition, the adult learner participants disclosed that face to face instruction had benefitted them; yet, many factors do not allow regular attendance. Adult learners and instructors participating in the study also expressed the importance of enhancing or acquiring technological skills. This is an important factor, as learners are required to take the GED test on a computer. The results of the research revealed that adult learners benefit from both face to face instruction and technology based instruction. Therefore, in an effort to curtail the barriers that hinder adult learners' persistence in adult education courses, the findings of this study will be used to develop a professional learning workshop/orientation for new instructors. The intent of the orientation is to provide guidance on the successful retention of adult learners to new instructors. The orientation will include 3 modules, which will entail pertinent topics on motivation and barriers of adult learners, time management, and integrating adult learning theory and technology. Disseminating the findings of this research with stakeholders in adult education could assist the adult education division with a strategic retention tool.

The results of this study could be instrumental in providing adult education programs, as well as technical colleges, with strategies to improve the overall retention rate of learners enrolled. Moreover, the outcomes of this study will be used to unveil and

possibly restrain the obstacles adult learners and adult education instructors experience in the adult learning environment.

Summary

In Section 2 of this research study, I articulated the methodology and validated the qualitative approach utilized to obtain the data. This section also discussed participant recruitment and selection, sampling strategy, ethical considerations, and data collection and analysis. The goal of this study was to provide stakeholders of adult education with information on the reasons to barriers to persistence. Moreover, the research sought to identify strategies that can assist adult learners with overcoming these barriers and obtaining their GED. In Section 3 of this research study, I will provide comprehensive details of the proposed project. Moreover, a literature review that addresses the project and contains an analysis of the research will be included.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore adult learners' and adult education instructors' perceptions of the barriers to students' persistence in rural adult education programs. I analyzed rich data that was collected from semistructured interviews. Four themes emerged: situational hardships, personal investment: motivation, time management, and technology based instruction. Based upon the results of the research, I selected a professional development workshop, titled "Professional Development Seminar for Adult Learning: New Teacher Orientation for ABE and GED Instruction," for my project (See Appendix A).

The orientation will include three modules, which will provide instructors with methods to increase retention for learners enrolled in adult education programs. The facilitator will present the orientation via a PowerPoint presentation (See presentation outline in Appendix A). Supplemental resources (e.g., handouts and activities) are also included in Appendix A. Through implementing the orientation, I intend to bring about positive social change by increasing retention and graduation rates. The professional development workshop will enable adult education instructors to obtain pertinent information on the retention of learners. A timeline will be included for the orientation designed for new adult education instructors. The following section includes the project description, goals for the orientation, rationale, review of the literature, positive social change implications, and a summary.

Description and Goals

The project that evolved as an outcome of the research is an orientation for new adult education instructors. The professional development training will focus on the themes that emerged as instrumental in assisting adult education instructors and adult learners in overcoming students' internal and external. Caffarella and Vella (2010) denoted the importance of developing clear goals when planning programs. The researchers (2010) emphasized that the project goals ought to convey broad intents of purpose and should respond to the question of why a program should be designed and implemented. My goal for the professional development workshop is to eliminate the potential barriers associated with learner persistence. The professional development will highlight strategies and action plans to assist adult learners and instructors in (a) situational hardships, (b) personal investment: motivation, (c) time management, and (d) technology-based instruction.

Rationale

Investigators have performed extensive research on the perceived and experienced barriers to retention of adult learners in colleges and universities (Kim & Frick, 2011; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012; McGrath, 2009) however, little is known about the barriers associated with adult learners enrolled in adult education and literacy programs, particularly in rural communities. My intention in conducting this project study was to explore instructors' and students' perceived and experienced barriers, as well as investigate instructor's current practices being implemented to influence positive retention efforts.

Retention continues to be a challenging issue among U.S. colleges and universities (Fincher, 2010). The dynamics of learners who are entering postsecondary institutions is shifting dramatically, and these shifts have had an immense effect on retention. Thus, it is beneficial to explore the hastily progressing cluster of prospective adult learners of society (Fincher, 2010). The complexity of retaining these diverse groups of learners, who often arrive with minimal academic preparation, is further confounded by aspects of retention management. Adult learners fail to complete their courses and obtain their GEDs due to many internal and external restraints (Mein, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial for adult education stakeholders to investigate the dilemma of retention and present a platform to alleviate some of the problems distinctive to nontraditional learners (Fincher, 2010). Exploring these issues could help adult learners and instructors combat the internal and external barriers that are associated with low retention rates.

Institutions that serve adult learners are often challenged with students' irregular attendance. In many instances, students who attend courses irregularly are less likely to graduate or complete a program (Shapiro & Bray, 2011). Yet, far less research has been conducted on creating early alerts for learners who display signs of dropping out (Shapiro & Bray, 2011). Researchers that investigate potential factors in students dropping out from educational programs have generally emphasized student demographics such as ethnicity, sex, socioeconomic status, and previous learning experiences (Bourgeois, 2012; Howley, Chavis, & Kester, 2013; Shapiro & Bray, 2011; Woodford & Mammen, 2010).

A student's decision to drop out of school is due to various circumstances and is

frequently the result of an extensive progression of educational disconnection. The choice to withdraw from school transfers immense cost to both the adult learner and society. (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Individual costs comprise minimal wages, greater probability of unemployment, and higher risk of health issues as minority and low income students are significantly more likely than their wealthy counterparts to drop out of school. The individual costs plummet disproportionately across groups (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Societal costs include deficits of tax revenue, increased spending on public assistance and higher crime rates (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

While the negative effects of dropout are well known, understanding the depth of the problem and its effects on adult education systems is surprisingly difficult (Zachary, 2010). To increase the persistence rates of adult learners, strategies such as (a) democratization of the classroom, (b) adjustment of curriculum to meet immediate student interest and demand, and (c) development of learners' metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness can be adapted within adult education programs (Fritz & Alsabek, 2010). Based on my data analysis and the literature review, I chose the professional development genre as it could serve as a guide for rural adult education instructors to increase adult learners' persistence and graduation rates.

The project's goal is to develop a means to implement strategies to overcome the barriers associated with learner persistence. I selected a professional development workshop as the most relevant means to use the data accumulated in qualitative multiple case study. The workshop may provide supplemental support for current and previously enrolled students. Instructors may benefit from the orientation's relevant information on

increasing retention planning, instructional effectiveness, and academic advising or counseling. Students may reap the benefits of overcoming barriers, setting goals, and maintaining retention. I chose the genre of professional development because it has the potential to serve adult education instructors and students immediately and because it can be easily implemented within any adult education program.

Review of the Literature

Although within the review of literature, I did not locate information on professional development workshops specifically designed for adult education instructors and learners involved in GED programs, current research does reveal that professional development can be beneficial in increasing student retention and graduation (Berger, 2014; Khan, 2012; Larsen, 2012; Loo, 2013; Nicoll & Edwards, 2011; Rieckhoff & Stewart, 2012; Stewart, 2014; Trent, 2012). Based on the findings of the research and the subsequent design of the professional development workshop, saturation in the literature was accomplished by using Boolean search terms such as *professional development*, *new teacher orientation*, *adult education*, *adult learners*, *best practices*, *goal setting*, *instructional effectiveness*, *motivation*, *academic advising*, *retention*, and *retention*. A thorough search of the Walden University library databases, including ERIC, SAGE, ProQuest, and Educational Research Complete generated peer reviewed articles on the subjects of professional learning for adult education and the specific elements to consider when designing and implementing such workshops. Google Scholar also provided resources on the subject of professional development.

The theme that surfaced from both the literature reviews and data from the multiple case study was the need for specifically designed professional development for adult education instructors and students. The literature supports the view that professional development has the potential to increase students' success, leading to increased retention and graduation rates. The lack of research pertaining to specifically designed professional development for adult education instructors and students in rural communities highlights the needs for such programs. Using the data gathered for this study and the development of a professional development workshop provides a starting point for meeting the need. The literature review focuses on the benefits of professional development workshops. Moreover, an overview of the specific form of professional development, an orientation for new teachers, is provided. Finally, the 3 components of the orientation are examined: motivations and barriers of adults, time management, and integrating adult learning theory and technology into the adult education curriculum.

Professional Development for Adult Learning

Throughout the years, the quality of professional development within the adult education arena has undergone major discussions, despite the fact that this topic has been clarified in many cases and is specific to content (Berger, 2014). The spectrum of adult education is one that is extensive; therefore, it is not uncommon that the discussions regarding the content of professional development in the field are ongoing.

Consequently, oppositions regarding growth in adult education have caused rejection of an explicit professional development. In some cases, this has resulted into a rejection of a specifically professional philosophy altogether, in addition to debates over the qualities

that professionalism ought to comprise. Nonetheless, this has not immobilized the expansion of professional development workshops, conferences, and the like among adult educators throughout the universe.

Professional development in the field of adult education is provided by technical colleges, colleges, and universities—both accredited and unaccredited. The components of these workshops range from explicit in content to implicit, and focus on the competences and skills necessary for adult educators (Nicoll & Edwards, 2011). Professional development for staff is a mechanism that is capable of producing competence within instructors. This in turn can have an immense influence on the quality of students and mentors. The incorporation of staff development and training has the potential to increase instructional knowledge. Moreover, innovative approaches are implemented into current practices. (Khan, 2012). Staff training and development provides an authentic instrument for stakeholders as they strive to implement comprehensive, quality management. These training sessions and staff development programs affect the instructional practice, educational cognizance, and research ability of staff members, which they incorporate into their instruction and which ultimately, impacts the learners' achievement (Khan, 2012).

Professional development is being implemented into a number of academia to provide staff with opportunities to meet both personal and professional goals. Institutions are challenged with ensuring that learners are provided ultimate learning opportunities within their organizations (Rieckhoff & Larsen, 2012). Professional development for

adult education instructors is most noteworthy when participants are colleagues who are serving in similar roles and striving to achieve common missions (Stewart, 2014).

Activities that are recommended for professional development entail (a) exploring data on learner progress, (b) examining learner work, (c) establishing suitable approaches to facilitate learning, (d) creating and evaluating operative curriculums, and (e) developing learner focused evaluations to assess progress (Stewart, 2014). Focusing upon the elements of professional learning experiences within a professional learning workshop can create the organization that is necessary to advance adult education instruction. These scholarship opportunities should be in alignment with existing ingenuities and goals within organizations that approve linking theoretical discoveries to practice, and integrating viewpoints and reflections (Stewart, 2014).

Generally, professional development is most practical when it is engaging, emphasizes content, creates alternatives to instructional practices, enhances knowledge, and ultimately improves student learning (Loo, 2013). The most comprehensive analysis to date of adult learning contexts also validates the need for program based professional development that helps teachers actively acquire skills with which they can build theories of good teaching (Hanna, Salzman, Reynolds, & Fergus, 2010). Professional learning experiences should be relative to the specific learning environments, data driven, learner centered, incorporates opportunities for active learning, and ensues over a time span that will enable phases of progression, application, and assessment. Additionally, topics should be purposeful, explicit, and interconnected to learning theory and criterions

informed by national workforce and post secondary preparation standards (Stewart, 2014).

Professional developers for an ABE literacy program in Ohio concurred with other researchers concerning an active learning model for professional learning. This cohort of professionals focused their efforts over the last several years on more actively engaging adult basic education teachers as learners in the professional development that was offered. By creating activities that engaged teachers in active learning with their adult students, they hoped to help those teachers see the benefit of using more active learning strategies in instruction. Because students were present, teachers had the unique experience of concurrently viewing the class from both a student's and an instructor's perspective (Hanna et al., 2010).

Research has shown that professional development is comprised of all the conventional learning proficiencies and those sentient and strategic activities that are anticipated to be direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group, or institution and which contribute through these to the quality of education in the learning environment (Trent, 2012). Professional development requires preliminary planning to ensure its overall effectiveness. For the purposes of this study, the form of professional development training that is being designed is an orientation for new teachers. Research on orientations will be discussed in the next section.

New Teacher Orientation

As mentioned previously, the specific genre of professional development that is proposed for this study is a new teacher orientation. The orientation will focus on three

components that are essential to establish adult learning environments (a) motivations and barriers, (b) time management, and (c) integrating adult learning theory with technology. Although the research on topics explicit to orientation for new adult education instructors were minimal, what little research that was available indicated that pre-service teacher training programs are important elements for training qualified teachers. Recently, the background, experience, and qualifications of adult educators have been considered to be of great importance for the success of the training of teachers. These requisites can only be met by the instructors that possess the necessary knowledge and experience, and who have been trained by competent facilitators (Ritter, 2009). Consequently, it is strongly emphasized that new teacher educators should participate in a good training process in order to acquire professional competence (Gurgur, 2012).

The focus of the adult education orientation is to train faculty to deliver instruction successfully as well as to assist them with designing or modifying their curriculum. Working together in a collaborative environment is a common practice in the education arena, and it has incentives that include accomplishment, inspiration and gratification. Recurrently planned sessions could be extended to larger clusters of participants, hence allowing interaction amid participants and a replication of the learning experience received by students in their adult learning setting. Affording participants with this opportunity is critical as it could enhance their knowledge that is related students' experiences in their adult education courses (Gurgur, 2012).

In addition, the orientation would follow the principals of active learning, a model of instruction that focuses the responsibility of learning on learners, and student-centered

instruction, which encompasses methods of teaching that shift the focus of instruction from the teacher to the student. Like their students, faculty members are adult learners, and their needs are analogous. Adult learners favor an educational encounter that is pertinent to their lives. A workshop that comprises realistic assessments, engages the participant in the construction or modification of their curriculum as they progress through the orientation. As a result, the orientation provides instructors with an experience that is relevant to the learners. By the end of the orientation, faculty members would have acquired the necessary skills to provide instruction.

Facilitation. Employing a learner-centered method for faculty to teach online allows students to build upon their prior knowledge and explore desired or required topics to learn about in a facilitated environment. Orientation facilitators might include an instructional designer and experienced online faculty members who regularly exemplified best practices by being active in discussions forums, maintaining a rich presence within the online environment, and providing timely feedback to participants, just as they would be expected to do with actual students (Vaill & Testori, 2012).

Moreover, stakeholders can gather resources and develop intellectually stimulating activities to promote a deeper understanding of active teaching and learning to allow participants to explore assessment strategies, pedagogy, reflective teaching and learning, and innovative practices. The orientation might consist of a learning experience where faculty could work together as a community of reflective practitioners with one-to-one support as needed (Eliason & Holmes, 2012). In addition to the incorporation of

active learning and student-centered instruction, the orientation for this study will incorporate principles related to learning how to learn and backward design.

Learning-how-to-learn

Adult learners frequently approach the learning environment with the means to an effectual process referred to as learning how to learn. Learning-how to-learn has various connotations. The formative research on learning-how-to-learn was assembled by Robert M. Smith (1982). The researcher formed a theory and series of professional learning modules which were established upon the philosophy that it is just as significant for adults to receive instruction on how to learn as it is to identify specific curriculum content for learning. Smith's (1982) presented a working definition of learning-how-to-learn as "a matter of the adult's having (or acquiring) the knowledge and skill essential to function effectively in the various learning situations in which he finds himself." Smith (1982) described learning how to learn as "possessing, or acquiring, the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in whatever learning situation one encounters." Grasping the concept of learning-how to-learn is essential to the adult education field as it holds great promise for helping adults expand their learning effectiveness (Knowles, 1998). The model is significant because it transpires in everyday lives, yet marginal research concerning learning how to learn beyond formal educational or structural settings exists.

Learning from daily circumstances, events, challenges, and encounters is a process learners confront on numerous occasions. Adult education investigates the advantages of learning applications that are relative to the experiences of adult learners, in contrast to learning that is from lecture based curricula in formal education. Learning

that is centered on reality is applicable to the existing responsibilities of the individual as opposed to standard based instruction that is deemed more appropriate within formal educational settings (Bear, 2012). In formal educational settings, the learning process is structured differently from the concepts of relative learning. The principle of relative learning ensures that more detail is given to relevant tasks rather than standards recommended by conventional instruction. Generally, the conventional educational experience denies individuals the opportunities to learn from everyday life experience (Hanna et al, 2010).

Backward design

Backward design is a method developed by Wiggins & McTighe (2005) that has been primarily unincorporated in K-12 curriculum design; however, the model has become increasingly popular in higher education courses and curriculum planning. The backward design model encourages teachers to reflect upon their overall objectives as educators and outline their goals for learning understanding and measurable objectives from the outset. In backward design form follows function, with instructors first focusing on desired results before looking at content, methods, and activities most likely to achieve those results (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). As opposed to restricting instructional practices to textbooks or other resources as the primary curriculum materials, practitioners of backward design articulate the expected goals and objectives that learners are expected to achieve at the end of a course. As a result of setting transparent learning goals and objectives, teachers using student centered, backward course design can stimulate their learning environments, observe increased motivation

from students, improve learners' confidence in their learning, and witness an increase in student engagement (Linder, Cooper, McKenzie, Raesch, & Reeve, 2014). This section summarized the contents of the orientation for the project. Learning environments based upon the motivation and barriers of adult learners will be addressed in the following section.

Learning Environments: Motivational Factors and Barriers

A number of studies provide rationales for the dramatic influx of returning adult learners. Some of these explanations among major motivational factors included: altering life experiences, employment dilemmas, changes in family situations, and personal challenges (Cleary & Wozniak, 2013; Narushima, Liu & Diestelkamp, 2013). Other researchers indicate that adults enroll in educational programs to increase their employability skills and fulfill social statuses or to change careers (Strong & Harder, 2011). Motivational inclinations of adults to attend learning programs are key components for academic achievement. Many nontraditional adult learners possess high self-esteems, but there are also positive correlations between their self-esteem and intrinsic motivation. Understanding the motivational dispositions of adult students can help educators create successful learning environments (Francois, 2014).

Motivation is the drive that enables adult learners to defeat barriers to persistence in adult learning programs (Petty, 2014). Situational factors beyond their control (e.g., attaining employment, health, issues, transportation, and childcare) is one primary obstacle that adults face (Francois, 2014). Adult learners are also confronted with

institutional barriers such as instructional levels, location, and attendance. They also contend with dispositional barriers associated with self-efficacy and self-regulation (Petty & Thomas, 2014).

Facilitating self-efficacy. Facilitators can implement instruction that are relative to theories of self-efficacy and self-directed behaviors. Some examples of this might include involving learners in activities and learning experiences that require them to apply and demonstrate appropriate behaviors that reinforce the theoretical content of the lectures. In addition, extra tasks can be set weekly, which require learners to further engage with self-directed study behaviors during their home study prior to the next lecture (Whannell, Whannell & Allen, 2012).

Other approaches involve utilizing activity menus during instruction. Students are provided with a list of activities and they select which activity to work on and how, independently, in pairs, or small groups. They then share their work with the class at the end of a designated period. Activity menus allow the instructor to model participation by creating a more student centered classroom. They allow students to take responsibility for their own learning. This strategy fosters instructional practices such as active learning, community building, and self-efficacy, all of which have been found to improve persistence (Gardner, 2011).

Self-efficacy has been used successfully by prior studies as a highly reliable measurement for predicting the integration or implementation of technology in instruction (Whannell, Whannell & Allen, 2012). Many returning adult learners have encountered an educational setting that heavily embedded with technology. Learning

instructional content and technology collaboratively can be intimidating for students who feel apprehensive about using technology (Sivakumaran & Lux, 2011). To create positive learning environments, programs should focus on reducing anxiety and building efficacy by including instructional practices that contain optimistic and encouraging formats (Sivakumaran & Lux, 2011).

Facilitating self-regulation. Self-regulation, which is integrated in backward design (discussed in the previous section), is a vital component of the instructional environment. Self regulation emphasizes goal setting, goal operating, and goal monitoring (Burnette, Boyle, VanEpps, Pollack & Finkel, 2013). Homework, which is a conventional activity across grade and skill levels, was one of the subthemes from this study. Homework has been traditionally viewed as an important instrument for developing better study habits and anticipated self-regulatory tactics (e.g., better time management) (Xu & Wu, 2013).

The online platform is another means by which self-regulation can be embedded. Computer based learning environments allow individuals to actively engage in and regulate learning activities. Active engagement is a renowned approach for sustained learning and learning online would consequently appear to be especially advantageous for stimulating motivated learning. Computer-based learning environments should contain aspects of self-regulated learning, including goal setting, monitoring, and knowledge acquisition (Sansone, Fraughton, Zachary, Butner & Heiner, 2011).

Instruction is most effective when it is focused on planning and evaluation. Instruction might entail discussions, using think aloud methods, and modeling evaluation.

Self-regulation strategies, such as brainstorming and taking a stance, can be incorporated throughout the stages of instruction to encourage independence. Graphic organizers can be supplied for the brainstorm and a printed evaluation rubric to support evaluation (MacArthur & Lembo, 2009).

Overall, motivation can become a complex matter, particularly in varying situations in which learners require extensive attention (Francois, 2014). Researchers have unveiled that adult learners enter adult education programs with ample motivation to persist; nevertheless, along the path, the barriers that adult learners experience demotivate them (Petty, 2014). In an effort to confront the barriers of learners, adult education programs should employ systems that promote contact and follow up that offers support to learners who withdraw and desire to return to the program, also soliciting information that can advance and expand the program services (Linder et al., 2014). Students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that maintain distinct expectations for student. The ultimate goal of adult learning programs should be to maintain motivating learning environments for the students (Hanna et al., 2010)

Programs should provide professional development opportunities and include instructors and students in the decision making processes of educational programs (Francois, 2014). Improved training for instructors can assist in better instruction and support for adult students. Students embrace exclusive instruction and experience progress in which they are more likely to persist. To be successful with student retention, institutions should distinguish the foundation of challenges students encounter (Olesen-

Tracey, 2010). Postsecondary institutions must then cultivate positive measures for motivating students to persist in pursuing their academic goals (Petty & Thomas, 2014).

Adult education programs must have a system that promotes contact and follow-up that lends a hand to students who drop out and desire to return to the program, also soliciting information that can advance and expand the program services. Students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that hold high and clear expectations for student. Above all, the utmost goal of the institution should be to maintain motivating learning environments for the students (Petty & Thomas, 2014).

Learning Environments: Time Management

Both the review of literature and the results of the study confirm that many adult learners cope with challenging matters comprised of studying, family, working, and other important commitments (Romero & Barbera, 2012). This orientation for new instructors will provide time management tips that might be helpful to adult learners. These components could be applied to learners enrolled in face to face courses as well as the current online options available to the participants referenced in this study.

From an instructional perspective, time flexibility indicates that academic learning schedules can be adapted based on learners' convenience and educational development. For students, time flexibility is described as the students' capacity to adjust their academic schedules according to their learning time availability (Petty & Thomas, 2014). Learners' time flexibility is established by their ability to distribute time to reviewing and studying for their courses, as well as the quantity and quality of time they can devote to

these activities (McClanahan, 2014). Therefore, instructors should consider time flexibility in terms of students, instruction, and learning.

Learner's availability to devote to their academic goals is therefore a central element in the adult learning setting because of the lack of time adults have (McClanahan, 2014). Students engaged in adult learning environments are frequently adult learners who have employment and personal constraints. The time they can designate to their education is therefore condensed, and is frequently the time they can spare after their employment related, social, and personal obligations have been satisfied (Romero & Barbera, 2011). Thus, the orientation for new instructors will integrate strategies that focus specifically on time management recommendations for adult learners.

Learning Environments: Integrating Adult Learning with Technology

In any professional development model encompassing adult learning practices, it is beneficial to be acquainted with the learning model of andragogy. Though there are disapprovals of the implications of Knowles' Andragogical model, the theorist's methodology realizes the necessity for adult learners to obtain proficiencies that will empower them to employ technology both in and outside of their learning settings (McClanahan, 2014).

The educational prerequisites for learners that are outcomes from the continuous upsurge in technology are embedded in the adult learning principles of (a) andragogy, (b) self-directed learning, (c) learning how to learn, (d) real life learning, and (e) learning strategies. Stakeholders in the adult education field have developed an immense

interested in self-directed learning (Bear, 2012). The process ensues once learners take the initiative for establishing their learning requirements, conveying learning goals, recognizing resources for learning, selecting and utilizing applicable learning tactics, and assessing learning outcomes. (Knowles, 1980). The notion of self-directed learning relates to various learning experiences in the Technology Age. These experiences could include individual or multiple learners and could occur in diverse settings.

Students attain more when they are actively involved in learning. Dewey (1938) devoted interest on the concept of experiential education as a revenue to appealing learners and stimulating active investigation in the learning setting. In recent years, researchers have investigated the significance of linking teaching to learners' necessities and experiences beyond lectures to encourage participation and, thus, learning (Condelli, Wrigley, & Yoon, 2009). Technology makes it possible to create real world experiences within the classroom via multimedia collaborations, and by doing so, it reinforces the links amid instruction and the experiences and necessities of the learners (McClanahan, 2014).

The results of a survey study, disclosed that the key motivations for adult learners' return to educational settings are related to employment (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Currently, technology permeates our surroundings and the employment industry acclaims those who are experienced with it (McClanahan, 2014). Therefore, when adult learners become familiar with technology and they develop technological skills, as a result of attending adult education programs, it can help to support their motivation to learn. The incorporation of technology into instruction

cultivates both employability and communicative competencies simultaneously (McClanahan, 2014).

The abilities and skills required for adults to perform successfully as self-directed learners have and continue to receive dedicated attention. Specific to online teaching and learning, learners' abilities to function independently, manage their time efficiently, and acquire computing, literacy dialogue and interpersonal communication skills essential to be self-directed learners, are regarded as the necessary skill sets (Hunte, 2012). However, learners do not automatically possess this skill set and as a result, it must be explicitly taught and supported in the online learning environment (Bear, 2012). This activity includes learners in self-assessment applications as these permit them to concentrate on their skills, needs, potentials and areas that entail distinct awareness and in this manner not only prepare themselves for online learning but put themselves in a better situation to profit from the experience (Hunte, 2012).

Implementation

I will be accountable for the implementation of the Professional Development Seminar for Adult Learning: New Teacher Orientation for ABE and GED Instruction (See Appendix A) which will entail the following actions (a) obtain consent from the local technical college/adult education program to conduct the 3 day orientation seminar, (b) contact the Executive Director of Campus Life to ensure the appropriate steps are taken, as outlined per school policy, regarding the use of facilities and approval, (c) plan for the orientation, (d) conduct the workshop incorporating elements of effective

professional development, and (e) evaluate results of the orientation. Implementation of the new teacher orientation for adult education instructors would become effective upon approval from Walden University. The professional learning workshop would tentatively occur during the 2016 fall semester. By conducting the orientation early in the semester, participants will have an opportunity to immediately incorporate and apply new skills and knowledge learned in the seminar.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

I will follow the technical college's protocol and meet with the designated officials to discuss the resources the college is willing to offer. A classroom or meeting room and computers or laptops will be necessary for the orientation. The classroom should have both round and rectangular tables for small and large group discussions. A projection system with audio availability will be required for PowerPoint presentations and YouTube videos. Other resources needed include chart paper, markers, and pencils.

There will be no cost for the participants who attend the orientation; however, they will be asked to bring items to take notes (e.g., notepads, pens, and pencils). If the budget allows, continental breakfast items will be provided all 3 days of the orientation. In addition, water will be provided for participants to obtain during the breaks. Participants will be responsible for purchasing their own lunch.

Potential Barriers

One potential barrier is the current lack of funding within the adult education division for the orientation. In the event that this is a problem, funding sources could possibly be obtained from other divisions as retention of adult education students affects

the technical college as well. Another potential barrier would be the reluctance of the college to approve and host the 3 day orientation program. This could be offset by contacting local libraries, community centers, or other agencies. An additional potential barrier could be new instructors' disinterest in participating in the orientation. Should this occur, I could survey new instructors in all divisions of the college to determine their levels of interest and conduct workshops based upon the feedback that is received.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The implementation of this project could occur during the 2016-2017 academic year. After the project has been approved by the technical college and adult education program for implementation, the orientation program will begin during the fall semester. The 3 day orientation program will be presented on three consecutive weekday, Monday-Wednesday. These particular dates were selected as they are preservice days for instructors. Students will not yet have returned from the semester break; therefore, the orientation would not interfere with regularly scheduled classes. Moreover, new instructors would have the opportunity to interact with other instructors and become familiar with the adult education environment prior to their official instructional class date. Enrollment will be limited to a maximum of 20 instructors. The 3 days will consist of a 7 hour day; participants will have two 15-minute breaks; a 60-minute lunch break will be given at 11:45 am each day.

Caffarella and Vella's (2010) Interactive Program Planning Model will serve as the guide to conduct the orientation sessions. The model provides an interesting approach to creating a model for planning programs. With no specific beginning or

ending, it sets the decision making process within the boundaries of the individual accountable for designing programs for adults (Caffarella & Vella, 2010).

On the first day the program, overall goals and objectives will be introduced, and subsequent sessions will begin with the learning objectives to be addressed on that day. Sessions will also include an icebreaker, a mini lecture via PowerPoint and YouTube, a small/large group activity, pair share activity, a brainstorm activity, and a writing activity. At the end of day 1 and 2, participants will engage in a Twitter feed (formative evaluation) which will be displayed on a screen in the orientation setting. Attendees will be given the opportunity to share ideas, questions, or concerns without publicly making them uncomfortable. This method of formative evaluation might be useful towards engagement consideration. Additionally, the Twitter feed could model the usage of technologies within the instructional environment, as well as frame the teacher's cognitive understandings revolving how to implement technology within an appropriate instructional environment. On the last day of the orientation, a summative evaluation questionnaire will be distributed. (See Appendix A for additional resources for the professional development workshop, including the timetable, PowerPoint presentation for the workshop, handouts, and activities).

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

I will serve as the program developer and facilitator. I will need to present the proposal to the technical college and adult education program to receive their endorsement. I will schedule a face to face meeting with the Vice President of Adult Education, and present a copy of the proposed agenda, upon approval of this project by

Walden University. After I have been awarded approval, I will collaborate with the necessary faculty and staff to secure to a location for the orientation program, and obtain the required equipment.

The participants' roles and responsibilities will be present on all three days, arrive on time, and remain for the duration of the sessions. Moreover, participants are expected to actively participate in all sessions, and be candid in their evaluation of the program. This will be necessary to ensure essential implementations for adult learners.

Project Evaluation

Evaluation planning is an integral component of professional development planning. The evaluation design and approach of the orientation seminar will be participant and outcome based. Evaluation designs that are participant based have participants complete evaluation surveys that denote their views on the content, project design, presenter, facilities, and effectiveness of the learning outcomes (Caffarella & Vella, 2010). Both formative and summative surveys will be used so that I can receive instantaneous feedback. This will permit the opportunity to improve the design of the orientation both during and after the workshop.

Formative evaluations will provide feedback to improve or change the program while it is in progress (Caffarella & Vella, 2010). Participants will be engage in a writing activity in which they will complete lesson plans (See Appendix A) each day to evaluate their learning experience. In addition, participants will have the opportunity to post comments, questions, or concern via a Twitter feed (See Appendix A). This will allow me to assess learning outcomes each day.

The summative evaluation (Caffarella & Vella, 2010) will entail a Likert scale survey and short-answer response inquiries (See Appendix A). The electronic evaluation will be given to the participants on the final day of the orientation. Participants will access Survey Monkey to complete the evaluation. The data received will be two fold. It will be used to evaluate the professional learning workshop as a whole and to implement strategies for future seminars.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

Completion rates for rural learners are considerably low compared with practically every other demographic group, and are linked with low levels of achievement and extreme rates of absenteeism (Jackson-Barrett, 2011). Adults with minimal educational achievement often comprise populations with low levels of income, high levels of unemployment, in rural and isolated regions, and in areas with high levels of social welfare needs (Jackson-Barrett, 2011).

The new teacher orientation focuses on themes that were found to be instrumental in assisting 12 participants from an adult education program. The orientation program addresses understanding the motivation and barriers of adult learners, time management, and integrating adult learning theory and technology. The implementation of the orientation has the potential to increase the retention rates of adult learners in rural communities, thus increasing the percentage of adult learners obtaining a GED and entering postsecondary education and the workforce.

Far-Reaching

Deficits in retention rates are often a result of low literacy skills (Yildiz, 2011). An estimated 21-23% or some 40-44 million of the 191 million adults in the United States demonstrate low literacy skills (United States Department of Education, 2013). The adult population in the rural county addressed at the time of this study was 7,850, and more than 30% of those adults had less than a high school diploma (United States Bureau of Statistics, 2013). The median income of \$19,921 for this rural community is significantly below the state's average of \$46,007 (Georgia Community Profile, 2014). Hence, the need to increase adult literacy is apparent (Yildiz, 2011).

With the intention to prepare adult learners to enter postsecondary institutions and the workforce, it is vital that strategies for increasing GED completion are investigated and implemented. The new teacher orientation can easily be replicated in any adult education program throughout the state as well as the nation. If the orientation seminar is implemented, the outcome for the participating instructors may be an increase in retention rates of adult learners and in obtaining a postsecondary degree, which will allow them to compete for higher paying jobs. Additionally, the orientation has the potential of increasing a technical college's overall retention rate, which can lead to increased enrollment and additional state, and federal funding.

Conclusion

This section outlined the development of the project as a 3 day orientation program new adult education instructors. The orientation program focused on the

themes generated through the research and data analysis. A literature review included an overview of professional development, new teacher orientations, and adult learning environments. Moreover, the concepts of active learning, student centered instruction, learning how to learn, and backward design were summarized in the review of the literature. A discussion of new instructor orientation, which includes guidelines for project implementation, timeline, evaluation procedures, and implications for social change, was highlighted. Section 4 will further develop project strengths, remediation, and personal reflections on project development, scholarship, leadership and directions for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate adult education instructors' and learners' perceived and experienced barriers to students' persistence in rural adult education programs. The research question for the study was centered on students' and instructors' perceptions and experiences relating to the lack of student persistence in adult education. Data were collected via one on one interviews. The following themes emerged from data analysis (a) situational hardships, (b) personal investment: motivation, (c) time management, and (d) technology-based instruction. Using these themes, I developed a 3 day orientation for new adult education instructors. This section focuses on the strengths and limitations of the project and on my personal insights gained regarding scholarship, project development, and leadership and change.

Project Strengths

I believe that the new teacher orientation that I developed will offer adult education instructors many things that are not readily available. Currently, the adult education division at the study site has a manual that instructors can reference regarding instructional standards. However, the manual does not provide research based strategies for curtailing the retention barriers that adult learners often face (McGrath, 2009). The orientation might provide beginning adult education instructors with an opportunity to increase their skills, strategies, and knowledge of adult learning. New instructors can collaborate and discuss relevant instructional aspects related specifically to perceived and

experienced barriers of adult learners. In addition, they can share ideas with other new instructors, construct curriculums, and devise retention management plans.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

Program developers encounter flaws and difficulties when designing and implementing professional development workshops (Lodico et al., 2010). This professional learning workshop is no exception. One possible limitation is that the duration of the professional development training is 3 consecutive days. In addition, the orientation will occur during preservice days, which many instructors are accustomed to using for organizing their classrooms. The orientation might interfere with completing their tasks. To address this possible limitation, the orientation could be offered as professional development throughout the academic year, thereby allowing adult education instructors to sign up for individual modules on specifically scheduled dates. Instructors may find this option to be more convenient.

Another limitation might be the minimal number of adult education instructors who are able to participate in the orientation. One option could be that the technical college mandates adjunct and full time instructors from all departments to attend the orientation or complete all three sessions during their first year. Adult learners are integrated within all divisions of the college; therefore, all instructors could benefit from the professional learning workshop. Requiring instructors' participation could ensure attendance as well as prevent the training from being viewed as merely another professional development training, which could interfere with the effectiveness of the training. Still, I recommend that trainings be scheduled during semester breaks when

instructors do not teach classes. Such scheduling will prevent instructors from needing a substitute teacher in order to attend. I hope that it will allow more instructors to attend the entire training.

The decline in ABE and GED retention rates can be addressed in a various methods. A white paper might have been designed to present the necessity to amend the design of ABE and GED programs. Furthermore, a proposal for a curriculum plan may have been a deliverable technique; however, an active, learner center environment might have been absent with a curriculum plan.

Scholarship

I have to concede that the work required to obtain my doctoral degree has been an arduous journey. I have had to balance my family, career, and education during the past 4 years. The tasks have not always been easy. However, the closer I have gotten to the finish line, the more I have appreciated the obstacles that I had to sustain because they have allowed me to enhance my abilities. Although I have always enjoyed writing as a researcher, composing this document has allowed me to enrich my writing abilities. It has helped me to perfect my research skills and APA capabilities. Pursuing this doctorate degree has empowered me to view research differently. It has given me a different, better perspective of both qualitative and quantitative research. I have a greater appreciation for the field of adult education as I am now able to evaluate information through a scholarly lens. I am much more research driven now. I am more apt to apply research in my instructional practices now than I was before I began this journey. I want to be able to

share this experience with my peers and colleagues so that they are aware of the benefits of research.

Project Development and Evaluation

Developing and devising an evaluation plan for this project was no easy task. Initially, I wanted to pursue a curriculum plan that would provide instructors with the tools to implement a hybrid course for adult learners. However, after a discussion with my chair and committee, I determined that this project required something more detailed and labor-intensive. I then pondered developing a policy manual. My competences in the area of manual writing are minimal; therefore, I quickly rejected that idea. After much consideration, I finally decided to develop a professional development training for new instructors. I was adamant about creating a project that truly incorporated the findings from the study. This process entailed reviewing data closely to implement a project that could benefit both adult education instructors and learners. Thus, the project that I developed was based upon the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. The goals and objectives for this project had to align with evaluation instrument. I designed both formative and summative tools to evaluate the effectiveness of this project.

Leadership and Change

I live intently to be a leader in both my personal and professional life. The need for positive leadership is a necessity in an evolving economy, and in the field of adult education, effective change and leadership is a driving agent (Blackburn, 2010). Becoming a leader requires following a path to leadership. To me, this doctoral degree has been that path. Although within my current job my role is defined as a leader, this

doctoral journey has extended leadership to an entirely different level. I feel compelled to become a change agent within my own organization as well as internationally. I have pursued the topic of retention for the past 4 years. I have been intrigued by the findings of the research. I want to continue to find answers and solutions to queries that evolve as well as improve my expertise in my field for colleagues, adult learners, and myself.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

I perceive a scholar as someone who possesses courage, integrity, and perseverance. A scholar must have the courage to risk disapproval in the name of candor. A scholar must possess the will to take on difficult or unpopular work that others avoid, transcending ideas, rules and patterns, and imagining new questions and problems. Without the courage, I would have never embarked upon pursuing a doctorate degree. I was comfortable in my role within an academic support setting, which is where I initially began when I first enrolled as a doctoral student. Although I had thought about pursuing a doctorate degree, I never had the courage that was necessary until 3 years ago. Because of that courage, I have heightened my skills and abilities in areas of research and writing that I could never have attained if I had not pursued this prestigious degree.

I also believe that a scholar is someone who acquires integrity. Scholarship is not able to flourish if it lacks an ambiance of trust. Throughout my research, I have been careful to ensure that I set a tone that ensured integrity for the participants who were involved in my study. The pathway to my doctoral degree has shown me that the basis of scholarly existence is integrity.

Finally, perseverance is necessary to be qualified as a scholar. Institutions of higher learning seek scholars who persevere in their efforts. Good scholars, like good workers, pursue perfecting their craft over a duration of time. When I began taking courses, I served as a Tutor in an academic support center. I went on to become a Lead Instructor for adult education. Currently, I am the Coordinator of the academic support center. Pursuing my doctoral degree prepared me for my roles in each the promotions in my adult education career. In addition, it was preparing me to become a scholar. The qualities of a scholar merit special considerations that individuals who lack those qualities are not warranted. Although I have much more to accomplish, I feel that this path has awarded me the title of a scholar.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

My perception of a practitioner has changed drastically since I have been a doctoral student. I used to think that the number of years of experience quantified a person's ability, especially if that person was recognized as a leader. Over the past few years, however, I have discovered that a true expert has knowledge, experience, adaptability, and judgment. I have spent the past 3 years conducting research in the field of adult education. I think that I have become an expert in the field as I have gained knowledge, skills, and abilities that I did not possess prior to becoming a doctoral student. Thus, I have learned to apply those competences in my professional life. I have become cognizant of the role I am playing in becoming a social agent within both my professional and personal community.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

I obtained my graduate degree in Curriculum and Instruction; therefore, I felt comfortable in developing a project that might be beneficial for my colleagues. Moreover, I have spent countless hours attending professional development workshops to enhance my own professional practices. Even so, I had no idea of the immense amount of time, creativity, and effort that is required to create an original project. Designing the project was both gratifying and challenging. Yet, I can genuinely express that having completed this project, I feel like I will be able to master other projects within my field. The research, skills, and knowledge that I have attained have enabled me to devise notable products for the higher education industry.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

This project is a professional development workshop titled “Professional Development Seminar for Adult Learning: New Teacher Orientation for ABE and GED Instruction” created for first year adult education instructors. The workshop provides research-based strategies to improve the retention rates of adult learners. Many of these instructors enter the adult education field with minimal or no knowledge of adult learning theory. Several enter from professions unrelated to education, while others enter from the K-12 sector. Despite their entrance into the field, they lack the necessary skills for adult learner retention. There are professional development workshops that enhance knowledge and skills, but none of these provides a means of strengthening retention through research-based strategies. New instructors need a means of support to not only enhance their instructional practices, but also to retain adult learners by first

acknowledging their barriers to persistence. If productive, the professional development workshop has the potential to increase retention, literacy rates, graduation rates, and employability skills.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

When I started this doctoral journey, I was faced with many uncertainties, as well as some anxiety. With each assignment, the course of my doctoral studies became clearer to me; however, it was not until I became the lead adult education instructor within a rural county that I decided the direction I wanted to take to impact social change. There was this constant pattern of learners stopping in and out of the program. Administrators were constantly approaching instructors about retention efforts. I wanted to hear from adult learners and instructors to receive their perceptions on the barriers to retention and design a project that could benefit both groups.

The “Professional Development Seminar for Adult Learning: New Teacher Orientation for ABE and GED Instruction” workshop has the potential of reaching all beginning teachers. The applications that are meaningful for them can be achieved by the implementation of this workshop. Future research is also a wide open arena. Research that addresses retention of adult learners is necessary. There is a need for research into ways that a professional development workshop would be more beneficial to support new adult learning instructors. Instructors could use knowledge of ways to integrate technology in the classroom to help reach more adult learners to accommodate their busy schedules (e.g., home, employment, academics). Studies on how to better support beginning teachers offers a good direction for future scholars to engage. This professional

development workshop can be used by researchers to achieve the evidence they desire from the first year teachers who are participating in the orientation.

Conclusion

The persistence of adult learners, particularly in rural communities, has been an ongoing challenge for adult education stakeholders (Bourgeois, 2012; Lester, 2012). Student retention is essential for educational institutions to be successful in their missions, and high attrition rates imply that an institution is not meeting its objectives (Blackburn, 2010). In an attempt to address this issue, a project was designed for instructors entering the adult education arena.

The “Professional Development Seminar for Adult Learning: New Teacher Orientation for ABE and GED Instruction” was designed to support adult education instructors; however the orientation could be implemented within other higher education facets. The orientation for new instructors emerged from the results of a multiple case study on the perceived and experienced barriers to retention in rural adult learning environments. After a thorough data analysis, I determined that a professional learning workshop could guide adult education instructors in their quest to developing the necessary instructional, leadership, and research skills to improve retention rates among adult learners.

In Section 4 of the study, I provided a reflection that summarized my qualities of a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. I discussed the processes and challenges I encountered as I developed the professional development workshop. As a scholar, I gained courage, perseverance, and integrity. As a practitioner, I learned that experience

alone does not make me an expert. I also need to possess knowledge, adaptability, and judgment. As a project developer, I now possess the theoretical knowledge and skills to develop projects in my profession. As a result of conducting this research and developing this project, I have developed as a scholar, program planner, practitioner, and change agent. My hope is that the implementation of the orientation will provide the support to new instructors, which could increase retention rates and enable adult learners to obtain their academic and career related goals.

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Appendix A: The Project

Professional Development Seminar for Adult Learning: New Teacher Orientation for

ABE and GED Instruction

Appendix A: Table of Contents

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Appendix A: Introduction

The purpose of this project is to disseminate an innovative professional development for full-time and adjunct faculty in the adult education division. The goal of the project is to provide adult education instructors with resources to enhance their knowledge of adult learning, provide techniques on learner-centered instruction, and deliver strategies that employ critical thinking, problem solving, and technological skills. The intended audience will be full-time and adjunct instructors, teaching ABE and GED learners. Listed below is the outline for the 3 modules that will be used to construct the Professional Development Seminar for Adult Learning: New Teacher Orientation for ABE and GED Instruction:

Day One: Adult Learning Theory

- Motivation and Barriers (Andragogy)
- Learning-how-to-learn

Day Two: Learner-centered Instruction

- Learner-centered Instruction Components
- Backward Design
- Active Learning

Day Three: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and 21st Century Skills

- Integrating Adult Learning Theory and Technology
- Time Management

Appendix A: Timeline and Agenda

Day 1: Adult Learning Theories and Practices

Target Audience: Adult Education Instructors Setting: Adult Learning Center		
Topics: Motivation and Barriers Learning-how-to-learn		
Purpose	This session will enable instructors to gain knowledge of the motivation and barriers (andragogy) of adult learners and the principles of learning-how-to-learn.	
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instructors will be able to explain the motivation and barriers of adult learners. ▪ Instructors will be able to explain principles learning-how-to-learn into curriculum. 	
Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instructors will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of the motivations and barriers of adult learners. ▪ Instructors will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of learning-how-to-learn principles. 	
Time Required	7 hours	
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PowerPoint ▪ YouTube Video 	
Activities/Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Welcome ▪ Overview: Class objectives and outcomes ▪ Icebreaker ▪ PowerPoint/Discussion ▪ Morning Break ▪ Small Group Activity ▪ Lunch ▪ YouTube Video/Lecture ▪ Write-Pair-Share Activity ▪ Afternoon Break ▪ PowerPoint/Discussion ▪ Lesson Plan Writing Activity 	9:00-9:15 am 9:15-9:30 am 9:30-10:15 am 10:15-10:45 am 10:45-11:00 am 11:00-11:45 am 11:45-12:45 pm 12:45-1:15 pm 1:15-2:30 pm 2:30-2:45 pm 2:45-3:15 pm 3:15-3:45 pm
Evaluation	Formative Evaluation: Twitter Feed	3:45-4:00pm

Day 2: Learner-centered Practice

Target Audience: Adult Education Instructors Setting: Adult Learning Center		
Topics: Learner-centered Instruction Components Backward Design Active Learning		
Purpose	This session will enable instructors to understand principles of learner-centered instruction, backward design, and active learning.	
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instructors will be able to explain learner-centered theories. ▪ Instructors will be able to explain principles of backward design into curriculum/learning environment. ▪ Instructors will be able to explain principles of active learning. 	
Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instructors will be able demonstrate their knowledge of learner-centered instruction. ▪ Instructors will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of backward design. ▪ Instructors will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of active learning. 	
Time Required	7 hours	
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PowerPoint ▪ YouTube Video 	
Activities/Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overview: Objectives/Outcomes ▪ Icebreaker ▪ PowerPoint/Discussion ▪ Morning Break ▪ Active Learning Activity ▪ Lunch ▪ YouTube Video/Lecture ▪ Reflection Activity ▪ Role Play Activity ▪ Afternoon Break ▪ PowerPoint/ Discussion ▪ Lesson Plan Writing Activity 	9:00-9:15 am 9:15-9:30 am 9:30-10:45 am 10:45-11:00 am 11:00-11:45 am 11:45-12:45 pm 12:45-1:15 pm 1:15-1:45 pm 1:45-2:30 pm 2:30-2:45pm 2:45-3:15 pm 3:15-3:45 pm
Evaluation	Formative Evaluation: Twitter Feed	3:45-4:00 pm

Day 3: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and 21st Century Skills

Target Audience: Adult Education Instructors Setting: Adult Learning Center		
Topics: Andragogy and Technology Time Management		
Purpose	This session will enable instructors to understand the connections between andragogy and technology, as well as principles of time management that could allow the successful retention of learners.	
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instructors will be able to explain principles that incorporate andragogy and technology. ▪ Instructors will be able to explain principles time management. 	
Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instructors will demonstrate their knowledge of the connections between andragogy and technology. ▪ Instructors will demonstrate their knowledge of the principles of time management. 	
Time Required	7 hours	
Materials	PowerPoint Presentation YouTube Video	
Activities/Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overview ▪ Icebreaker ▪ PowerPoint/Discussion ▪ Morning Break ▪ Large Group Activity ▪ Lunch ▪ YouTube Video/Discussion ▪ Small Group Activity ▪ Afternoon Break ▪ PowerPoint/Lecture ▪ Lesson Plan Writing Activity 	9:00-9:15 am 9:15-9:30 am 9:30-10:45 am 10:45-11:00 am 11:00-11:45 am 11:45-12:45 pm 12:45-1:15 pm 1:15-2:30 pm 2:30-2:45 pm 2:45-3:15 pm 3:15-3:45 pm
Evaluation	Summative Evaluation	3:45-4:00 pm

Appendix A: Outline of Orientation

The facilitator will welcome the participants to the orientation of new teachers. I will inform participants of the hours of the workshop, breaks, lunch, and participants' expectations. I will share the following quote: "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education." ~*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The facilitator will allow participants to read quote silently. I will then say to the participants, "The work you do is not an easy task, but remember the impact that you are making in the lives of adult learners."

Transition: I will provide the participants with a handout that addresses background information and the origination of this professional learning workshop:

Background of the study (Handout):

Purpose of the study:

- (1) Assess the extent to which barriers identified over time to adults in rural learning environments affect retention rates at various adult education sites
- (2) Identify strategies that can assist adult learners with overcoming these barriers and obtaining their GED

Participants of the study:

- (1) 3 adult education instructors from various adult learning centers
- (2) 9 former and current adult learners

Problem statement:

The retention of adult learners is a relentless effort for stakeholders of adult education. Dedication and persistence are common themes in the literature, as investigators attempt to discern features and motivations of adult learners and the explanations for meager attendance and withdrawal (Kefallinue, 2009). Hence, the specific problem is that the lack of student persistence hinders literacy success, graduation rates, and employability skills.

Results of the study:

Four themes emerged from the data: situational hardships, self-investment: motivation, time management, and technology-based instruction.

According to the findings, the implementation of a new teacher orientation could possibly decrease the barriers to retention in adult education.

From these results, a professional development model consisting of 3 modules was created.

Transition: The facilitator will provide the participants with the agenda for the next three days.

Agenda (Handout):

Day 1: Adult Learning Theory

Motivation and Barriers

Learning-how-to-learn

Day 2: Learner-centered Instruction

Active Learning

Backward Design

Day 3: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and 21st Century Skills

Time Management

Andragogy/Technology

Overview: (15 minutes)

Learning Objectives

- Enable instructors to gain knowledge of the motivation and barriers of adult learners and the principles of learning-how-to-learn
- Enable instructors to understand principles of learner-centered instruction: active learning and backward design.
- Enable instructors to understand the connections between andragogy and technology and principles of time management.

Purpose

This session will enable instructors to gain knowledge of the motivation and barriers (andragogy) of adult learners and the principles of learning-how-to-learn.

Goals

- Instructors will be able to explain the motivation and barriers of adult learners.
- Instructors will be able to explain principles learning-how-to-learn into curriculum.

Learning Outcomes

- Instructors will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of the motivations and barriers of adult learners.

- Instructors will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of learning-how-to-learn principles.
- The facilitator will review the anticipated learning outcomes for the day's session.

Day One: Adult Learning Theories and Practices

Session 1: Motivation and Barriers

Icebreaker: Know Yourself: Your Learning History and Motivation (30 minutes)

- This activity begins with the participants using BINGO cards to help get to know each other and to identify the wealth of learning that they bring to the sessions.
- The facilitator will distribute the BINGO cards to the participants.
- The facilitator will explain that the activity is a purposeful means to gather information on learners' motivation, learning profile, and readiness.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will explain the icebreaker activity to the participants.

Materials needed: pens, pencils

Handouts: BINGO card template

Bingo Activity Instructions

- Brainstorm steps that could be taken to improve your comfort and familiarity with classroom practices that support motivation to learning.
- Reflect on the provided topics and list 5 responses per topic.
- Write the suggestions as bingo squares.

- Any squares that are not completed during the allotted time can be completed by the participants during their personal time.
- Participants will discuss their answers as a group.
- The facilitator will explain that instructors can incorporate this activity into their own instructional practices.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will explain the BINGO activity to the participants.

Brainstorm Topics for BINGO Activity

- Methods to use the adult learner's experience and knowledge as a basis from which to teach
- Tactics to show adult learners how this class will help them attain their goals
- Means to make all course and text material practical and relevant to the adult learner
- Techniques to adjust your instructional practices to meet the needs of the older learner
- Approaches to motivate adult learners to learn new information

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will give the participants a copy of the brainstorm topics for the Bingo activity.

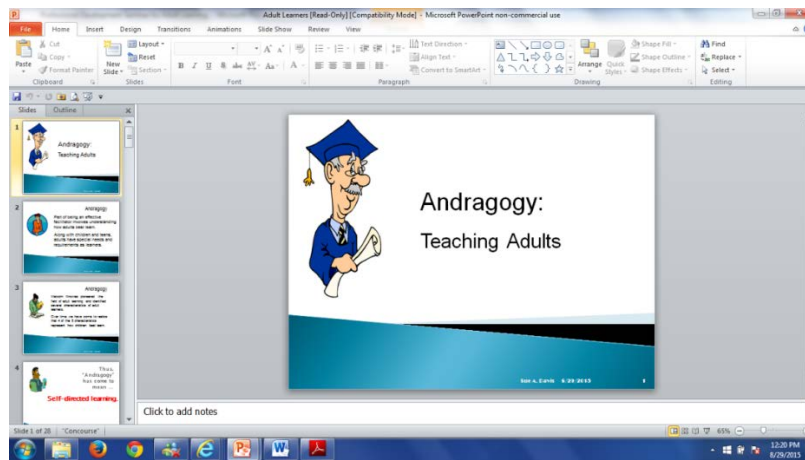
Bingo Card Template

Facilitator's Note: The facilitator will distribute a BINGO card to the participants.

B	I	N	G	O
		FREE SPACE		

Session One: Activity 1 (Day 1)

PowerPoint/Discussion: Andragogy (45 minutes)



www.kedc.org/sites/default/files/Adult%20Learners.ppt

The presentation will outline the theory of andragogy. The 8 learning principles will be explored.

Facilitator’s Note: The facilitator will give a brief overview of the PowerPoint on andragogy. Participants will be informed of the discussion that will take place after viewing the presentation. I will tell participants that we will now break into small groups to work on an activity on andragogy.

Transition: After viewing the PowerPoint Presentation, participants will be advised of a 15 minute morning break (10:45-11:00am). Upon returning from the break, the facilitator will instruct participants to split up into groups of four to five individuals.

Discussion: Andragogy

- Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
- Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.
- Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life.
- Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

Facilitator's Notes: After the participants view the PowerPoint presentation on andragogy, the facilitator will generate a discussion on the listed topics.

Session One: Activity 2 (Day 1)

Small Group Activity (45 minutes)

- Participants will devise groups of four to five people.
- Participants will be asked to list five things they have learned during their adulthood.
- The facilitator will record the groups' different things learned on a flip chart.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will read the directions for the small group activity. The results of the activity will be discussed. Note: Possible outcomes of the activity are domains of andragogy.

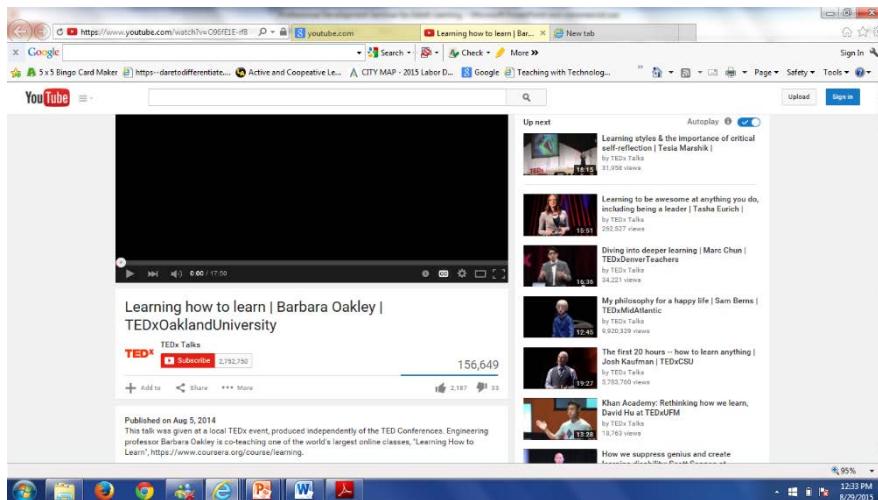
Materials Needed: chart paper, markers

Note: Participants will be informed of their dismissal for a 1 hour lunch break (11:45-12:45) after the small group activity.

Day One-Session 2: Learning-how-to-learn

Session Two: Activity 1 (Day 1)

YouTube Video/Discussion: Learning-how-to Learn (45 minutes)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O96fE1E-rf8>

gpsid.schoolwires.net/cms/lib01/TX01001872/.../learninghowtolearn.ppt

This video will explore the theory of learning-how-to-learn.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will recap the session for topics that were covered before the lunch break. Then, participants will be informed that they will watch a video on learning-how-to learn. After watching the video, we will have a group discussion.

Discussion: Learning how to learn

- Participants will be asked to discuss learning strategies and mental tools that they incorporate into their instructional practices.

- Participants will discuss new strategies that they learned from the presentation that they think might be useful in their instructional practices.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will ask participants to express their views on learning-how-to-learn.

Session Two: Activity 2 (Day 1)

Write-Pair-Share Activity (30 minutes)

- The facilitator will ask a thought-provoking question related to learning-how-to-learn.
- Participants will be given time to think about the question on their own.
- Participants will share their thought with a partner (this allows participants the opportunity to check out their answers with another person or hear another possible answer. Participants can ask their colleagues for assistance if necessary.
- The facilitator will ask for volunteers to share their thoughts with the whole group.
- The facilitator will display the diverse thinking and patterns on a flip chart to help both participants and the facilitator assess understanding and clarify ideas.

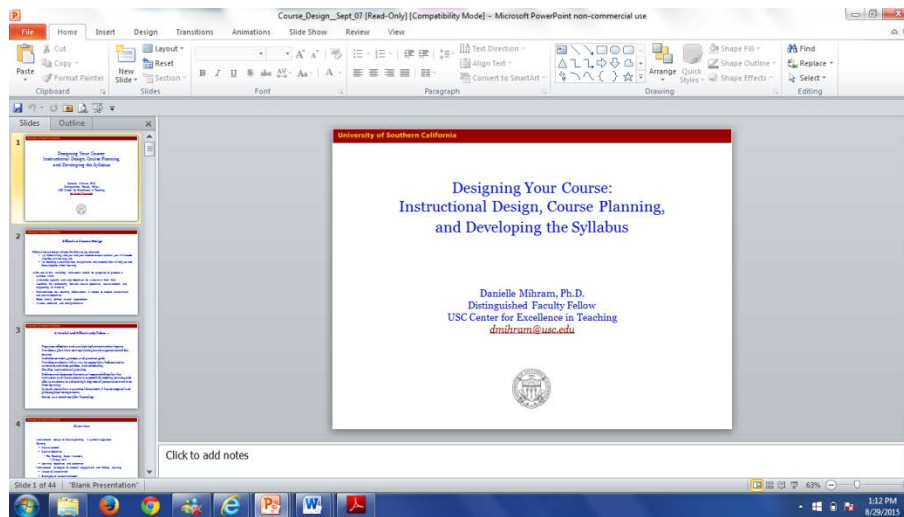
Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will explain the write-pair-share activity.

Note: After the activity is completed, participants will be given a 15 minute afternoon break.

Day One-Session 3: Course Design

Session Three: Activity 1 (Day 1)

PowerPoint/Discussion: Course Design (45 minutes)



cet.usc.edu/.../Course_Design

- Participants will view a presentation to receive information on methods to design a course/lesson for adult learners.
- The PowerPoint will explore the purpose, learning objectives, and learning outcomes when designing a course/lesson. Assessment and evaluation will also be addressed in the presentation.

Discussion: Course Design

Participants will reflect on the content, connection, and application for course design.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will guide the participants into a discussion on the content, connection, and application of course design.

Session Three: Activity 2 (Day 1)

Writing Activity: Lesson Plan-Part 1 (30 minutes)

- On Day 1, participants will form groups of 4-5 people to devise a lesson plan which incorporates adult learning theory.
- Participants can use textbooks which will be made available by the facilitator and/or internet resources.
- Participants will continue to work on the lesson plans on Day 2 and 3 of the training.
- Components learned from each day will be incorporated into the lesson plans.
- Groups will share lesson with other participants on the last day of the orientation.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will inform participants to split into groups of 4-5 people to complete a writing activity. I will explain to the participant that the writing activity will be extended through the duration of the orientation. Day 1 will consist of part one of the lesson plans. I will explain to participants that they will work with their group to devise a lesson plan of their choice. On Day 1, the activity involves incorporating one or more adult learning theories into the lesson plan. I will walk around to offer advice and/or answer questions regarding the lesson plans.

Materials Needed: pens, pencils, textbooks, computers/laptops

Handouts: Lesson plan templates

Note: Participants will be given the option to use a laptop/computer or manually complete the lesson plans.

Lesson Plan Template

Adult Education Curriculum
Sample Lesson Plan Template

ABE/GED Instructor: _____ Course Title: _____
ALC: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Topic

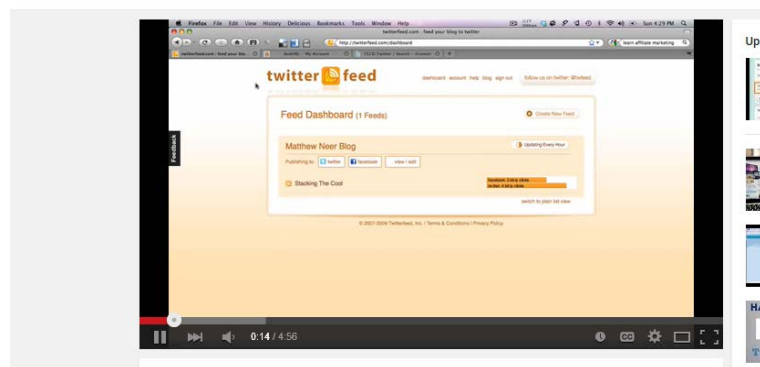
Curriculum Student Learning Outcome(s): _____

Curriculum Objective(s): _____

Materials: _____

Formative Evaluation: Day 1

Twitter Feed (15 minutes)



Participants will engage in a Twitter feed (See Appendix A: Twitter Feed Procedures). I will evaluate the participants' knowledge of the session via the Twitter feed activity. The Twitter feed, which will be displayed on a screen in the orientation setting, will allow attendees the opportunity to share ideas, questions, or concerns via blog posts to Twitter without publicly making them uncomfortable.

Prerequisite: Participants will need an existing Twitter account prior to engaging in the Twitter feed.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will summarize the contents of the day's session

Day Two: Learner-centered Instruction, Backward Design, and Active Learning

Overview: Objective/Outcomes (15 minutes):

The facilitator will share the following quote: "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." ~Benjamin Franklin Topics

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will welcome the participants to Day 2 of the new teacher orientation. I will explain the topics for the day's session. Participants will be asked to reflect upon the quote.

Purpose

This session will enable instructors to understand principles of learner-centered instruction, backward design, and active learning.

Goals

- Instructors will be able to explain learner-centered theories.
- Instructors will be able to explain principles of backward design into curriculum/learning environment.
- Instructors will be able to explain principles of active learning.

Facilitator's Notes: The goals for the session will be read.

Learning Outcomes

- Instructors will be able demonstrate their knowledge of learner-centered instruction.

- Instructors will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of backward design.
- Instructors will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of active learning.

Facilitator's Notes: the facilitator will review the anticipated learning outcomes for the session.

Day Two- Session 1: Active Learning

Icebreaker: What type of environment and activities do you find are most effective for you as a learner? (15 minutes)

- Participants will pair up with a person from their table.
- Participants will exchange thoughts for 3-4 minutes.
- Participants will rotate until they have exchanged thoughts with everyone at their table.

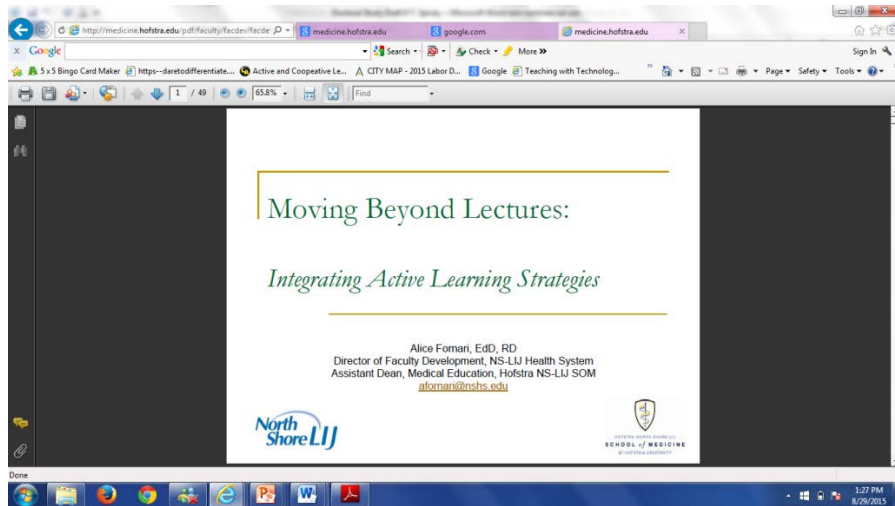
Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will explain the icebreaker activity to the participants.

Materials Needed: pens, pencils

Transition: Participants will be informed that they will now view a PowerPoint presentation on active learning.

Session One: Activity 1 (Day 2)

PowerPoint/Discussion: Active Learning (45 minutes)



http://medicine.hofstra.edu/pdf/faculty/facdev/facdev_classroom_activelearning.pdf

Facilitator's Notes: I will give participants a brief overview on the principles of active learning.

Discussion: Active Learning

- What are active learning instructional strategies?
- Why are active learning strategies instructionally important in college and university courses?
- What obstacles do faculty members commonly report limit their use of active learning instructional strategies? And, how can these barriers be overcome?

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will start a discussion with the participants using the questions listed.

Session One: Activity 2 (Day 2)

Active Learning Activity: Corners Activity (45 minutes)

- Prior to the start of the session, the facilitator will place a question on chart paper in each corner of the room for participants to record responses.
- During the activity, groups of 3-6 participants will move from corner to corner to answer each question.
- The groups will develop a consensus and write their answer directly on each flipchart.
- When the flipchart has an answer already written by a previous group, the next group will revise/expand/ illustrate that response with additional information.
- Different colored markers will be used for each group to see what each group wrote for each question.

https://www.ndsu.edu/ahss/teaching_and_learning_resources/active_learning_activities/

Facilitator's Notes: Facilitator will explain "Corners Activity" to the participants.

Materials Needed: chart paper, markers

Note: Participants will be given an hour lunch break after the small group activity.

Corners Activity Questions

- What types of lectures have you incorporated (or will) in your classroom to ensure active learning?
- What individual activities have you used (or will) to apply active learning?
- What group activities have you applied (or will) in your instructional practices to spark active learning?

- What active learning strategies do you use (or will) to promote class discussions?

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will write the questions listed on four sheets of chart paper and will have them taped on the wall. Participants will be provide with markers to record their responses to the questions. After the activity is complete, the group will discuss the responses.

Day Two- Session 2: Backward Design

Session Two: Activity 1 (Day 2)

YouTube Video/Discussion: Backward Design (30 minutes)



designhttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJWTKclIZnY

Participants will view a YouTube video on backward design.

Facilitator's Notes: I will recap the contents of the morning session. The facilitator will advise participants that the group will transition to our next topic for the day—backward design.

Session Two: Activity 2 (Day 2)

Reflection Exercise (30 minutes)

- The facilitator will ask participants what backward design strategy they anticipate being able to incorporate into their instructional practice.
- The facilitator will ask participants to reflect on an attitudinal change they will have to personally make to incorporate these specific active learning strategies into their toolbox of teaching strategies.

- Participants will display responses on chart paper.
- The group will discuss the responses.

Facilitator's Notes: I will read the directions to inform the participants how to complete the reflection exercise.

Materials needed: chart paper, markers

Note: Upon completion, participants will be given a 15 minute afternoon break.

Session Two: Activity 3 (Day 2)

Role Play (30 minutes)

- Participants will work in groups on Student Educational Plans (SEPs).
- One participant will play the role of the instructor and the other the adult learner.
- Participants will apply backward design principles to complete the SEPs.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will ask one set of participants to volunteer to demonstrate their role play.

Student Educational Plan (SEP)

STUDENT EDUCATION PLAN (SEP)

LEARNER'S NAME _____ SEP DATE _____

SHORT TERM GOAL(S) _____ INSTRUCTOR _____
 Goals for the next 6 months? How will you evaluate achievement?

LONG TERM GOAL(S) _____
 Goals for the next 6 – 12 months? How will you measure achievement?

Evaluator _____ Date _____
 Evaluator _____ Date _____
 Evaluator _____ Date _____

EXAMINE GOALS AFTER 40 INSTRUCTIONAL HOURS

GOAL DATA	DATE	MET
PRIMARY NRS	SET	TARGET

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will go over the contents of the SEP with the participants. Participants will be informed that they will participate in a role play exercise using the SEP.

Day Two-Session 3: Course Design

Session Three: Activity 1 (Day 2)

Writing Activity: Lesson Plan-Part 2 (45 minutes)

- Participants will continue to write lesson plans.
- Participants will add components of backward design and active learning to their lesson plans.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will inform participants get back into the groups that they work with yesterday to design their lesson plans. Participants will be allowed to finish anything that they did not complete yesterday. In addition, they will incorporate backward design and active learning strategies into their lesson plans.

Materials needed: pens, pencils

Handouts: SEP template

Lesson Plan Template

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Word document with the following content:

Adult Education Curriculum
Sample Lesson Plan Template

ABE/GED Instructor: _____ Course Title: _____
ALC: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Topic

Curriculum Student Learning Outcome(s): _____

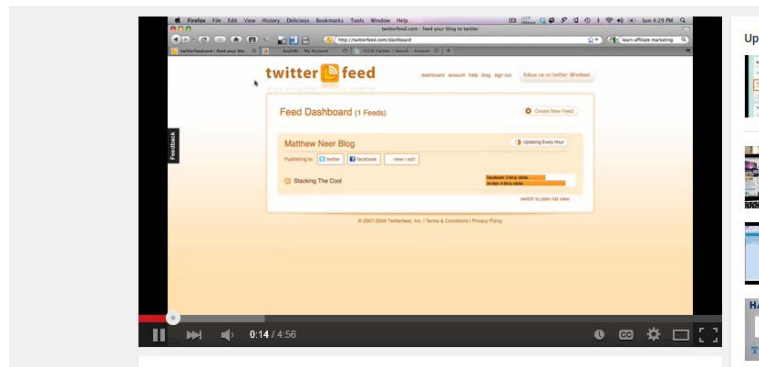
Curriculum Objective(s): _____

Materials: _____

The document is displayed in a Microsoft Word window with the title bar 'Deborah Study Draft 9 T. Spivey - Microsoft Word non-commercial use'. The ribbon shows 'Home', 'Insert', 'Page Layout', 'References', 'Mailings', 'Review', and 'View'. The status bar at the bottom indicates 'Page: 200 of 216' and 'Words: 42,940'.

Day 2: Formative Evaluation:

Twitter Feed (15 minutes)



Participants will engage in a Twitter Feed (See Appendix A: Twitter Feed Procedures). I will evaluate the participants' knowledge of the session via the Twitter Feed activity. The Twitter Feed, which will be displayed on a screen in the orientation setting, will allow

attendees the opportunity to share ideas, questions, or concerns via blog posts to Twitter without publicly making them uncomfortable.

Prerequisite: Participants will need an existing Twitter account prior to engaging in the Twitter feed.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will summarize the contents of the day's session.

Day Three: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and 21st Century

Skills

Overview (15 minutes):

I will read the following quote: "The principal goal of education in the schools should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done." ~*Jean Piaget*

The participants will be notified of topics:

- Time Management
- Andragogy/Technology

Facilitator's Notes: I will thank the participants for returning for the last day of the professional learning workshop.

The purpose will be explained:

This session will enable instructors to understand the connections between andragogy and technology, as well as principles of time management that could allow the successful retention of learners.

Facilitator's Notes: I will read the purpose of today's session from the slide.

The goals will be identified:

- Instructors will be able to explain principles that incorporate andragogy and technology.
- Instructors will be able to explain principles of time management.

The learning outcomes will be addressed:

- Instructors will demonstrate their knowledge of the connections between andragogy and technology.
- Instructors will demonstrate their knowledge of the principles of time management.

Facilitator's Notes: The anticipated learning outcomes for the session will be explained.

Day Three-Session 1: Time Management**Icebreaker (15 minutes)**

- The facilitator will divide participants into 3-4 groups.
- The facilitator will place a brief activity exercise at each group's table, with bold headline **-PLEASE START THIS GROUP EXERCISE IMMEDIATELY- YOU HAVE 15 MINUTES TO COMPLETE.**
- The task will be kept simple with materials, etc., accessible.
- The activity will generate some great discussion around who takes the lead, hesitation, procrastination, critical thinking, and problem solving, and can be referred to throughout the session.

Facilitator's Notes: I will open the session with the icebreaker. I will read the directions.

Time Management Icebreaker

PLEASE START THIS GROUP EXERCISE IMMEDIATELY- YOU HAVE 15 MINUTES TO COMPLETE.

Egg Drop

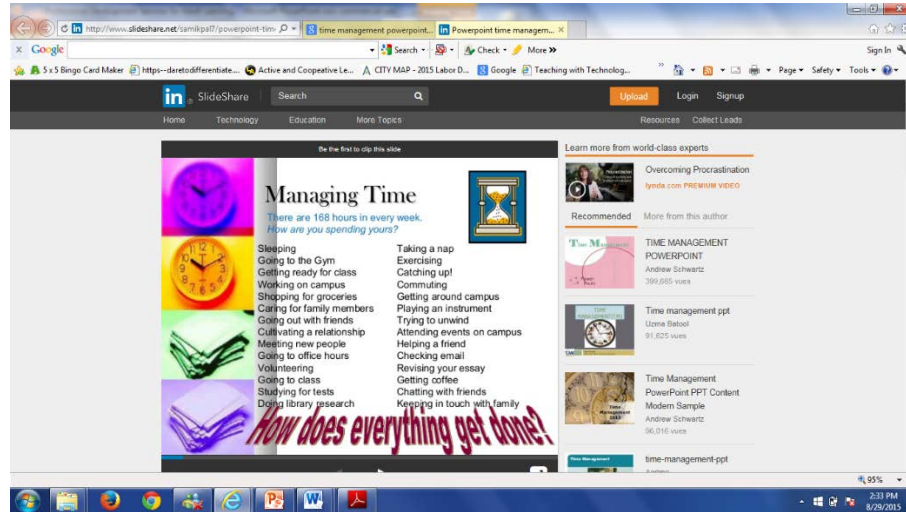
Participants will need:

- Eggs (other items may be substituted, e.g. apples, to decrease messiness)
- paper
- craft sticks
- tape
- Teams have to create a cushion for the eggs from the materials provided. They then have to drop the egg from head height without it breaking.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will pass out a handout to the participants with the directions on the slide. After the activity is completed, the facilitator will start a discussion around who took the lead, hesitation, and procrastination. The facilitator will ask participants to discuss how this activity relates to adult learners' and time management strategies. The facilitator will inform the participants that the topics from this icebreaker will be referred to throughout the session.

Session One: Activity 1 (Day 3)

PowerPoint/Discussion: Time Management (45 minutes)



http://www.slideshare.net/josephstroga/powerpoint-time-management?next_slideshow=1

Participants will view a PowerPoint Presentation on time management.

Note: Participants will be given a 15 minute break after they have viewed the presentation.

Discussion: Time Management

- Participants will be asked to engage in a discussion regarding the time constraints that adult learners may be faced with and how these constraints could be resolved.
- The facilitator will inform the participants that they will engage in an online activity that will provide them with adult learners' real life experiences with balancing their educational and personal needs.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will generate a discussion on the time constraints of adult learners and how the constraints could be resolved.

Session One: Activity 2 (Day 3)

Large Group Activity: 168 Hours (45 minutes)

Facilitator's Notes: I will explain the purpose of the large group activity. Participants will be instructed to complete the 168 Hours exercise on a computer/laptop. Participants will then reflect on questions---questions will be read from the slide.

Materials Needed: computers/laptops

Handouts: 168 Hours Time Log/Directions

Note: After the small group activity, participants will be dismissed for an hour lunch break.

Online Worksheet: 168 Hour Exercise

The 168-Hour Exercise
How Do I Use My Time Now?

Understanding how you use your time now can help you decide if you need to make changes.

- Enter the hours you think you spend on each of the activities below.
- Click the buttons below to see the total amount of time for each area of activity.
- Evaluate the results to see how you use your time now.

Only enter information where a green box with a star (*) is indicated.

ACADEMICS

1. Enter total number of class hours per week

List your courses, the grade you want to earn and the number of hours you need to study each week.

Courses I Am Taking	Grade I Want To Earn	Study Hours Per Week

Click for total number of study hours

<http://lauravanderkam.com/manage-your-time>

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will provide the participants with the website to access the 168 hour exercise. Participants will be informed that they can provide

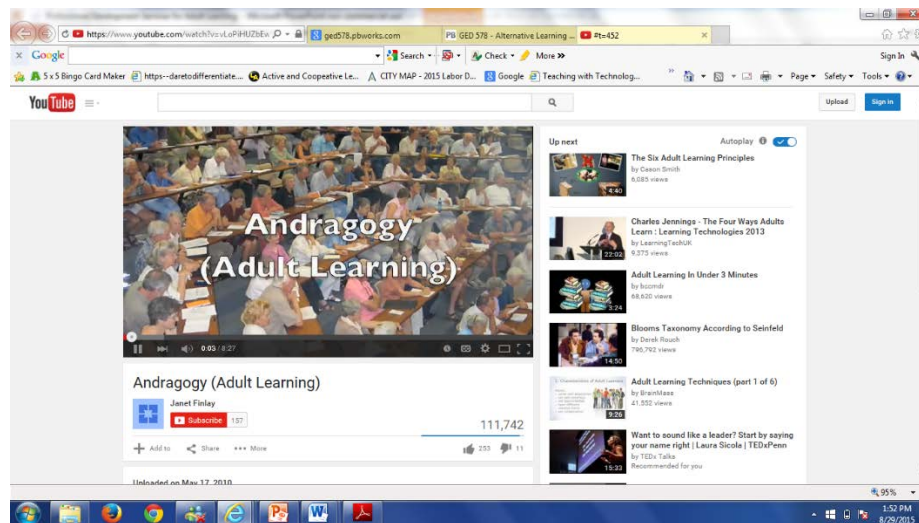
fictitious answers as some of the questions may not apply directly to them. The facilitator will state that the purpose of the exercise is for instructors to have an idea of adult learners' experiences with managing time.

Day Three-Session 2: Integrating Adult Learning Theory and Technology

Session Two: Activity 1 (Day 3)

YouTube Video/Discussion: Integrating Adult Learning Theory and Technology

(30 minutes)



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLoPiHUZbEw&feature=player_embedded

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will inform participants that they will watch a YouTube video on integrating adult learning theory and technology. The facilitator will initiate a discussion with the participants after viewing the video. Participants will be asked (1) what stood out? and (2) what strategies can you incorporate into your learning environments?

Discussion: Integrating Adult Learning Theory and Technology

- There is a need to explain the reason that explicit technological details are being conveyed to learners (e.g., certain commands, functions, operations, etc.)
- Instruction should be task-oriented instead of memorized -- learning activities should be in the context of realistic tasks to be performed.
- Instruction should entail the comprehensive range of diverse backgrounds of learners; learning resources and activities should allow for various levels of former experience with technology.
- Since adults are self-directed, instruction should allow learners to make discoveries for themselves, providing guidance and assistance when errors are made.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will create a discussion using listed topics.

Session Two: Activity 2 (Day 3)**Small Group Activity: Integrate and Restructure Instructional and Technological Strategies (30 minutes)**

Participants will be given a handout to record best practices in the physical and online environment.

Materials needed: pens, pencils

Handout: Integrate and Restructure Instructional and Technological Strategies

Integrate/Restructure Instructional & Technological Strategies

Integrate New Strategy	Restructure Existing Strategy

Facilitator Notes: The facilitator will state to the participants, “Using your knowledge of adult learning theory (Knowles), brainstorm best practices for approaching the learning experience in each example situation. If appropriate, what technologies could be incorporated to enhance the learning experience? Make an ‘Integrate New Strategy’ and a ‘Restructure Existing Strategy’ list of instructional and technological strategies and activities in light of your new knowledge about adult learners.”

Day Three-Session 3: Course Design

Session Three: Activity 1 (Day 3)

Writing Activity: Lesson Plan-Part 3 (45 minutes)

- Participants will finalize lesson plans.
- Participants will incorporate a technology segment.

- Participants will share completed lesson plans.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will inform participants that they will finalize their lesson plans today. They will be advised to incorporate technology into their lesson plans. I will explain to participants that the lesson plan that they created in this training could serve as a model for forming lesson plans in their individual teaching/learning environments. If time permits, I will allow participants to share their completed lesson plans.

Lesson Plan Template

The image shows a screenshot of a Microsoft Word document titled "Adult Education Curriculum Sample Lesson Plan Template". The document is displayed in a window titled "Deborah Study Staff 9 T. Spivey - Microsoft Word non-commercial use". The ribbon shows the "Home" tab with various font and paragraph options. The document content is as follows:

Adult Education Curriculum
Sample Lesson Plan Template

ABE/GED Instructor: _____ Course Title: _____
 ALC: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Topic

Curriculum Student Learning Outcome(s): _____

Curriculum Objective(s): _____

Materials: _____

The status bar at the bottom indicates "Page: 201 of 218", "Words: 43,040", and the date "9/11/2015".

Summative Evaluation: Day 3

(15 minutes)

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Professional Development Evaluation Form
Day 3: Summative Evaluation

Workshop Title: _____ Date: _____
Facilitator: _____ Location: _____

Place a ✓ to indicate level of satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 5
where 1= strongly agree and 5= strongly disagree.

Categories	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with the sessions					
Handouts were engaging and useful					
Time in sessions was sufficient for learning and practicing new concepts					
The workshop was well planned and interactive					
The presenter was effective					
Atmosphere was enthusiastic, interesting, and conducive to collegial professional exchange					
PD content and strategies will be useful in my work					
I would recommend this PD to colleagues					

What are the most significant concepts you learned?

- Participants will complete training evaluations.
- Evaluations will be assessed via <http://surveymonkey.com>

Facilitator's Notes: I will summarize the contents of the workshop. Participants will be allowed to ask questions or express concerns. The facilitator will inform participants to log onto a computer/laptop and assess surveymonkey.com to complete the evaluation for the orientation. I will offer any needed support to participants in completing the survey.

Note: Participants will need to have log-in credentials to assess the online evaluation.

Conclusion

Thank you for your participation in this orientation. I hope that the information that you have received over the past 3 days has provided each of you with strategies that will influence successful retention and graduation among your adult learners. For more information about the study that incited this professional development workshop, please contact the facilitator via email: tspivey@centralgatech.edu.

Facilitator's Notes: The facilitator will thank the participants for their time and will give them a certificate for their attendance.

Appendix A: Handouts

Bingo Activity Instructions

Day 1: Know Yourself: Your Learning History and Motivation Icebreaker

- Brainstorm steps that could be taken to improve your comfort and familiarity with classroom practices that support motivation to learning.
- Reflect on the provided topics and list five responses per topic.
- Write the suggestions as bingo squares.
- Any squares that are not completed during the allotted time can be completed by the participants during their personal time.
- Participants will discuss their answers as a group.
- The facilitator will explain that instructors can incorporate this activity into their own instructional practices.

Brainstorm Topics for BINGO Activity

- Methods to use the adult learner's experience and knowledge as a basis from which to teach
- Tactics to show adult learners how this class will help them attain their goals
- Means to make all course and text material practical and relevant to the adult learner
- Techniques to adjust your instructional practices to meet the needs of the older learner
- Approaches to motivate adult learners to learn new information

BINGO Template (Day 1)

B	I	N	G	O
		FREE SPACE		

<https://bingobaker.com/>

Day 1- 3: Writing Activity: Lesson Plan/Formative Evaluation

ABE/GED Instructor:

Course Title:

ALC:

Date:

Lesson Topic

Curriculum Student Learning Outcome(s):

Curriculum Objective(s):

Materials:

Key Vocabulary:

Lesson Procedures

Introduction:

- Prior knowledge activation
- Building background knowledge

Instruction and Activities:

- State the activities in chronological order
-

- Provide a time estimation
-

Assessment

Evidence of Learning:

- Include both formative and summative assessment techniques

Day 2: Role Play Activity

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL PLAN (SEP)

LEARNER'S NAME _____ **SEP DATE** _____

SHORT TERM GOAL(S)

INSTRUCTOR:

Goals for the next 6 months	How will you evaluate achievement?

LONG TERM GOAL(S)

Goals for the next 6 – 12 months?	How will you measure achievement?

Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

EXAMINE GOALS AFTER 40 INSTRUCTIONAL HOURS

GOAL DATA	DATE		
PRIMARY NRS	SET	TARGET	MET
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase Educational Functioning Level			
<input type="checkbox"/> Obtain GED®			
<input type="checkbox"/> Enter Dual-Enrollment			
<input type="checkbox"/> Enter Post-secondary Education			
<input type="checkbox"/> Enter Employment			
<input type="checkbox"/> Retain Employment			

SECONDARY NRS	SET	TARGET	MET
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase Involvement in Child's Education			
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase Involvement in Child's Literacy Activities			
<input type="checkbox"/> Register to Vote or Vote for the First Time			
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase Involvement in Community Events			
STATE	SET	TARGET	MET
<input type="checkbox"/> Obtain Work Readiness Certificate			
<input type="checkbox"/> Obtain Citizenship			

LEARNER FOLLOW-UP ON GOAL ATTAINMENT

Evaluator Initials _____ Follow-up Method _____ Date _____
 Evaluator Initials _____ Follow-up Method _____ Date _____
 Evaluator Initials _____ Follow-up Method _____ Date _____

Day 3: Time Management Icebreaker

**PLEASE START THIS GROUP EXERCISE IMMEDIATELY- YOU HAVE 15
MINUTES TO COMPLETE.**

Participants will need:

- Eggs (other items may be substituted, e.g. apples, to decrease messiness)
- paper
- craft sticks
- tape
- Teams have to create a cushion for the eggs from the materials provided. They then have to drop the egg from head height without it breaking.

Integrate New Strategy/Restructure Existing Strategy Handout**Day 3: Small Group Activity**

Integrate New Strategy	Restructure Existing Strategy

Appendix A: Twitter Feed Procedures (Day 1 and 2: Formative Evaluation)

Embedding a Live Twitter Feed in Your PowerPoint Presentation

- Determine the type of Twitter Feed:

Normal Tweets: Any message posted to Twitter containing up to 140 characters.

Mentions: A Tweet containing another user's Twitter username, preceded by the "@" symbol, for example: Thank you @Support!

Replies: A Tweet that begins with another user's @username and is in reply to one of their Tweets, for example: @Support the information provided was resourceful.

- Select a "Visible Tweets" website to exhibit the Twitter Feed. This format displays Tweets one at a time and will accommodate any type of Twitter search.
- Install the LiveWeb PowerPoint add-in
- Open PowerPoint and choose the slide to display the Twitter feed
- Make sure the add-in is installed on any computer that will use the PowerPoint file
- Participants can use existing Twitter accounts to interact in the Twitter feed or they can create an account prior to participating in the activity

Note: These procedures should be performed, preferably by an information technology (IT) administrator, prior to the professional development workshop. The procedures are provided in the event that there are technological difficulties. An IT administrator will be on standby to address any technological issues.

Appendix A: Summative Evaluation (Day 3)

Workshop Title: _____	Date: _____
Facilitator: _____	Location: _____

Place a ✓ to indicate level of satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1= strongly agree and 5= strongly disagree.

Categories	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with the sessions					
Handouts were engaging and useful					
Time in sessions was sufficient for learning and practicing new concepts					
The workshop was well planned and interactive					
The presenter was effective					
Atmosphere was enthusiastic, interesting, and conducive to collegial professional exchange					
PD content and strategies will be useful in my work					
I would recommend this PD to colleagues					

What are the most significant concepts you learned?

What support do you need to implement what you learned?

How will you apply what you learned from this PD to your work?

How can we build on the sessions for follow-up learning?

If you were not satisfied with any part of the workshop, please explain why.

What type (s) of other professional development would you like to see?

Additional comments:

Appendix A: References

- Academic Advancement Center. (n.d.). 168 hours exercise: How do I use my time now? Retrieved from https://webapps.ohio.edu/studytips/Time_168hours.html
- Davis, S. (2013). *Andragogy: Teaching adults* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from www.kedc.org/sites/default/files/Adult%20Learners.ppt
- Expeditionary Learning. (August 2013). Appendix: Protocols and resources. Retrieved from https://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachements/appendix_protocols_and_resources.pdf
- Estroga, I.J. (2013, June 27). *Managing time* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://www.slideshare.net/josephestroga/powerpoint-time>
- Finlay, J. (2010, May 17). *Andragogy (adult learning)* [Video File]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLoPiHUZbEw&feature=player_embedded
- Fornari, A. (n.d.). *Moving beyond lectures: Integrating active learning strategies* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from http://medicine.hofstra.edu/pdf/faculty/facdev/facdev_classroom_activelearning.pdf
- Hargis, J. (2011, June 22). *Course backward design* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJWTKc1IZnY>
- How to Add a Live Twitter Feed to Your PowerPoint Presentation (2013, June 5). Retrieved from <http://lizgross.net/how-to-add-a-live-twitter-feed-to-your-powerpoint-presentation/>

Appendix B: Email to Participants

Dear [name]:

My name is Tiffany Spivey. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I hope to learn more about adult learners' perceptions of the barriers to retention in adult education programs; therefore, I will be conducting research to possibly provide insight into this issue.

I will conduct a study which aims to address the barriers to persistence in adult education. Your participation in this study could provide stakeholders of adult education with solutions for increasing the retention and literacy rates within our local community. There are no known risks associated with this research. Participants of the study will engage in one-to-one semi-structured interviews that will take approximately 45-60 minutes. If you are an instructor/ current or previously enrolled learner and have attended at least 40 instructional hours, you are cordially invited to participate in this study.

Should you decide to participate in this study, I will meet with you at the Adult Learning Center where you attend/ last attended/instruct during a designated date and time that is convenient for you. More details about the study will follow when I contact you by telephone in the near future. Thank you for your time and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Spivey

Appendix C: Consent Letter

Dear Participant:

My name is Tiffany Spivey. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University in the Higher Education and Adult Learning department under the supervision of Dr. Emily Green. I am also a Lead Adult Education instructor; however this study is separate from my professional role. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled: Stakeholders' Perceived and Experienced Barriers to Retention in Rural Adult Education Programs. The purpose of this study is to identify the current/previously enrolled adult learners' and adult education instructors' perceptions to the barriers of learner persistence. This study has been approved by Walden University's Institutional Review Board.

If you agree, I will be tape-recording our interview. The purpose of this is to ensure that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to maintain an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a report which will contain remarks without any reference to individuals. It is my hope that this information can assist faculty, staff, and administrators of adult education in their quest to increase retention and literacy rates. During this interview, I will ask you about your experiences as an instructor/ adult learner at this technical college. The purpose is to get your perceptions for the barriers to student persistence. There is no right or wrong or appropriate or inappropriate answers. I would like you to feel comfortable in speaking about what you really think and how you really feel. There are no identified risks from participating in this research.

The interview is confidential. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or discontinue participation, without consequence, at any time. Each interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. No compensation will be provided for participating in this study. Responses from the interview will only be reported collectively to protect the identity of respondents. The expected benefits of the study include increased retention, higher education, and better employment opportunities. The results will be reported. The data collected from this study will be kept in a locked cabinet for five years.

To assure safe and proper research procedures, auditors of Walden University Institutional Review Board will be granted direct access to the research data without violating the confidentiality of the participants. Further information regarding the research can be obtained from the principal researcher [redacted] or my Chair Member [redacted]. If you wish further information regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Walden University Institution Review Board, irb@waldenu.edu. A copy of this consent form will be given to you. Thank you for your consideration. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

[Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information, are at least 18 years of age, and agree to participate in the study: Stakeholders' Perceived and Experienced Barriers to Retention in Rural Adult Education Programs.]

Participant's Printed Name

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Date

Date

Appendix D: Interview Protocol for Current/Former Adult Education Students

Thank you once again for volunteering to participate in this study. Your opinions are greatly valued, as a reminder, all information will be kept confidential. If at any time, you would like to stop the interview, please just tell me. Also, if there is anything you would like me to remove from the interview transcript at any time, even after the interview, please let me know. First, we will begin by talking about your specific experiences as a current/former adult learner.

1. To begin, please tell me about your educational experiences.
 - a. When did you stop school, and why?
 - b. Please describe your current educational experience.
2. Please tell me about the current ALC you attend.
 - a. What are the advantages/disadvantages of the location?
 - b. Is there anything specific about *your* current experience that could be changed to improve your success?
 - c. Are there any opportunities or achievements you have experienced (both in and out of school) while attending the center?
3. Is there anything that motivates you to continue attending the center?
 - a. If not attending, is there anything that could be changed to help you begin your studies again?
4. What motivates you to learn in general?
5. What are some challenges that you face as an adult learner?

Next, we will talk about your perceptions of issues pertaining to all adult learners.

6. What barriers do you believe impact student persistence for adult learners?
7. What are the advantages of being an adult learner?
8. Do you have any other ideas about the ways to improve your (or other adult learners') experiences?
 - a. Have any specific strategies used by the instructors/administrators helped you towards accomplishing your educational goals?
 - b. Could these also be applied to other centers?
9. Do you have any other comments/ideas/questions about anything we discussed?

Thank you again, for taking your time to participate in this study. Your insight is greatly appreciated. If you have any ideas or questions after this interview, please do not hesitate to contact me through email or telephone to let me know.

Appendix E: Interview Protocol for Adult Education Instructors

Thank you once again for volunteering to participate in this study. Your opinions are greatly valued, as a reminder, all information will be kept confidential. If at any time, you would like to stop the interview, please just tell me. Also, if there is anything you would like me to remove from the interview transcript at any time, even after the interview, please let me know. First, we will begin by talking about your specific experiences as an adult education instructor.

1. To begin, please tell me about your professional experience.
 - a. Why did you begin this career path?
2. Please tell me about your current ALC.
 - a. What are the advantages/disadvantages of the location?
 - b. Is there anything specific about *your* current experience as an instructor that is relevant for improving success amongst adult learners?
3. What are some challenges that you face as an adult education instructor?
4. How significant of a problem is retention at your site?
 - a. Have you implemented specific measures to improve retention?
5. What are some of your accomplishments/achievements you have experienced while working at the center?

Next, we will talk about your perceptions of issues pertaining to adult learners in general.

6. What barriers do you believe impact student persistence for adult learners?
7. Do you believe there are advantages to being an adult learner?

8. Do you have any other ideas about the ways to improve your center (or other adult learners') experiences in general?
 - a. Have any specific strategies that you have implemented helped your students or center?
 - b. Could these also be applied to other centers?
9. Do you have any other comments/ideas/questions about anything we discussed?

Thank you again, for taking your time to participate in this study. Your insight is greatly appreciated. If you have any ideas or questions after this interview, please do not hesitate to contact me through email or telephone to let me know.

Appendix F: Research Journal Notes

Adult Learner #1: This participant has 7 children, and is currently pregnant. She has lived in a rural community most of her life, moved to a larger city for one year, but returned to her hometown. Does not have a job, receives assistance from DFCS and child support. She wants to have her GED by the end of the year and has started taking GED practice tests. Student has been attending current site for 3 months.

Adult Learner #2: Has lived in a rural community all of her life. Has one son. Quit school in 2009 because she was pregnant, and got too lazy to attend school. She is a former student who received her GED December 2013. She is currently enrolled at the technical college.

Adult Learner #3: This participant appeared to be uneasy about the interview. She began to open up the further the interview went along. She appeared to have unresolved anger regarding her incompleteness of high school. The participant was raised in a foster care setting in which her descriptions of her upbringing express periods of apathy.

Adult Learner #4: This participant seems to have her priorities in order. She is a former student who received her GED last year. She has lived in a rural community for about 20 years. She moved from a large city. Although she is not involved in her community, she likes the rural life style because it is relaxed.

Adult Learner #5: This participant seemed somewhat distant. The participant was expelled from school and an alternative school. He said he likes the GED program and really wants to receive his GED.

Adult Learner #6: The participant enrolled into the GED program because he and his mother thought he was too far behind to catch up. He had been attending an alternative school, but said he did not like it. He talked about his involvement in sports a lot during the interview. The participant seemed a bit nervous during the beginning of the interview.

Adult Learner #7: This participant noted that she had attended a GED program before at a larger site, but she transferred to her current location since it was closer to home. She said that she likes the smaller setting better. The participant has 2 children and is currently pregnant. She said that she plans to get more serious about her GED after she has her baby.

Adult Learner #8: Participant is a lifelong resident of her community; she has never lived outside of her hometown. This participant seems dedicated to the program. She attended before, but was unable to finish. She quit school in 1956 so that she could get married.

Adult Learner #9: This participant has been experiencing a number of family and personal issues. She is currently separated from her spouse, and lives with her mother. She works as a housekeeper. Her employer is not the most flexible; therefore, she missed class often. The participant wants her GED, but she does not have the time to commit. She has passed all of the GED practice tests with the exception of math. She received a scholarship for 3 parts of the official GED test, and has passed the reading test.

Instructor #1: This participant started as a volunteer. Currently, she is an adjunct instructor who formally taught in the K-12 setting. Her adult education classes are held in government housing.

Instructor #2: The instructor is a former cosmetologist who later received a degree in business. She appeared to be frustrated with her adult learners' behavior. She teaches in a setting with primarily young adult learners.

Instructor #3: This instructor is a full-time instructor with several years in the educational setting, including the K-12 setting and currently adult education. She expressed a genuine concern regarding adult education.