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Improving the General Education Development (GED): Retention and Completion Rates of Low Income Adults

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Walden University

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Kimberly Rice

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2019

Abstract

Improving the General Education Development (GED): Retention and Completion Rates
of Low Income Adults

by

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MSW, University of Pittsburgh, 1994

BSW, South Carolina State University, 1993

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

April 2019

Abstract

Retaining adult education students has been a growing concern. The new GED requirements have generated low completion rates for a free GED program in a 3-year period, in a non-profit agency in a Southeastern state. Instructors are concerned about this problem and need to understand the factors that are inhibiting adult learners from successfully attaining their GED. This qualitative research design was the most appropriate to answer the research questions to determine the experiences that caused the adult learners to not complete the program and identify potential educational strategies needed to improve retention. Sticht's functional context theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Fourteen adult learners previously enrolled in the free GED program participated in in-depth, individual interviews. Thematic analysis, NVivo and open coding were used to identify, describe, and interpret data. The findings indicated that lack of computer and typing skills, the conversion from paper and pencil to computerized testing, and the onset of temporary and personal and family obstacles were factors that contributed to learners not successfully completing the program. Reinstatement of tutors and mentors and providing the participants with a well-defined curriculum for the GED courses were potential solutions to improve retention. The overwhelming evidence from the participants also suggested that a curriculum for a professional development training for instructors facilitating the online courses is an educational strategy for a potential solution to the local problem. This project has the probability to produce social change because it provides GED instructors researched-based instruction to facilitate online courses effectively to improve retention.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this doctoral study to my amazing mother, Ruby Butler. You have been my rock and my source of strength. I thank you for your love, continued encouragement and support. I thank you for believing in me, even when I didn't believe in myself. Most importantly, I thank you for your prayers. You have demonstrated James 5:16 "The effectual fervent prayers of a righteous man availeth much."

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First and ultimate, I would like to thank God for giving me the strength and ability to complete this journey. This process has truly been one of the most challenging tasks that I have ever experienced, but through it all, you never left my side. I thank you for sustaining and keeping me these past 5 years. I would like to thank my siblings George, Clifford, Bennie and Lalita for your love and motivation. To my goddaughter Taylor, I am super proud of you and the young woman that you are becoming and I hope that I have shown you that you can achieve anything you put your mind to. To Dr. Derrick Robinson, I thank you for always being willing to assist me when needed. To my best friends Jennifer Porter and Valencia Keeler, I want to thank you for always listening. A special thank you to Maurice Walker and Ed Irick for your continued prayers, support and encouragement when I wanted to quit. All of the phone calls and uplifting words will forever be cherished. I would like to also send a special thank you to my line sister and friend Yolanda Williams for being my editor and Microsoft word technician. Finally, I would like to express my utmost gratitude to Dr. Scott Mertes for having to take over as my chair unexpectedly and for your diligence and support and to Dr. Candice Adams for agreeing to be my 2nd chair during my final phase of this program. I would also like to thank other members of the Walden Committee for your insight and expertise in reviewing my study. I will conclude with Isaiah 40:31 “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint”.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

In the United States, the general educational development (GED) was initially rewarded to individuals whose high school education was disrupted by the second World War. Currently, the GED is one of the most widely accepted forms of an alternative secondary certification. Although the GED requirements are distinct from the traditional high school diploma, they are generally perceived as equivalent to a high school diploma. Although the GED is considered equivalent to a high school diploma, the attainment of the GED is significantly lower (Smith, 2003). Retaining adult education students has been a developing concern for many adult education instructors (Gopalakrishnan, 2008). Students enrolled in GED courses have been exiting without completing the programs.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences that are causing students not to complete the free GED program. Examining the obstacles faced by GED students and determining methods to retain and motivate them to complete the program is critical. Two significant problems among GED students have been low retention and graduation rates. This has had a significant impact on GED programs universally. Gopalakrishnan (2008) characterized these low rates as “a revolving door of students” (p. 147). Being able to establish the reasons students are exiting the program without successful completion is a step towards providing a solution to increasing student attrition and graduation rates.

There are some adult education students who face obstacles that inhibit them from successfully attaining their GED. According to Tyler and Lofstrom (2010), students are

unsuccessful because they were unmotivated, academically challenged, and economically disadvantaged. Additionally, situational barriers such as personal health issues, family problems, and lack of transportation have had a long-term effect on student retention (Goodwin, 2002).

Definition of the Problem

According to the U. S. Census (2010), nearly 39 million adults, which is approximately 18% of the U. S. population, 16 years and older in the United States do not possess any type of high school credentials. These adults are not enrolled in any educational programs (Annual Statistical Report, 2013). The GED has recently undergone a significant revision to reflect the more rigorous k-12 academic standards, known as Common Core (Clymer, 2012). The new version of the GED, which was implemented in 2014, offered the traditional high school certification plus a “new career-and-college-readiness” benchmark. The new test is more challenging, where it now requires that the test-takers possess more and higher levels of content knowledge than the previous GED (Strucker, 2013).

The old GED test was implemented in 2002, in which test takers were only required to retake the section that they did not pass. Now, the new test requires a passing score on all sections or they will have to start over and retake the entire test, even the sections that they passed (Lipke & Farrell, 2014). Currently, the new GED test has influenced the field of adult education because adult literacy and basic education programs are being forced to pursue new funding changes that need to be made to assist students with meeting the requirements of the new test (Lipke & Farrell, 2014).

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The educational problem for this study was a pattern of high percentage rates of adult learners who have not completed a free (GED) program in a 3-year period (i.e., 2012, 2013, and 2014), in a non-profit agency in a Southeastern state. The program is located in the inner city, and it offers free GED prep courses, tutoring, childcare, and meals. The total number of individuals served during the 3-year grant-reporting period was 332, with 20% of the individuals enrolling in the program (Florida Literacy Coalition, 2012).

Although the GED program is free, the completion rate has declined. The population negatively affected by this problem was low-income individuals age 16 and older. Many of these individuals live in the community, and few of them who begin the new GED program pass the exam successfully. Instructors at the program are concerned about the low completion rates. At the conclusion of the grant, it was reported that only 8% of the individuals enrolled in the program actually completed it (Florida Literacy Coalition, 2012).

According to a governmental agency that tracks and reports GED completion and non-completion data (Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, 2013). Although the noncompletion rate decreased from 2012-2014, the rates are still above or at 50%. These results are shown in Figure 1.

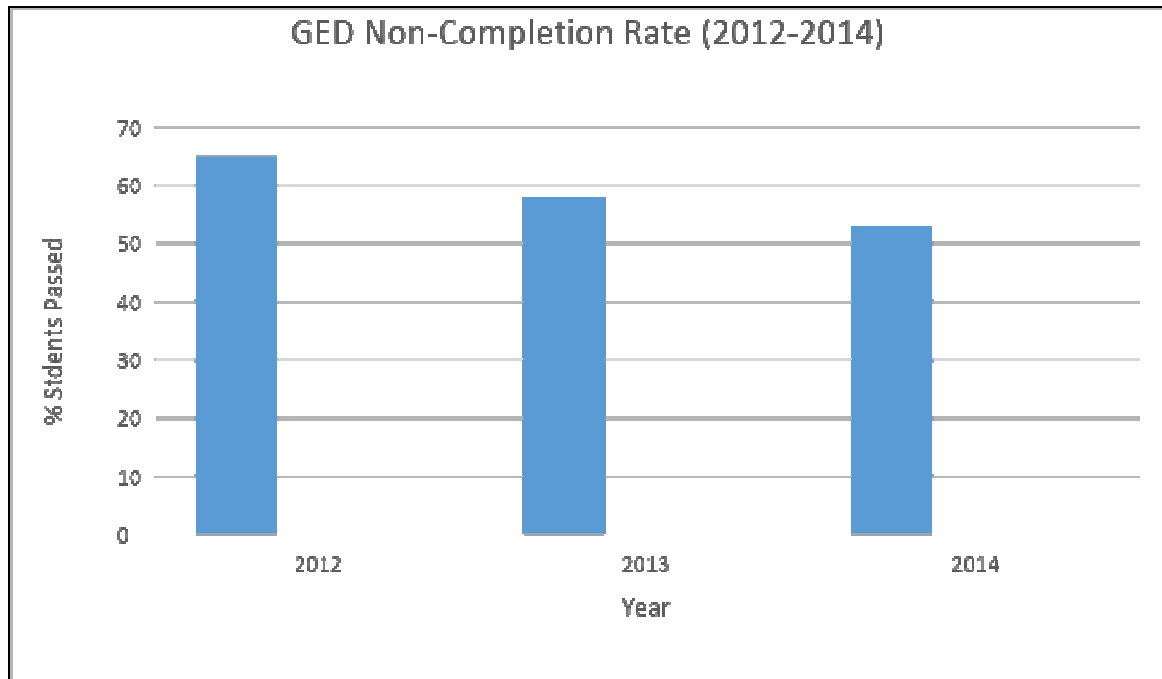


Figure 1. GED noncompletion rates for years 2012 -2014

The GED Testing Service estimated that 90,000 people nationwide earned the GED credential in 2014 (Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, 2013). That is down from 540,535 in 2013 and 401,388 in 2012 (Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, 2013).

Similar declines occurred in Florida, where the number of people taking the test fell from 46,055 in 2012 to 21,828 in 2014, a 53% decline over the past 2 years (Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, 2013). The passage rate also fell from 65% passing in 2012 to 58% in 2014 (Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, 2013). In 2013, 61,084 people took the test and 76.5% passed in Florida (Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, 2013). Nationally, 743,000 people completed the GED test in 2013 (Annual Statistical

Report, 2013). Nearly 560,000 of these completers (75.3%) met the passing standard by earning scores equal to or higher than those earned by the top 60% of graduating high school seniors (Annual Statistical Report, 2013).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

GED noncompletion rates have become a national issue. According to Thomas (2011), there is a need to improve retention rates in GED programs. This is an increasing concern at various levels. Lewis (2009) indicated that “Research exploring the reasons why individuals fail to take the GED exam or complete the GED skills development classes could provide insight for GED programs on national, state and local government levels” (p. 9).

Thomas (2011) also indicated, “Literature reveals some of factors contributing to nonparticipation and low retention rates in adult basic education programs” (p. 15). One of the main problems affecting graduation and retention rates is the structure of the GED programs. Perin, Flugman, and Spiegel (2006) stated that it is imperative that GED instructors demonstrate how certain activities will assist students with obtaining a diploma. Students are likely to leave a class if they feel that their academic needs are not being met. To retain students, Gopalakrishnan (2008) suggested that educators help learners to prepare for the general education development exam one sub-test at a time. This can make the GED test seem more attainable to some learners. Programs should create stepping-stones for learners at lower ability levels. (p.7)

McCaskill-Mitchell (2009) believed that “negative forces are affecting adult learners from the time they enter the programs until the time they either achieve their

goals or dropout” (p.38). These negative barriers can lead to low GED retention and graduation rates. McCaskill-Mitchell stated, “Any intervention by an ABE program determined to increase persistence must assist adult learners in strengthening the positive forces and reducing the negative forces” (p.38).

According to Chaves (2006), practitioners and scholars have continued to establish procedures for retaining and graduating all students enrolled in adult basic education programs. Some programs have added online components, which affords GED students with the ability to study from home. Additionally, GED students possess diverse needs, and many administrators and instructors work to accommodate them (Olesen-Tracey, 2010). These students’ issues often prevent them from attending class and passing the GED exam (Goodwin, 2002). Since the GED noncompletion rate for the free GED program has increased, in this study, I analyzed the program requirements and the obstacles that individuals are faced with that are causing them not to complete the program.

Definitions

Several key terms were stated throughout this study. These key terms are defined within this section.

Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs: Precollege-level, government-sponsored community programs aimed at improving literacy levels. Services include English as a second language (ESL), parenting skills, vocational training, and GED preparation programs (Zaft, 2008).

Adult education: Adult education programs are instructional programs that help adult learners gain the knowledge and skills they need to enter and succeed in postsecondary education (Florida Department of Education, 2017).

Attrition: A gradual reduction in numbers and sizes (Schneider, 2010).

Common Core Standards: Rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills aligned with college and work expectations (Florida Department of Education, 2010).

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).

Goals: Educational goals are statements that describe the competencies, skills, and attributes that students should possess upon completion of a course or program (Huitt, 2011).

Motivation: Motivation is an attribute that drives people to do something (Gredler, Broussard, & Garrison, 2004).

Perceptions: Perceptions are the consciousness of material things present to sense. Perception is like sensation, something of an abstraction (Sekular & Blake, 2005).

Persistence: Persistence is defined as a learning process that continues until an individual attains his or her goals (Pickard, 2013).

Personal barriers: Personal barriers are obstructions put in place by individuals that negatively affect their achievement in a particular area (Goodwin, 2002).

Retention: Remaining in school until completion of a degree (Daempfle, 2003).

Supports: Academic supports are a variety of instructional methods or anything that could assist individuals in meeting learning standards or succeed in school.

Significance of the Study

The GED was developed and had been administered by the American Council of Education (ACE) since it originated. The ACE believed that the original GED did not possess the skill level required for college; therefore, there was a need to make sure the new GED test was in line with the state's Common Core Standards Initiative (Clymer, 2012). In January 2014, the new GED went through re-examination process. The new changes possess abstruse implications for individuals with limited skills capability to move forward with pursuing their education and obtaining credentials required to obtain adequate employment (Clymer, 2012).

Identifying obstacles that influence the number of GED students who complete the program is intricate in various ways. These obstacles can affect the lives of people and society. Earning a high school diploma or equivalent is a step needed to be successful in the labor market as well as in society, especially because education assists individuals to earn wages that are suitable to sustain their families (Clymer, 2012). In this study, I filled a gap in practice by analyzing the program requirements and the perceived and experienced obstacles that participants may be faced with that are causing them not to complete the program.

I identified potential educational strategies needed to improve student retention, which is critical to both the program and students. This study could also influence social

change by providing these individuals with more support and resources that will increase their achievement. They will also be offered more effective routes to not only complete the GED but also have more access to training and higher education. Identifying the problems will contribute considerably to generating options and courses of action, and implementing solutions.

Guiding Research Questions

Limited research has been conducted on perceived and experienced reasons for the high noncompletion rates of participants in the free GED program. The questions guiding this qualitative study included the following:

RQ1: What are the perceived and experienced reasons participants may not complete the free GED program?

RQ2 : What are perceived educational strategies needed to improve retention and to increase the completion rates for the free GED program?

The qualitative, case study was selected to explore, understand, clarify, and describe GED participants' perceptions regarding the research question to acknowledge this local problem. For this qualitative case study, open-ended interview questions were used. Once the data were gathered, thick and rich descriptions were transcribed to analyze the perceptions and experiences of the GED students and why they may not be completing the free GED program.

Review of the Literature

In this literature review, I examined the motivational strategies that could increase the GED completion rate. I will also discuss obstacles and supports that could make it

harder or easier for students to persevere and be successful in completing the GED. The major themes highlighted in this chapter are persistence and obstacles and supports that could channel persistence. Persistence was explored in various ways. Obstacles and supports were explored regarding how they correlate with academic persistence. Supports are vehicles that have been put in place to assist individuals pursuing a GED to progress in the program and attain their goals. The themes identified fundamentally influence each other.

Conceptual Framework

The functional context theory was used for this study. The functional context approach to learning was introduced by Sticht (1975). The functional context theory stresses the importance of making learning relevant to the personal experience of learners and the context of their activity (Sticht, 1975). Functional context theory also stresses building upon previous knowledge to create new concepts to carry out complicated tasks (Sticht, 1975). Sticht (1975) proposed that instructors should develop better learning environments that integrate real-world situations to increase students' performance.

The functional context theory proposes new assessment methods to assess student learning. Instead of using grade-level scores, tests should measure content knowledge gained and distinguished between practical learning and academic learning (Sticht, 1975). Functional context theory shares a similar emphasis with situated learning theory, which also stresses the importance of context during learning (Sticht, 1975). Finally, the functional context theory maintains, "the learning experience should be meaningful and problem-centered" (Trotter, 2006, p. 8). Hence, the literature review is comprised of

concepts that were examined such as personal barriers, persistence, motivation, goals, and supports and the worthiness of the GED.

Literature Related to Personal Barriers

Gopalakrishnan (2008) suggested that learners are likely to disconnect from GED programs within the first few weeks of direct instruction. As the semester proceeded, there is a reduction in GED enrollments. Poor retention can lead to a decline in the number of students receiving their high school equivalency, because either they withdraw from the program before taking the GED exam or they are unable to meet the requirement to pass the exam. According to Goodwin (2002), “the cause of low participation among minorities is connected to their negative attitudes about school, self, or to life circumstances that are difficult to change” (p. 21).

Goodwin classified barriers that affect participation in adult education programs into categories of dispositional, situational, and institutional barriers. Goodwin revealed that the barriers did not encompass any exclusive group of minorities. GED programs accommodate students of all races, and several of them encounter the same barriers, despite race and ethnicity. Alternately, “attrition, or the inability to persist, is generally the result of expectations of the learning not being met” (Thomas, 2011, p. 15).

- *Dispositional*: Barriers associated with perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about education (Goodwin, 2002).
- *Situational*: Barriers that arise at any given time from a person’s life situation (e.g., family problems, childcare, lack of transportation, personal health, or job responsibilities; Goodwin, 2002).

- *Institutional*: Barriers that involves practices or procedures of the educational setting that discourages or excludes adults from participating (e.g., program completion, scheduling issues, time requirements, and precise attendance requirements; Goodwin, 2002).

Literature Related to Persistence

Persistence is defined as a learning process that continues until an adult student attains his or her educational goals. Persistence includes numerous synonyms and related terms, such as resilience and retention. Persistence starts before the initial stage of attending a program. It concludes when the student decides to cease learning. Comings (2007), O'Neill and Thomson (2013), and Pickard (2013) provided individual definitions and observations of persistence and retention. In some instances, students may exit a program before completing it. They can study on their own or participate in programs that will assist them with keeping up with their work until they are able to physically return. Comings (2007) stated that this could be looked upon as a standard of persistence even if the student is not physically in class for a specific amount of time.

Pickard (2013) explained the difference between persistence, attrition, and retention. Pickard concluded that persistence determines a students' level of competence to remain in their academic program and their ability to achieve their academic goals, attrition notes a program is losing students, and retention assesses how well a program can retain its students (p. 115).

O'Neill and Thomson (2013) stated, "Academic persistence for the adult learner is a complex phenomenon" (p. 162). According to Pickard, "How researchers

conceptualize student participation in adult literacy programs has changed over time” (p. 117). Pickard suggested that initially, students were identified as either “participants or non-participants,” and motivation was measured based on participation (p. 117). Pickard stated that student participation was interpreted into the amount of time the student spent in a program. Pickard also claimed that “Those who stayed in a program until they completed their goals ‘persisted;’ those who left a program before meeting their goals were classified as dropouts” (p. 117).

Comings (2007) established that persistence has two essential components, “intensity (the hours of instruction per month) and duration (the months of engagement instruction)” (p. 24). Persistence is calculating the amount of time a student spends in the classroom. If the students remain engaged over an extended period, they still may not have enough hours per month in class, and this could decrease the amount of learning gains that they would attain otherwise.

Comings (2007) also established, “Adult education programs often refer to persistence as *retention* and measure it by recording participation in formal classes and tutoring sessions” (p. 24). Comings (2007) further proposed the following definition of persistence: “Adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study or distance education when they must stop attending program services, and returning to program services as soon as the demands of their lives allow” (p. 24). This definition is student-focused and affirms some of the challenges and complications that adult learners frequently face.

Comings (2007) recommended that persistence is paramount for academic progression and success, saying, “Studies point to 100 hours of instruction as the point at which a majority of adult education students are likely to show measurable progress and, therefore, it serves as a benchmark that identifies an effective program” (p. 25). Students benefit from spending time in studying and attending classes. This initiates academic growth and is essential to academic achievement. Ultimately, students will maintain persistence until they have passed all four components of the new GED test.

This study was based on understanding motivational strategies that could increase the GED completion rate. There are rare cases where certain students might pass the GED test immediately after enrolling in the program. Most students find that long-term persistence is most beneficial. To remain motivated and persistent, there are some positive components, such as motivation, goals, and supports that can assist students with achieving their academic goals.

Literature Related to Motivation

Motivation refers to “reasons underlying behavior” (Guay, Chanal, Ratelle, Marsh, Larose and Boivin 2010, p. 712). Gredler, Broussard and Garrison (2004) defined motivation as “the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something” (p.106). Intrinsic motivation is animated by personal enjoyment, interest, or pleasure.

Motivation is a combination of perceptions, beliefs, interests, actions, and values that are generally correlated. Different methods to motivation might focus on cognitive behaviors (such as the use of strategy and monitoring), non-cognitive aspects (such as attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions), or both (Lai, 2011). Goto and Martin (2009) defined

academic motivation as “enjoyment of school learning of challenging, difficult, and novel tasks” (p. 525). Goto and Martin (2009) discovered that some were motivated by the expectation of having a “better life” (p. 13). A number of other motivational factors can be included: primarily financial achievement, better employment opportunities, and a higher quality of life for themselves and their families.

O’Neill and Thomson (2013) focused on the importance of motivation and resilience and how they correlate with academic persistence. O’Neill and Thomson (2013) stated, “As motivation wanes, volition or will take over to support motivation and bolster persistence in pursuit of a goal” (p. 164). Although motivation helps students, they often require extra effort to assist them with following through. O’Neill and Thomson also stated, “Resilience is another term that defines the personal quality of employing persistence in overcoming obstacles to achieve one’s goals” (p. 164).

Shaw, Tham, Hogle, and Koch (2015) also established that motivation was essential for GED students (p.28). Shaw et al. found corresponding agents that contributed to success when they interviewed students studying online. Shaw et al. (2015) interviewed a student who stated, “One thing I believe you need to do is to believe in yourself and stick to it. You have to do it for yourself. If you don’t want to do it for yourself, you’re not going to get it” (p. 28). Shaw et al. emphasized the significance of motivation, self-efficacy, and desire.

Goto and Martin (2009), O’Neill and Thomson (2013), and Shaw et al. (2015) inferred that motivation is needed in attaining academic success. Adult learners possess diverse motivations, many of which are centered on improving their quality of life.

Motivation and confidence were also correlated and are connected to having and attaining goals. These factors could motivate persistence for GED students.

Literature Related to Goals

O'Neill and Thomson (2013) recognized various factors that can assist adult learners, including establishing personal and career goals (p. 168). Reynolds and Johnson (2014) highlighted the significance of having goals and how this could help students with overcoming specific barriers. Reynolds and Johnson also believed that "students' fear of failure is not as powerful as them setting goals and their desire to achieve" (p. 41).

Comings (2007) also discussed the importance of establishing goals. Some examples of goals were "attending college or some other academic institution, moving forward in life, obtaining better employment opportunities, and merely bettering a person's self" (p. 34). Shaw et al. (2015) explained the significance of having goals and being able to see progress being made towards accomplishing those goals (p.31). Comings, O'Neill and Thomson, Reynolds and Johnson, and Shaw et al. believed that goals are a component for academic success.

Literature Related to Supports

For this review, supports are anything that could assist a student with being persistent and succeeding in the GED program. The positive components that have been established derived from the works of Comings (2007), Fritz and Alsabek (2010), Goto and Martin (2009), Jacobson (2009), O'Neill and Thomson (2013), Reynolds and Johnson (2014), and Shaw et al. (2015) and included family, healthy self-esteem,

motivation, self-efficacy, having goals, positive interactions with teachers, and community support.

Various components can serve as supports for GED students. Goals and progress are also vital. For students, setting clear and realistic goals is just as important as being able to see progress that has been made towards accomplishing these goals. O'Neill and Thomson (2013) also explained the significance of establishing and sustaining a sense of self-efficacy (p. 168).

Implications

The project study was guided by the literature review. The project study was established based on findings from the research. Program non-completion can produce setbacks for the GED students as well as the agency; therefore, the findings and data analysis from the study were used to create an evidence-based project that serves as a potential solution to the problem high rates of non-completion of the free GED program at the local non-profit agency. Additionally, the findings from this study provided a correspondence of strategies, ideas, and philosophies that will embrace the goals of instructors working together to support students successful completion of the free GED program.

Summary

Retaining adult education students has become a significant concern as well as low retention and graduation rates in GED programs. To address this issue, the administrators and instructors are required to find ways to retain GED students. At the beginning of Section 1, the causes of low GED completion rates associated with

moderate retention and graduation rates were explored. Section 2 describes the methodology that was suitable for the study. At the conclusion of the study, I will add the findings to this section.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to fill a gap in practice by analyzing the program requirements and the perceived and experienced obstacles that participants may be faced with that are causing them not to complete the GED program. I identified potential educational strategies needed to improve student retention, which is critical to both the program and students. Adult basic education instructors encounter many challenges. Retaining adult learners in rural areas have been challenging for adult education stakeholders (Bourgeois, 2012; Lester, 2012). Administrators, recruiters, and adult education instructors have been unsuccessful in implementing methods and incorporating strategies to retain adult learners (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). For educational programs and institutions to adhere to their mission, they must be successful with student retention. When attrition rates are high, it implies that the program or institution is not fulfilling its objectives (Blackburn, 2010).

Research Design and Approach

Unlike quantitative research, which is deductive and tends to analyze phenomena regarding trends and frequencies, the qualitative researcher seeks to determine the meaning of an occurrence through description. Qualitative scholars aim to develop concepts that aid in the understanding of natural phenomena with an emphasis on the purpose, experiences, and views of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying

reasons, opinions, and motivations (Lodico et al., 2010). It also provides insight into the problem or helps to develop ideas.

Additionally, qualitative research is used to uncover trends in thought and opinions and to dive deeper into the problem processes (Lodico et al., 2010). I explored the GED participants' perceptions of the high noncompletion rates and their perceived solutions to the problem. Qualitative studies focus on the participants' feelings and perspectives. Based on the review of the literature, there has been limited research to address these research questions; a qualitative research design was used to conduct this study.

The qualitative method provided the most appropriate answer determining the perceived reasons why the participants are not meeting the requirements to complete the free GED program. I used this method to obtain first-hand knowledge and experience from the GED participants while understanding how the participants derived meaning from their surroundings, and how their behaviors are influenced.

The case study tradition guided the data collection and analysis processes. The case for the study was the GED participants. I chose a case study because they are used to explore ways to find meaning; examine processes; and obtain awareness into and a comprehensive understanding of a situation, individual, or group (Lodico et al., 2010). Case studies are also strategies of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Lodico et al., 2010).

Participant Selection Criteria

The setting for this study was a non-profit agency located in a southeastern state that provides temporary housing to some women and children. In addition to housing, the program offers youth services and work readiness, psychological assistance, job training, and free educational programs for qualifying individuals. The ethnic makeup of the agency is 89 % African American, 7 % European Americans, and 4% Hispanic American. The selection criteria for participants included individuals ranging from ages 18 and above that met the qualifications to participate in the free GED program but did not complete the requirements.

Sampling Size and Rationale

For this study, I had a sample size of 14 participants previously enrolled in the free GED program. Purposeful sampling is generally used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to a phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015). Using a purposeful sampling method may also prove to be effective when only limited numbers of people can serve as primary data sources due to the nature of research designs. In purposeful sampling, personal judgment needs to be used to choose cases that help answer research questions or achieve research objectives (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). This method is appropriate for this study because there are limited numbers of primary data sources that can contribute to this study.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

As a researcher, it was imperative that I recognized my personal biases and developed an ethical perspective that ensured that correct measures were in place when

faced with difficult ethical dilemmas. Accordingly, for me to conduct this research, I had to get consent from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB is an administrative body that was established to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects who are recruited to participate in research. The IRB will also ensure that I adhere to critical ethical and legal principals when conducting research (Lodico et al., 2010).

I received final consent to conduct my research by the IRB on December 8, 2017 (approval # 12-08-17-0411800). Once I received approval, I facilitated a meeting with the agencies IRB to find out the protocol and procedures for reviewing and monitoring research involving human subjects. I then completed a letter of cooperation with the agency. A letter of cooperation is a document that verifies a community partner's understanding of the study and willingness to engage in research (Walden University).

Ethical Considerations

As the researcher, I have a moral responsibility to protect the research participants from harm or risk (mentally, physically, or psychologically). For this study, I adhered to Walden University's (IRB) ethical and research guidelines to ensure that the research participants would be provided with adequate provisions to protect their privacy interest and to maintain the confidentiality of data. I also made every effort to ensure that the participants were aware that the questions for the research study would not pose any adverse effects or consequences. Finally, I affirmed that the participants would not be intentionally coerced or pressured in any way to participate in the study.

As the researcher, I entered into an agreement with the participants and their rights were disclosed verbally during the interview and through written correspondence. I made sure that the participants had a good understanding of the information and their choices, not only at the time of enrollment but throughout the research.

Informed Consent

I received informed consent from the participants that participated in the research study. Informed consent is a process in which the participant understands of the research and its risks. Obtaining informed consent is essential before enrolling a participant and is ongoing after he or she enrolls. As the researcher, I disclosed my identity and my role during the process. I established that the participants were competent and fully aware of the consent process and that the documents were in a language they could understand.

I provided the participants with the purpose of the study and the reason they were selected. They were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary, and there would not be any coercion or penalties for refusing. Because one of the risks of participating in research is a loss of privacy, I discussed how their confidentiality would be managed. Examples of confidentiality could include coding of records, limiting access to the study records, not using any individual identifiers in publications or reports resulting from the study, their rights as participants, and acknowledgment of possible conflicts of interest. The participants were informed about the length of time for the interview. They were also informed that the interview questions were related to their experience when they were enrolled in the free GED program.

The participants were advised that although there were no personal benefits, inducements, or compensations for their participation in the study, their responses would be used to provide a greater understanding and offering a solution as to the perceived reasons they may not be completing the free GED program. Should the participants have any questions about the study, they were provided with my name and contact information, as well as where this information will be located. I also provided the contact information for the chair of the IRB in case of questions about their rights as human subjects.

To maintain participants' anonymity and privacy, I assigned the participants an identification code that they would be associated with during this study. A list of identifiable information linking individuals to their codes were kept on a password-protected computer, in a locked office. As the researcher, I was the only person who had access to the data. The data were stored and locked in a secure location and assigned a security code to access.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were the primary method to collect the data. In-depth interviews provided me with an opportunity to ask several types of questions to generate responses from the participants. As an instrument in the study, I created interview guides (see Appendix D) for conducting each interview. Interview guides were designed to ensure that the same general areas of information were collected from each participant. This allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the participant (Merriam, 2014).

The other data collecting procedure used was documents. Examples of documents included the programs' curriculum and enrollment criteria. Documentary data are essential in qualitative research because they require the data to be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Documentary data were used to corroborate the interview data. I also collected documents from the Internet and by visiting the program.

Appropriateness of Data Collection Methods

I chose to interview participants because the interviews provided me with the opportunity to establish a rapport with the participants and to interact with them in their natural setting at the GED program. Each of the questions was open-ended, affording me the opportunity to gain in-depth experiences and perceptions from the participants. I asked each participant follow-up questions when I meet with them one-on-one. This method also provided the participants with an opportunity to proceed in any direction with the questions that I asked.

The intent of the interview questions was to gather data; consolidate the data into categories (coding); and then analyze the data, qualitatively, to develop key themes, narratives, and trends. The outcome of the data represented qualitative research methods and data interpretation that provided firm and absolute answers to questions provided to the participants who volunteered to participate in the study (Groleurd & Wickham, 2014).

Procedures for Collecting and Recording Data

As the researcher, the interviews allowed me to record information as it occurred in the setting . I interviewed 14 individuals ranging from ages 18 and above. The interviews occurred over a 4-6 week span and lasted from 60-90 minutes. The interviews were conducted on Monday – Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Before starting the interviews, the participants received a copy of the informed consent and were provided an opportunity to ask questions or to address any concerns that they may have had. Once the participants agreed to move forward with the interview, I used an Olympus VN 7200 Digital Voice Recorder to facilitate the recording of the interviews, along with preparing hand-written notes. By using this type of recorder, I could transfer the recording to a computer. I felt that the voice recorder was more appropriate because video recorders could have caused the participants to feel uncomfortable, preventing them from providing detailed answers.

Data Analysis

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), analyzing data requires the researcher to develop topics and themes from the data collected. At the conclusion of the interview process, data analysis was conducted. The objective of the data analysis was to develop topics and themes from the data collected from the participants. The data were analyzed and examined to ensure that none of the components were excluded. A copy of the transcriptions, as a form of member checking, were sent to the participants to ensure the accuracy of what was recorded.

Once the data were transcribed, each interview was reviewed. Throughout the interviews, I looked for corresponding words and phrases and noted any developing themes and topics. Themes were documented in instances where participants identified similar phrases and expressions. Afterward a manual system was developed to record emerging themes and code words used by the participants.

Correlative words and phrases were delineated by using a highlighted color. Many topics were covered, but several themes were reoccurring. These themes seemed to have an immense impact on the participants. The majority of the themes correlated with the research questions. A detailed analysis was provided to discuss the results in the findings section.

During this phase, I also looked at various responses for questions, and I identified words or ideas that kept coming up. I used NVivo coding, which assigns labels to a section of data, words or phrases from the interview data. NVivo coding also uses the participants' language (Wong, 2008). I also used open coding, which is another process of analyzing textual content. It includes labeling concepts and defining and developing categories (Wong, 2008). Open coding was used to identify distinct concepts and categories.

Credibility

Qualitative research has various evaluation methods to determine validity. Member checks are used to improve the credibility, accuracy, and validity of what has been recorded during the research interview. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described member checks as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 34) in a study. I

conducted member checks during the interview process and at the conclusion of the study. Throughout the process, I took data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they could confirm the credibility of the information.

I reiterated and summarized information and then questioned the participants to determine accuracy. The participants either agree or disagree that the summaries express their beliefs, feelings, and experiences, and if accuracy and completeness were assured, then the study is noted as being credible. As the researcher, conducting member checks at the end provided the participants with an opportunity to clarify any misinterpretations or confusion. I was also able to correct any errors and challenged what was perceived as wrong, incorrect interpretations.

Research Findings

According to Creswell (2007), the ultimate phase of the data analysis entails an examination of the results. The study provided an explicit understanding of the lived experiences of GED participants who were enrolled in the new GED program. Thematic analysis was used. Although the coding procedure involved developing topics, results were reported according to themes. Thematic analysis is an approach that is used to analyze qualitative data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

The primary objective of this study was to determine the perceived and experienced reasons participants may not complete the free GED program and the perceived educational strategies needed to improve retention and increase the completion rates for the free GED program. Simultaneously, I wanted to identify educational strategies to assist GED participants with completing the GED. I conducted in-depth

interviews with 14 former GED participants to accomplish this task. The interviews were conducted at the Neighborhood Network Center, using a self-made questionnaire consisting of 12 questions. Pseudonyms were given to participants' to protect their identity. The participants in the study were identified using AL (which stands for adult learner), followed by a number 1-14.

The participants in this study shared their reasons for enrolling in the GED program and their reasons for not completing the program. The participants' responses revealed information that may provide insight for program directors, administrators, and instructors who will be working with the GED participants.

I used inductive reasoning to develop themes. I completed this task by taking significant statements and clustering them into themes. I also used peer debriefing to get an outside understanding of the themes. As a result, I developed the following themes: (a) computer competency, (b) academic challenges, (c) environmental barriers, (d) instructional supports, and (e) instructor collaboration.

Research Question 1

The interview and documentary data indicated that three perceived and experienced reasons contributed to students not completing the free GED program and they can be categorized into three main themes: (a) computer competency, (b) academic challenges, and (c) environmental barriers. Each perceived and experienced reason is discussed below as a separate finding, after a summary of each theme.

Theme 1: Computer Competency

Limited computer competency is one perceived reason participants did not complete the free GED program at the local site. Computer competency related to

Findings 1-3 below and was the initial theme that emerged from the interview data.

Computer competency is when one demonstrates his or her ability to execute basic computer skills (Shuster & Pearl, 2011). Literature affirms that an essential element of the educational process that is necessary for students to be prepared for adequate participation in society; is computer experience. Lack of computer experience is a primary factor that may lead to computer anxiety (Lloyd & Brassard, 1984b). Seemingly, the more experience an individual has with a computer, the less anxious there will be with using the computer.

Collectively, 12 responses indicated that the participants lacked computer and typing skills necessary to be successful in the new GED program. By contrast, some of the participants who believed that they had computer skills feel they were not adequate to navigate the different programs. In fact, they felt that an introductory computer class might be helpful before taking the exam. AL#3 stated, “I think I have proper computer skills, but I don’t have the knowledge. I have a disability, so I struggle with learning some stuff.”

Comparably, AL#9 stated, “I have computer skills, but I need a class on different ways to operate the computer.” Obtaining a high school diploma was not a real priority in his family growing up, so he did not take school seriously. He often regrets not remaining in school and completing his high school diploma.

This participant did not realize how important it was to have either a high school diploma or a GED until he went unnoticed several times for promotions on his job. He enrolled in the GED program because he wanted to attend truck-driving school and

eventually own a truck. Even though he knows the value of having the diploma, he feels that the new test is too complicated. He stated:

Man, that test is hard. I think it is important to make sure everybody knows how to use the computer before they start the GED program. That would be helpful. I know that if we could take the test the old way, I would have completed the program by now because I had already passed two sections.

Conclusively, the above evidence supports the similar theme of computer competency and correlates with the initial finding.

Finding 1: The lack of computer and typing skills was a perceived reason the participants did not complete the free GED program.

Fifty-seven percent of the participants' responses indicated that they lacked computer and typing skills necessary to be successful in the new GED program (See Figure 2). Figure 2 is a diagrammatic representation of the participant's computer competency skills.

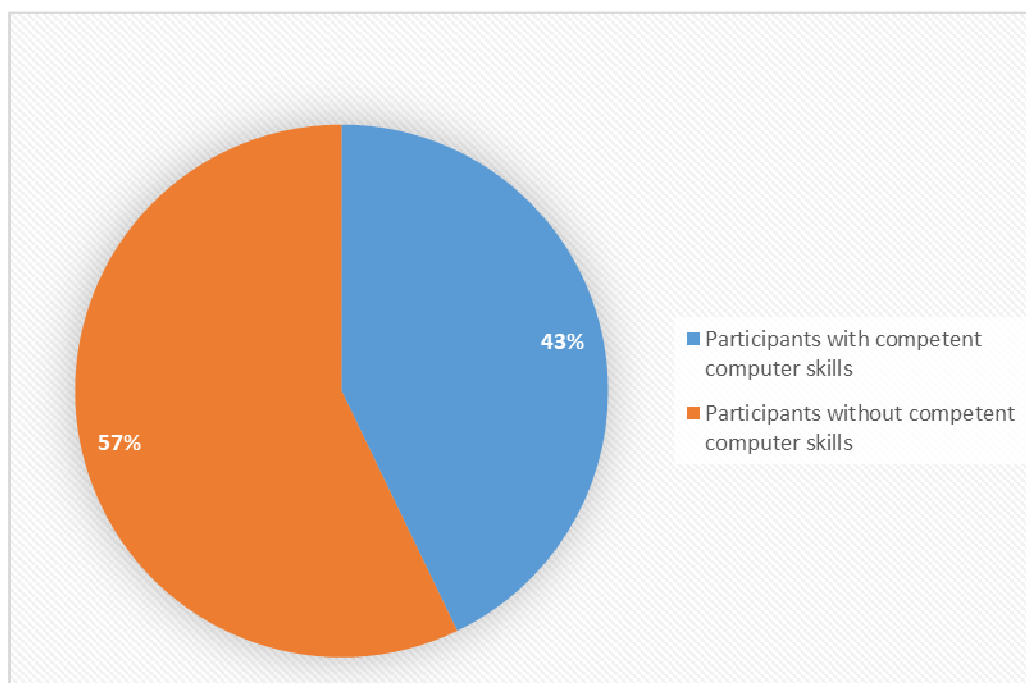


Figure 2. Participants' computer competency skills

A few of the responses indicate that participants felt that an introductory computer class could be helpful before taking the exam. Specifically, AL#4 commented, "I think I need a tutoring class to work on computers." Similarly, AL#11 asserted, "But if I can get some type of class where I can learn how to type more efficiently and swiftly, I think I would be more successful in the program."

Although several individuals described the reason differently, their sentiment suggest a lack of computer and typing skills. For example, AL#5 shared, "No, I don't feel like I have all the skills I need. I think I need some help on learning how to get on the Internet and look up things that I need to look up." AL#14 responded, "Well, I don't think I have the proper skills, because I don't know how to really type, first of all. I do

know how to cut a computer on and peck when I do type.” When asked about technology skills, AL#14 responded:

Oh, I don’t think I would do well with time, especially with typing skills. That might hinder me from being successful in the program. If somebody could offer a class, on just how to use the computer, and how to type, that would be detriment to me. I mean it would benefit me into being successful in the program.

Another participant had a completely different experience. AL#4 explained, “I feel I don’t have the necessary computer skill. I never worked on a computer before and that’s what I feel is not helping me at all to complete the GED.” This participant dropped out of high school in 10th grade due to being pregnant. During her generation, this was not out of the norm. A year after having her first child, she gave birth to a second child, so school was no longer a priority.

The participant shared that she had not used a computer while she was in school and most of her jobs did not require the use of a computer. Once her children were older, she decided to enroll in the GED program because she wanted better employment opportunities. For the participants, the use of computers for academic and professional purposes serves as an additional barrier. Although interview data indicated that 43% of the participants possessed computer competency skills, the evidence does support that the lack of computer and typing skills were significant factors that contributed to 51% of participants not completing the free GED program.

Relationship to the Literature

Allen and Seamon (2008) believed that anxiety is induced by a lack of familiarity with computers; therefore, having computer experience would be a critical factor in one's attitude regarding the computer. Shuster (2011) believed computer competency is critical to student success. Shuster also believed that administering an assessment of skills and knowledge, relevant to computer competency skills can provide instructors with valuable information regarding their students' strength and weaknesses.

Relationship to Conceptual Framework

Lack of computer and technology skills was a consequential factor regarding why participants are not completing the free GED program. This finding is plausible and aligns with the conceptual lens of functional context theory. The theory stresses building upon previous knowledge to create new concepts to carry out complicated tasks. The anticipated outcome will be for learners to be able to navigate the new computerized system and transfer what they have learned to the 21st century.

Theme 2: Academic Challenges

Another theme that developed from the interview data was academic challenges. Academic challenges might include someone's inability to achieve in a certain area, learning difficulty or disabilities, or lack of resources or support. Literature asserts that Lockwood, Nally, Dowdell, McGlone, and Steurer (2013) believe that several students are not used to learning by applying critical thinking skills; therefore, the Common Core GED Test has influenced learning significantly. Lockwood et al. (2013) affirmed that "As opposed to a student guessing on any test which is more typical behavior for low-

achieving students, those successfully taking the Common Core GED Test will have to think deeper and copy their knowledge to what they have learned in classrooms” (Lockwood et al., 2013, p. 265).

O’Connor (2013) believed that students would have to be retrained to take the test, specifically the ones who have developed a habit of just marking answers and not providing justification or an explanation for the response. The Common Core GED Test requires problem-solving and critical thinking skills, both of which will assist students with college preparation (O’Connor, 2013). Lockwood et al. (2013) also believe that older students who are not computer savvy have to study harder than other students do. These students may have to enroll in a computer class for them to become familiar with the execution of the new GED test.

The following evidence supports the theme of academic challenges and corresponds with findings listed below. Several of the participants shared in some way their apprehension about the test being online and timed. A few even felt that this was a disadvantage to some of the older students. AL#14 shared:

I was okay until I learned the test was timed. I struggle in math, so I know it will take me longer to complete that section. So, if I spend most of my time on that section, I know I won’t get the other sections done or I will have to rush through them. Personally, I think that by you telling me that the test is timed, that’s going to prevent a lot of people from applying for the program, because people are not good under pressure. Especially someone my age or older.

Comparatively, AL#3 shared the same concern regarding older individuals. She stated:

Everybody would prefer it the book way. Most people can't get it the computer way, really with the technology and all. Most of the people that come in are usually around my age. We're older. We can't do this work. We didn't learn this stuff when I was in school. I be feeling bad when I can't help my son with the math he brings home.

On the other hand, one of the participants did not have an issue with computer skills. She did not have an issue with the test now being online, nor the fact that it was timed. As a matter of fact, AL#2, who was also one of the younger participants stated, "The test wasn't hard. I wasn't focused. I just quit because I had too much other stuff going on."

AL#4 added:

I may be wrong for this, but I would say to see where their level is at, because most times the test that you're given, a person may do okay, but if you give them an all-general test, you'll find out where their level is. Some people might be good in math; some might be good in English. Science, just give a different aspect of the test and you'll see what level everybody on. A lot of people don't take tests that good, but depends on the subject. Because some people, like me, I like history, so I might do well, exceed in history. Y'all might not be giving a history test, so you can see where someone level is at and you can work on that and just uplift them in the other where they are weak at. So that way, at least they'll pass one specific test, and bring them up on the next test. This was one of

my younger participants, who I struggled to get complete responses throughout the interview process. However, she was very vocal with this question.

AL#10 was very confident. She stated, “If I’m good with numbers and I test out, I shouldn’t get retested for it.” Even though she did not complete high school, she was focused on her goals and has considered re-enrolling in the program. AL#2 was also sharp, yet simple with her response. “So that you can focus on one subject at a time, when it’s time to take the test.”

AL#7 and AL#12 responses were similar. AL#7 shared:

Well it just makes people feel like it’s not...that it’s not so difficult if you know you can test out and you can move on to the next thing. It would just make you feel better about it. It would make you feel more successful and it would make you want to go on and try to do the rest of it.

AL#12 follows:

I’m gonna say for me, for instance, if I know that I passed the math part of the exam, then that’s gonna motivate me to study harder for another part of the exam. If people know that, then you know, they’ll go through the program and be successful. So it would be good if we could just test out of certain parts at a time.

Evidence supported that various academic challenges were perceived and experienced reasons that contributed to participants not completing the free GED program. The next section will address the findings that corresponded with the theme of academic challenges.

Finding 2: The conversion from paper and pencil to computerized testing was another perceived reason participants did not complete the free GED program.

Evidence from the interview data supported the finding that the conversion from paper and pencil to computer was the leading contributor to participants not completing the new GED program. Each participant interviewed, identified this particular factor as having a significant impact on their level of success in the program. In addition to them not having the necessary computer skills to be successful in the program, the majority of the participants did not like the new version of the test. The test is computerized and like other standardized tests, all components must be passed simultaneously.

Each of the participants enrolled in the GED program when it was still being administered using the paper and pencil version, so they had completed certain portions of the test prior to the introduction of the new version. Surprisingly, none of the participants was aware that the test had changed upon re-enrolling. One was disappointed in herself for not completing the program with the old version of the test. AL#1, in expressing disappointment, stated:

If you pass the one part, you shouldn't have to re-take that part. I don't like how they did it like that. You should only be taking what you missed. You won't ever finish doing it like this. She actually had successfully completed two sections of the old test. Some of the responses from participants stood out, when referencing the new test.

AL#5 stated:

The experience was okay until everything changed over to computer. When I first started, everything was basically pen and paper way. It became stressful when they switched over to computers. It's stressful because I didn't have the computer skills. It became a lot harder.

AL#8 shared her experience with the old version of the test. She stated,

“I'm still old-fashioned. I loved pen and paper. I like writing stuff down and having access to books. I just couldn't keep up with the computer test.”

One of the most interesting comments that supported this finding was AL#13's response that stated:

I didn't like the fact that all of the work I did before don't count anymore. They should have let me take a test to see what sections I didn't need to retake. I wouldn't have ever passed having to keep re-taking the test. I don't see how anybody pass.

The above finding relates to the theme of academic challenges. Moreover, researchers have established that over time, the GED has been reformed and gone through various modifications to encompass the material necessary for higher education (Villanueva, 2018).

Relationship to the Literature

Literature affirms that there are numerous reasons why fewer students are taking and passing the new GED test. Several students perceive the new test is more difficult. The test is no longer paper and pencil but is computerized, which has enhanced adverse perceptions, uncertainty, and anxiety amongst test-takers (Villanueva, 2018). Literature

also states that providing test-takers with the option of using a computer or paper and pencil, produces various opportunities, which make the testing process more efficient. For example, the computerized test produces instant results in addition to strengthening test security (GED Testing Service Reports, 2012).

Relationship to Conceptual Framework

Lack of computer and technology skills and conversion from paper and pencil to computerized testing were important factors regarding why participants are not completing the free GED program. As indicated initially, these findings are plausible and align with the conceptual lens of functional context theory, which stresses building upon previous knowledge to create new concepts to carry out complicated tasks. The theory also emphasizes that assessments should measure knowledge. The new exam does focus on past knowledge and measures content knowledge; however, participants just have not been successful with applying their knowledge because they struggle with navigating through the new process. The anticipated outcome will be for learners to be able to operate the new computerized system and transfer what they have learned to the 21st century.

Theme 3: Circumstantial Barriers

Responses from the interview data revealed the final theme and finding that supported perceived and experienced reasons why participants did not complete the free GED program. The theme of environmental barriers was prevalent among the participants. Environmental barriers are obstacles that individuals face personally.

According to Pong and Ju (2000), a persons' family structure does affect the chances of that person dropping out of school.

Other literature that correlates with this theme is Goodwin's (2002) study. He classified barriers that affect participation in adult education programs into categories of institutional, situational, and dispositional barriers. Goodwin's findings revealed that the barriers did not encompass any exclusive group of minorities. GED programs accommodate students of all races, and several of them encounter the same barriers, despite race and ethnicity. Alternately, "attrition, or the inability to persist, is generally the result of expectations of the learning not being met" (Thomas, 2011, p. 15).

Participants' shared their experiences regarding personal circumstances that influenced their decision not to complete the free GED program. Specifically, GEDP#14 commented:

I was in the program years ago and then I decided to go back, but I had my last son by then. At first, they didn't offer childcare, so I really had a hard time trying to find someone to keep my son. I don't have any real family support, like my immediate family and I didn't want to burden anybody with taking care of my child. The program changed so much though. I couldn't really keep up with it this time. I only lasted about five months.

AL#7 was another single mother with transportation issues. She stated, "Just not having transportation and also just making sure I had someone to watch my kids."

While several attributed childcare and transportation barriers as their reasons for program non-completion, other participants shared different obstacles they encountered that prevented their program completion. AL#6 reported:

I had to relocate, so I had to come out of the program, and then I had other family situations going on. I had to take care of a family member; so again, it was times that it was just overwhelming. Then, eventually it became an issue with getting transportation to work, so I had to switch. I had to do a lot of stuff, so it was mostly time, personal, and family issues.

AL#3 expressed that, “My learning disabilities kept me from finishing. I couldn’t get it like everybody else. I’m the one that has to take everything step by step and put it all together.”

Several of the participants also referred to external factors that led to them dropping out of high schools, such as hanging with older, negative peers and engaging in drugs and alcohol.

Previously reported evidence maintains that environmental barriers contribute to participants’ non-completion of the free GED. The following finding is parallel with the theme environmental barriers.

Finding 3: The onset of temporary, personal and family obstacles was an additional perceived reason participants did not complete the free GED program.

Several of the participants identified multiple, temporary, personal and family obstacles that prevented them from completing the free GED program. Accordingly, AL#6 shared, “When I had my kids, I ended up dropping out because I didn’t really have

anyone to watch them.” AL#1 shared a similar response. She stated, “Just not having transportation and also just making sure I have someone to watch my kids.” AL11# disclosed that “I had too much on mind, then my mom was also sick so I had to be there to help her.”

Six of the participants shared that they came from single-parent homes. Five of them are also single parents. One of the participants shared that she came from a home where her father was an alcoholic. Another shared how she remembered having to move a lot when she was younger. She remembered her family being evicted and coming home from school and finding all of their belongings on the street.

One participant referenced back to her childhood and shared how no one in her family finished high school and how she and her siblings have lived in public housing all of her life. Right now, she is working two jobs but has to remain within a specific income parameter so that she does not lose her housing. AL#2 stated:

This is so hard trying to work two jobs, but still, it’s not enough. I’ve always lived in public housing, but it’s getting really bad and I just want to have a better life and a decent place for me and my kids to live. I don’t know how this is going to happen now because I’m already having to catch the bus to get to my second job and then I have to catch a ride to get to work in the morning. I don’t always have money for the bus and a bus pass is too high. Even though my mom and sister live out here, they don’t want to help me with my kids and I can’t leave them home all day by themselves and then try to go to school too.

The above evidence supports the claim that temporary personal and family obstacles are considerable factors for why participants are not completing the free GED program. The above findings also correspond with the theme of environmental barriers.

Relationship to the Literature

According to Koenig (2011), various circumstances beyond an individual's control have prevented them from completing high school. These individuals have overwhelming responsibilities that take precedence over completing high school. Previous studies on barriers have established that situational barriers are the ones more repeatedly reported by nonparticipants. The most frequently disclosed situational barriers are family situations and lack of time, which is reportedly the most universal amongst women (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

Relationship to Conceptual Framework

The component of functional context theory that focuses on situated learning correlates with the theme of situational barriers. Situated learning creates meaning from genuine experiences from daily living. Participants described their experiences throughout the interview process. Situated learning also suggests that learning not only takes place through social relationships but also through connecting prior knowledge to new content (Barab & Plucker, 2002).

Research Question 2

Similar to Research Question 1, interview and documentary data suggested that two perceived educational strategies are essential to improve student retention and

increase the completion rate for the free GED program. These perceived strategies are discussed below as separate findings under the theme.

Theme 4: Instructional Supports

Instructional supports were the first theme that emerged in this section. Evidence from the interview data indicated, that in addition to tutors and mentors, the majority of the participants felt that there was also a need for some sort of prep classes. The participants were used to having this resource in place with the old process and attributed this form of support to their success. AL#1 shared, “I liked the teacher. She was good, and she broke stuff down where I could understand. When asked about specific resources that were helpful, she stated, “The prep classes and the curriculum.” When asked by the researcher to elaborate a little more, she stated, “We used to have classes, like practice classes that we would do before we actually took the test.”

AL#11 feels that she would benefit from being able to take a prep class prior to taking the actual GED test. Similarly, AL#13 stated, “I think I need a class to show me what to do. Plus, if I had someone, I could ask questions to and understand.” “The lady in the past help me with me TABE test.”

As indicated within the literature, the implementation of orientation programs, such as math, English, science, and social studies tutorial classes, instructors stand a better chance at increasing students’ academic success on the GED test (Kefallinou, 2009). There are various GED programs accessible through non-profit organizations and some community colleges. Even so, GED programs are losing funding due to retention and completion rates. Providing simple methods that show evidence of practical

techniques used to increase retention and completion rates, can be a foundation to sustain funding for GED programs.

Literature also revealed that the development of peer and faculty mentoring programs could make it achievable for students to be socially and academically successful and persevere in adult basic education programs (Karcher, Nakkula, & Harris, 2015). According to Karcher et al. (2015), the essential fundamental step in the development of a mentoring program should be student input regarding their expectations from a mentoring program. Finding one will provide evidence for the first identified strategy.

Finding 1: The reinstatement of tutors and mentors was one of the perceived educational strategies needed to improve retention and increase the completion rates for the free GED program.

Seventy-one percent of the participants collectively identified the need for tutors and mentors to be incorporated back in the programs to improve retention and increase the completion rates for the free GED program. The following responses will support this claim. AL#4 stated:

For me again, having better mentors instead of everything being on the computer. It's okay to have the computer, but I think having the human touch from my mentors would make it more possible to complete the GED. I really think having that mentor would give me the motivation to complete my GED and go on to bigger and better things. My old mentors, a lot of them are college graduates, and I want to be like them.

When asked about specific resources, assistance or materials that she found helpful, AL#4 replied:

The library and resources from my mentors. By them sitting down and making time for me, going overboard. One particular incident I knew it was time to go and I had a question about my work, and they stayed after hours to help me to ensure that I was better prepared for the following test the next day.

AL#6 expressed the following:

I think it would be good if they go back to having tutors that's involved in the process. If I need to call on for questions or just check on me to see how I'm doing. I don't have to talk to them every day, but at least if I knew I had that person I can call, that's support enough for me.

AL#14 expressed a similar response. She stated:

If I could get a tutor to help me study for the GED or if I could get somebody to ask questions to, that I'm not understanding, because my skills are low; that would be great. If I can get somebody to work hand in hand with me, then I know I would be successful in the program.

As initially indicated, evidence supports that the participants feel that tutors and mentors should be incorporated back in the program to improve retention and increase the completion rates for the free GED program. The above findings correspond with the theme of instructional supports.

Figure 3 will highlight a diagrammatic representation of instructional supports identified by the participants.

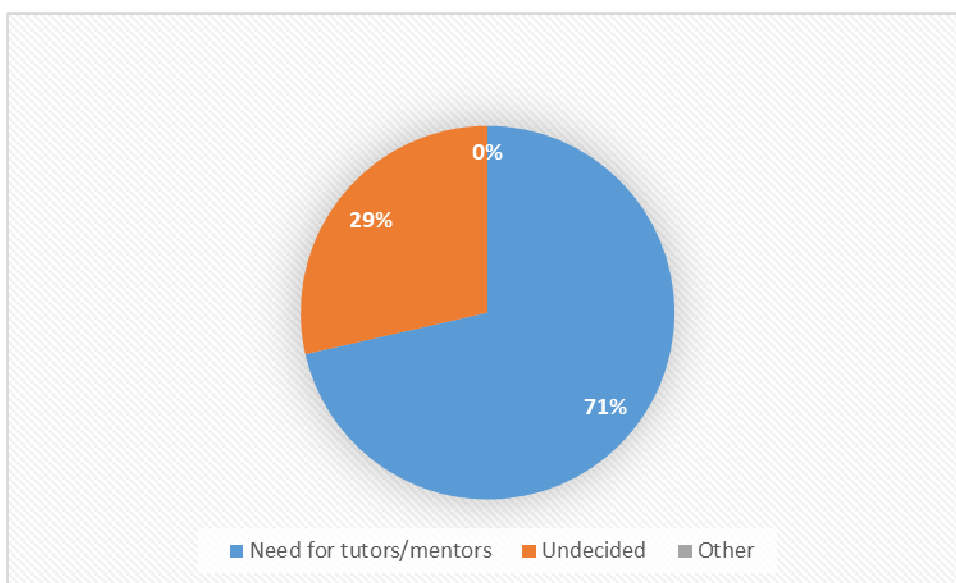


Figure 3: Instructional supports

Relationship to the Literature

Literature supporting this finding revealed that previous research by NEA (1997) advocated for mentoring in the adult basic education environments and characterized it as a favorable method for enhancing participation, retention and academic development among minority students. Additional research by Brown, Davis, and McClendon (1999) proved that mentoring programs in adult basic education increased student participation. Brown et al. (1999) wrote that mentors offer “sponsorship, protection, challenge, exposure, visibility, counseling, acceptance, confirmation, and coaching” (p. 53) to their students.

Lockwood et al. (2013) believed that GED instructional programs, in addition to tutorials would help build students’ comprehension levels. Computer training programs should also be incorporated in this process because it would allow the students to become

acquainted with the keyboard as well as the software needed to take the GED test (Lockwood et al., 2013).

Relationship to Conceptual Framework

Instructors stand a better chance at increasing students' academic success on the GED test by implementing orientation programs (Kefallinou, 2009). Literature supports the conceptual framework. This literature also aligns with functional context theory of making learning relevant. Students having some sense of autonomy with what they are expected to learn, as well as how they learn; may improve student retention.

Theme 5: Instructor Collaboration

The final theme that emerged from the interview data was instructor collaboration. Instructor collaboration is between students and professors to engage the learners in the learning process. Evidence presented from the interviews supported that some of the participants felt they needed to be involved with instructor collaboration to provide viable solutions for them to be successful in the program. The participants were candid in their responses as it related to instructor collaboration; however, a few were unable to identify who they felt should be involved in potential solutions for improving retention in the program. Some responses were more detailed than others were. One that stood out was quoted by AL#6. She stated:

I think somebody like me should be involved in the solution. Obviously, people who are in the program should be in the conversation, or talk to them. Talk to people who are currently taking the GED and those who have completed it and graduated. But of course, I could talk to the people or the staff that is creating

the program. I would have loved somebody to come talk to me, because maybe I don't know if I would help them. But definitely people who are currently in the GED program. They need to be in the conversation.

Evidence from literature indicates that students needed to have a positive relationship with their instructors and teachers in order for them to succeed in the GED, program (Coming, Parrella, & Soricone, 1999). Students feel that it is critical to develop a substantial relationship upon enrolling in the program, to refute any challenges they may face in their studies (King, 2002). Illeris (2010) conducted a study that focused on student and teacher interactions. The study proposed that student motivation and participation increased when instructor and student interactions were positive. The following finding also corresponded with the final theme of instructor collaboration.

Finding 2: Providing the participants with a well-defined curriculum for the GED courses was the final perceived educational strategy needed to improve retention and increase the completion rates for the free GED program.

Finding two indicated that it is imperative that a well-defined curriculum be provided for students to improve retention and increase the completion rates for the free GED. Interview data also indicated the participants felt that there is a need for extensive collaboration regarding the curriculum, for students to be successful in the program.

AL#4 and AL#7 both provided comments that indicated they believe coordinators, the teachers, and the students all need to work together, to increase success within the GED program. AL#4 declared that "Everybody needs to be

involved; students and teachers for us to be successful. Teachers need to motivate students.” AL#7 affirmed:

Well, first I would say offer pencil and paper, and also computer for those that do know the computer skills, that will have the computer skills. Second, I would say have a tutor on hand or that might be able to assist with, you know, with help preparing somebody to pass the GED. I’m thinking of the ones that, the GED program that I was enrolled in before. Also, instructors on hand to help me study and help me learn the information. The instructors need to work more with the student.

A final significant response was that of AL#8. She stated, “That’s a good question. I would say everybody should be involved. The ones that make the test and the books and everything else. That way, everybody will have some input.”

The previously stated findings support the final theme that emerged from the interview data, which is instructor collaboration.

Relationship to the Literature

Literature supporting this finding states that GED instructors were not trained on the new test style and needed additional time to execute new test material and curriculum content (GED Testing Services, 2016). The extensive collection of GED preparation resources and materials for instructors increased consideration for the quality of professional development instructors will receive (GED Testing Services, 2016). While the new GED test preparation training for instructors has been designed to correspond with the Common Core Standards, an orientation period is essential to execute practice

tests and curriculum guides. Instructors require time to become acquainted with the new course of study, accuracy, and type of test questions. Instructors also needed time to determine the material most appropriate for various testing populations (Hoffman, 2013).

Relationship to Conceptual Framework

Whereas literature supports that students needed to have a positive relationship with their instructors and teachers for them to succeed in the GED program, the functional context theory does not necessarily support additional literature. This literature suggests that many GED program administrators are no longer supporting the GED programs (O'Connor, 2013). Due to the significance of the Common Core GED Test, including directing students to establish higher levels of critical thinking and incurring the cost of purchasing more study materials and resources, administrators are continuously reluctant to register students for the GED programs (O'Connor, 2013).

Outcomes

Former GED participants were the primary source of data for this study of their experiences that caused them not to complete the free GED program and educational strategies needed to improve completion rates. Data collected from the interviews secured answers to both research questions and provided a more comprehensible illustration of the reasons the participants exited the program before completing.

The significant outcomes of this research included five themes, which focused on computer competency, academic challenges, environmental barriers, instructional supports, and instructor collaboration. Additionally, five findings emerged. The conclusions included lack of computer and typing skills, the conversion from paper and

pencil to computerized testing, the onset of temporary, personal and family obstacles, reinstatement of tutors and mentors and providing the participants with a well-defined curriculum for the GED courses.

A significant purpose of the study was to identify a potential solution to the educational problem of high numbers of participants not completing the free GED program. The overwhelming evidence from the participants suggests that a curriculum for a professional development training for instructors facilitating the online course is an educational strategy that may be a potential solution to the local problem. Elements for the professional development training will include course goals, course objectives, the target population, course performance measures/assessments, and academic content for the duration of the course and related components. Professional development research and literature in general, specifically for adult learners, will inform how the project is designed. The complete project is located in Appendix A.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 provides a project description and an explanation for project development. The project was a professional development workshop. It was designed for the GED instructors and will be conducted during their annual staff retreat. The workshop would afford the instructors with an opportunity to acquire knowledge concerning online facilitation, learning, and resources.

Description and Goals

The conclusion of the study indicated a need for on-going training for the GED instructors. The study also confirmed that retention for GED students is a significant concern, in addition to GED instructors not being adequately trained on the new test style. A potential solution regarding this concern is the incorporation of training for GED instructors. The project will focus on improving retention by administering a professional development workshop that would include the GED instructors at the program. The workshop will be divided into components and require shared participation from the participants.

The fundamental goal of the workshop is for instructors to facilitate the courses online effectively. At the completion of the training, the objective will be for the instructors to construct and execute a facilitation plan and determine the best methods to communicate with the GED students. To further attain the project goal, interactive activities will be included for the instructors to remain engaged. The training will also include a Power-Point presentation, group activities, and handouts for reinforcement.

Subsequently, the instructors will be able to use the training materials as they proceed with facilitation the online GED classes.

The goal of the project is to ensure that the instructors are equipped with the knowledge they need to facilitate the new GED courses with confidence. The training curriculum will communicate the findings established in the research study. The Power-Point presentation will highlight data collected and the handouts will relate to the research findings.

Rationale

The outcome of this study affirmed that many of the participants did not possess computer skills, which caused them to struggle with navigating the new online GED test. Collectively, many of the participants felt that they needed some form of online training or support. Participants are entering GED programs underprepared with various barriers such as lack of basic skills, lack of language skills and lack of computer skills. These 21st-century skills are invaluable to instructors and are essential in preparing the students for their future careers (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).

Baghdadi (2012) denoted that “The use of computers, software, and the Internet to transmit knowledge and skills is flourishing, and new technology is constantly being used to create new ways of learning, such as online education” (p. 109). Comparably, LaPlant (2010) asserted possessing basic computer skills is a critical part of the academic success that can be an effective tool, particularly for developmental students to address some of the students’ deficiencies. Acquiring basic computer skills provides these unprepared students the encouragement to continue their education (p. 3).

The project connects with various components of the data analysis, and the workshop was developed to acknowledge the findings. I also found that the GED participants had alternated throughout the program. I also revealed that none of them had completed the new online GED program. Nevertheless, none of them had participated in any kind of GED preparation classes prior to taking the new exam.

The results of this study also determined that the participants believed that there is a need for the prep classes because it would strengthen their academic level, measured through the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessment. The training will include information concerning the progression of online learning for GED students. Adult learners are concerned about materials and resources that will assist them with attaining their academic goals. One of the primary goals is to train learners to use the new online system and take responsibility for their learning; therefore, self-directed learners would be a prime focus of the workshop. The participants asked for a reinstatement of tutors and mentors and a well-defined curriculum for the GED courses.

The project was based on the data collected. Initially, the plan was to design a curriculum plan for adult learners that would train them on the new GED curriculum and how to effectively use the computer and Internet. However, after research and receiving verbal feedback from one of the program facilitators, what continued to echo was instructors need to be trained to understand the new GED online platform and effective ways to prepare and support adult learners (C. Johnson, personal communication, June 25, 2018). Instructors must also be competent and highly qualified; therefore providing resources and an online training course for GED instructors is warranted.

The results of the findings, along with communication with one of the current facilitators promoted staff training titled “Planning and Delivering Online Instruction for Adult Learners”. Herman (2012) declared, “It is pivotal for local ABE/GED program administrators to assess their perceptions of the traditional teaching and learning experience to include online instruction” (p. 86). Previously, there was not a considerable amount of training accessible for ABE/GED instructors. Several GED instructors possessed limited knowledge or proficiency related to facilitation of online GED preparation courses. Consequently, I outlined the project based on prior research and the online learners’ needs.

Review of the Literature

The following research questions guided the conception of the study project: What are the perceived and experienced reasons participants may not complete the free GED program and what are the perceived educational strategies needed to improve retention and increase the completion rates of the free GED programs? A professional development training was the selected project genre. Although I conducted a review of the literature, I was unable to uncover information on professional development training, particularly for ABE/GED instructors and learners. However, professional development training could be conducive to an increase in student retention as well as program completion (Berger, 2014; Khan, 2012; Loo, 2013; Stewart, 2014).

Based on the research findings and the development of the workshop, saturation was attained for the project by using the following terms: *adult education*, *adult learning*, *online facilitator*, *online instructor*, *retention*, *motivation* and *new GED test*, and

professional development. Boolean search terms used: *instructor orientation not facilitator orientation, professional development workshops and training, and not professional development, adult learning, theory of adult learning and adult learning theory, GED non completion rates instead of GED retention, GED instructor or GED facilitator, and online GED instructors.* and instructions. The search tools used to locate research studies were the following: ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE, Educational Research, and Google Scholar. I used Google Scholar for resources on professional development.

A central theme that emerged from the data and literature reviews of various case studies was the need for additional training, created particularly for instructors facilitating the new online GED. Professional development could increase student success, which could lead to increased graduation rates and retention. Utilizing the data collected from this study, in addition to the development of a workshop produces a foundation for this need to be addressed.

The review of literature highlights the importance of professional development trainings. It also highlights the importance of being familiar with how adults learn as well as the importance of GED instructors knowing how to facilitate online courses. I provided an overview of the importance of learners being self-directed learners. Improving the GED retention rates and the impact of the learning environment were the final components to encompass the literature review.

Scholars outlined the key factors and the importance of professional development workshops. I highlighted the importance of being familiar with the significant aspects involved with understanding and being familiar with how adults learn. I illustrated how

GED instructors facilitate instruction, particularly concerning online instruction, and focused on the significance of individuals accepting the role of self-directed learners. Improving the GED retention rates and the impact of the learning environment were the final components to encompass the literature review.

Professional Development Workshop

This professional development workshop was developed to prepare GED instructors with the fundamental skills necessary to facilitate online GED courses. Researchers have described professional development workshops for instructors (Luft & Hewson, 2014). Decades of studies have been conducted on professional development, which focused on improving classroom instruction and the effects of instructor's instructional methods (Little, 2012; Martin, Kragler, & Frazier, 2017). Professional development has been emphasized as a vehicle to strengthen instructors' knowledge, abilities, and perception of common trends. Professional development needs to be purposeful. It must also be direct for participants to welcome the experience as well as value the information conveyed in the workshop (Luft & Hewson, 2014).

Additionally, Killion and Roy (2009) proposed "That professional development organizers should make certain that training is correlated with school improvement standards, district guidelines, state academic requirements, professional learning guidelines and are executed by utilizing the most effective strategies for adult learners" (p. 18). For professional development to be realistic, instructor input is pertinent to reduce opposition regarding initiatives they feel are "useless" or "a waste of time" (Killion & Roy, 2009). When creating professional development components for

workshops, instructors' input is critical, primarily because instructors are expected to participate in the professional development exercises as well as reconstruct the information and procedures attained into practical and continuous instructional methods that encourage student achievement (Bayar, 2014; Tate, 2012).

Ordinarily, professional development is most efficient when content is reiterated, responsive, establishes or generates alternative instructional methods, and enhances and reinforces student learning (Loo, 2013). Professional development for staff is a vehicle that can produce instructor competency, which influences the students. Instructional knowledge can be increased by incorporating professional development (Khan, 2012).

Mizell, Hord, Killion, and Hirsh (2011) stated that professional development is the primary method for educators to learn to improve their performance and increase student achievement. Similarly, Lacursia (2011) declared that professional development training is essential for instructors to influence student learning positively. According to Vaughan and McLaughlin (2011), teacher involvement needs to be addressed by stakeholders at a state level and nationally. Seeing that GED students are expected to participate in online learning, there should be an endeavor to ensure that instructors are trained to facilitate these online courses.

The professional development training designed for this project is included in Appendix A. A GED instructors' competency and commitment is critical to thousands of individuals that take the GED test each year. The goal of the professional development training is to generate productive social change by teaching GED instructors to provide

adult learners with online instruction. Online instruction is a developing trend, which is different from the traditional version of the GED previously taught in the classroom

Adult Learning

Before promoting professional development training for GED instructors, the adult learning theory must be investigated. Instructors should possess basic awareness regarding how adults learn. Adult learners provide experiences and knowledge to learning that younger learners do not. Before designing a professional development curriculum for adult learners, it is essential to be familiar with the adult learning theory – andragogy. Knowles created the term “androgical,” which is a technique used to train and instruct adult learners (McClanahan, 2014).

Knowles’ principals of adult learning were premised based on the following assumptions about adult learners: (a) self-directed/autonomous learners, (b) goal-oriented learners, (c) relevant-oriented learners, (d) knowledge and real-life experience learners, (e) practicality learners, and (f) collaborative learners (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). The educational requirements for learners relating to the continual increase in technology are ingrained in these principles (Bear, 2012).

Adult learners bring their aggregated life experiences to these new GED classes, and these previous experiences can influence how they will convert the new knowledge. Instructors can design activities for learners from various cultural backgrounds that will provide them with an opportunity to share ideas and acquire knowledge from their peers. Adult learners generally participate and continuously engage in learning that match their

goals and exact needs by incorporating their life experiences and significant topics (Deci & Ryan, 2009).

Learners demonstrate they are eager to participate in the learning process when they can devise their own academic goals and take control of their learning (Greene, 2015). According to Ellis (2004), most individuals acquire information best when offered credible assignments, and they are held responsible for their learning. Instructors should be familiar with students' learning styles as well as their needs, to effectively engage adult students in the learning process (Varughese & Fehring, 2009). Instructors are also effective when they possess awareness of their students' interests and abilities (Parson, Ankrum, & Morewood, 2016). Goal-oriented and self-directed adult learners are influenced to engage in learning when needs are acknowledged and included in the learning process (Chen, 2014)

Facilitating Online Instruction

One of the primary purposes of the professional development training is to train and prepare GED instructors to provide online instruction. Whereas online learning has accelerated over the past few years, so has the urgency for practical ways to prepare and support highly qualified online instructor (Storandt, Dossin, & Lacher, 2012). The instructors' role is paramount when administering GED instruction online (Laat, Lally, Lipponen, & Simons, 2007). The GED instructors work as facilitators in the process of learning. Adult learners enrolled in online classes generally acquire knowledge through the "content only with learners relying on their meta-cognitive skills to derive meaning" (Dennen, Darabi, & Smith, 2007, p. 66).

The workshop curriculum suggests techniques that can be used to facilitate online courses. Laat et al. (2007) indicated that “Providing online instruction requires diverse and at times new skills for the instructors, as well as a unique attitude towards being an instructor” (p. 259). Instructors are responsible for progress monitoring, and assessments for students enrolled in online GED courses. Chu and Tsai (2012) concluded, “Instructors should focus more attention on providing adult learners with sufficient practice to inspire them to engage in online activities” (p. 478).

Online course facilitation requires personal and corporate feedback. According to Gallien, Ommen, and Early (2008), students function more effectively immediately upon receiving personal feedback. Instructors should be available to provide consistent communication through email, phone calls or text. Fish and Wickersham (2009) declared that online instructors should be able to communicate distinctively and know how to improve relationships. The professional development training will also offer preferred methods of communication for online instructors.

Self-Directed Learning

Various contributors to the field of adult education have developed interest in self-directed learning (Bear, 2012). The essential skills for adults to effectively perform as self-directed learners receives ongoing consideration. Self-directed learning involves the learner taking the initiative to establish their requirements for learning, communicating learning goals, identifying learning resources, choosing and employing appropriate learning strategies, and being able to access learning results (Knowles, 1980).

Online courses require learners to possess self-directed skills. Self-directed learning entails the learners being capable of functioning independently, effectively manage their time, and promote effective interpersonal skills (Hunte, 2012). However, some learners do not commonly acquire this skills set; it must be taught particularly and promoted online (Bear, 2012). When taught, activities should include the learner being involved in self-assessments that will allow them to focus their attention on their individual needs, skills, abilities, and other areas that will prepare them for successful online learning (Hunte, 2012).

The professional development training produced information concerning the relevance of self-directed learning skills for online learners. Instructors can enhance self-directed active learning in the classroom by providing the students with a syllabus highlighting activities related to the lesson. By doing this, students will be given a choice to select the activities to work on, as well as whether they want to work independently, with a partner, or in a group (Gardner, 2011). This process will afford the students with an opportunity to take control of their learning and the instructor develops continuous learning which enhances students' academic perseverance (Gardner, 2011).

Improving GED Retention Rates

Research revealed that many of the participants struggled with the conversion from the traditional paper and pencil version of the test to the new online GED test. This conversion hindered their ability to complete the program. Online classes are a potential solution to this problem (Olesen-Tracey, 2010). Haley (2012) also suggested that online classes have become instrumental in enhancing retention rates.

While many adult learners do not persist in GED classes for reasons beyond the programs' control, many do not remain in the program because they lack the necessary computer skills or have limited access to the online courses and services they need (Serin, 2011). As noted in *A Blueprint for Preparing America's Future* (2003) by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, "Adults who make the personal investment in learning deserve a broad array of high-quality program options that best meet their needs" (p. 3). Being involved in GED courses and training is a choice and participants generally make reasonable sacrifices to attend (Serin, 2011).

Research also determined that several obstacles prohibited GED students from attending class. Baghdadi (2011) declared "Online learning programs are created to accommodate students who are unable to attend traditional classes due to various reasons, to include family obligations, employment, and transportation" (p. 114). The participants in the study conceived that several obstacles could be eliminated by receiving training, to navigate the online courses.

Research on online learning concluded that learning, particularly for older adults, determined that social supports and connectivity could be increased by utilizing the Internet (Chu & Tsai, 2012). Additional studies have discovered that adults attain greater educational results when participating in the online learning environment (Baghdadi, 2011). Finally, research revealed that participants suggested online training be incorporated to assist them with successful completion of the GED classes.

Impact of Learning Environment

Promoting and preserving a lifestyle of learning for all learners should be fundamental objectives for any institution (Hanna, Salzman, Reynolds, & Fergus, 2010; Petty & Thomas, 2014). Student motivation is often affected by the structure of the educational environment (Wlodkowski, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 2009). Enhancing the student's learning environment could influence their opinion regarding the educational setting and the process of learning (Kafele, 2013).

Instructors could enhance students' academic outcomes by being aware of the instructors' cultural relevancy of the teaching, their relationship with the students, and the actual learning environment (Kafele, 2013). A students' academic performance is influenced by their attitude regarding the learning environment (Allodi, 2010b; Cohen & Genier, 2010). Essentially, Kafele (2013) encouraged instructors to continuously refine instructional methods by reinforcing methods used to reshape the students' attitudes, so that they are energized and prepared daily to achieve their best. At the conclusion of the research, it was determined that participants aspired to see instructors and tutors more visible and ready to support them.

When learners are afforded an opportunity to have the support of a tutor or mentor, their sense of belonging in the learning environment improves as well as their academic success (O'Keeffe, 2013). Cassidy (2012) also suggested there are "seven c's of effective teaching" that makes an enormous difference in the learning environment:

- **Caring** about students (nurturing productive relationships);
- **Controlling** behavior (promoting cooperation and peer support);

- **Clarifying** ideas and lessons (making success seem feasible);
- **Challenging** students to work hard and think hard (pressing for effort and rigor);
- **Captivating** students (making learning interesting and relevant);
- **Conferring** (eliciting students' feedback and respecting their ideas);
- **Consolidating** (connecting and integrating ideas to support learning)

(Cassidy, 2012, p. 801).

Instructors can support learners by providing orientations for perseverance and conducting outreach designed for students who do not complete the program (Kefallinou, 2009; Shaw, 2015). Instructors can also provide support to learners by developing time management instruments that will assist them in being able to set aside time devoted to studying (McClanahan, 2014; Romero & Barbera, 2011). When instructors produce institutional supports that encourage student motivation and perseverance, it improves student outcomes and increases student retention (Shaw, Tham. Hogle, & Koch, 2015; Zhang & Zhang, 2013).

Summary

Data suggested that students accomplish more when actively involved in the process of learning. Recently, researchers have examined the relevance of training instructors to encourage participation as well as learning (McClanahan, 2014). The technology generates the possibility of creating real-world experiences in the classroom and reinforces the relationship between the learners' experiences and instruction (McClanahan, 2014). By offering these current trends and research-based knowledge to

the GED instructors during professional development training, they can obtain in-depth knowledge of how adults learn. Additionally, the instructors learn techniques to strengthen current curriculum and instructional methods in order to encourage participation, enhance learning outcomes, and increase persistence for learners participating in the GED program.

Implementation

Once I receive approval of the proposed project, the professional development plan “Planning and Delivering Online Instruction for Adult Learners,” will be implemented. The implementation process will include the following: (a) obtaining permission from the program director to facilitate the professional development workshop during their three-day annual, fall staff retreat, (b) preparing for the workshop, (c) facilitating the workshop combining professional development principles, and (d) assessing the outcome of the workshop. By participating in the workshop during the fall, instructors will have an opportunity to incorporate the newly acquired strategies, implement lesson plans and best practices created during the workshop, before the new session.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Although many programs have a budget allocated for professional development workshops, I adhered to the programs’ policies for scheduling workshops and made contact with the appropriate staff to assess available resources. A computer lab was required for the workshop. A screen or projector with an audio system was also required. Additional resources needed for the workshop were chart paper and markers.

Potential Barriers

For this project, there were no perceived barriers. The intended audience for the professional development workshop is GED instructors. Due to the new changes to the GED, most GED instructors welcome the instructional training. However, there could be a lack of funding sources allocated for a three-day workshop. In case this problem occurs, alternative funds could potentially be procured from additional entities within the cooperation.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The plan for the professional development workshop is included in Appendix A. Once permission is granted to move forward with planning the workshop, I will recommend the program director to allow me to facilitate the workshop during the annual fall staff retreat. The workshop will be held before the Fall GED session resuming in September. It will enable the instructors to explore current processes and generate best practices, lesson plans, and activities to improve student learning. Gallien and Oomen-Early (2008) stated, "Online instructors must prepare for the increased written communication demands that accompany online education" (p. 463).

The professional development is a full three-day workshop that will be presented Monday-Wednesday. It will last from 8:00 am - 3:00 pm, with an hour lunch break. These particular days were chosen because they are the first three days of the retreat, and will not interfere with the instructors' regular work schedule. The workshop will be engaging and interactive. The presentations will include PowerPoint presentations,

handouts, discussions, role-playing, hands-on activities, question and answer segments, and evaluations.

Project Evaluation

I developed this project based on responses from the research findings. Using data to guide decisions concerning the focus of the professional development plan was important. Researchers determined that educators can understand students' needs better and can apply direct instruction when they have access to the data collected (Hayes & Robnolt, 2017). It is necessary for a properly designed professional development workshop to include an evaluation system that corresponds to the workshop objectives. It must also use an appropriate evaluation tool to determine the effectiveness of the workshop (Haynes & Robnolt, 2017).

Typically, professional development designers use summative or formative assessment tools to determine the workshops' effectiveness. A formative evaluation will be utilized to measure the effectiveness of this professional development workshop (see Appendix B). I selected a formative assessment because it will be used to gather information throughout the execution of the training. It will also be used to assess the effectiveness of the workshop during the initial phase of implementation. Utilizing formative evaluations will allow the GED instructors to not only assess to the training modules but also to assess the participants' perception of the three-day event.

According to research experts working with project evaluations, "when called upon to produce evidence that their programs are working and are impacting the participants positively, program administrators often evaluate the program" (Allen &

Bronte-Tinkew, 2008, p. 2). Each day, participants will complete an evaluation form at the end of the session to provide feedback regarding what they acquired from the professional development training as well as their implementation plan for the strategies learned. This data obtained will assist the facilitator with future professional development needs. The evaluation data will be obtained by utilizing a Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral =3, Disagree =2, Strongly Disagree = 1). It will encompass measurable and descriptive questions.

The instructors will complete an evaluation form at the end of each session. They will also assess the level of effectiveness of the training, to assist with determining if any portions of the training need revisions. I will explore data from the evaluations to determine variables that are pertinent to the training experience. I will also examine data at the conclusion of each day, as well as when the training is completed. Finally, I will use the measurable data to establish congruency and to determine if the workshop participants believe that the training program requires change.

The likely stakeholders are GED program administrators, coordinators, and instructors. As previously indicated, Vaughn & McLaughlin (2011) believed, “teachers should also be involved in professional development training” (p.53). ABE/GED instructors will gain the most from participating in and evaluating the training. Since student feedback indicated that they prefer working with instructors, I constructed the professional development training to prepare ABE/GED instructors on how to facilitate online classes.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

The study indicated that the educational problem is a pattern of high percentage rates of adult learners who have not completed a free GED program in a three-year period, in a non-profit agency in a southeastern state. The new GED is online, and many of the participants have been unsuccessful in the program because they lack basic computer skills necessary to navigate the program. Some also believe that they do not have the support needed to assist them with completing the program. The workshop was created to educate GED instructors on the current trend of online courses. The professional development workshop will also provide research-based information, which includes teaching the new GED courses online. Coaching and preparing GED instructors to teach online courses has the probability of producing social change throughout the Jacksonville area. Finally, training instructors to teach online courses could unlock access for many GED students to obtain their GED.

Far-Reaching

An approximate “39 million adults, which is roughly 18 percent of the U.S. adult population are not able to fully engage in today’s marketplace because they have not yet obtained a high school diploma essential for entry into college or work-force area” (Rutschow & Crary-Ross, 2014, p. 1). It is critical for the instructor to find ways to support adult learners with earning a high school diploma or GED and empower them to find ways to regain their confidence (O’Neill & Thomson, 2013).

Even though the project is for GED instructors in the Jacksonville area, it is intended to expand to GED instructors nationwide. When the national GED exam was replaced with a computer-based test, which aligned with the Common Core Standards, the exam's level of difficulty increased significantly, particularly for the students with low numeracy and functional reading skills (O'Neill & Thomson, 2013). As a result, there has been continual development nationally regarding GED programs, as researchers explore ways to recognize challenges of adult learners to establish suitable approaches to increase the learners' strengths to address their individual needs.

Conclusion

Section 3 presented a comprehensive analysis of the project. The workshop was designed mainly for GED instructors. It will serve as a vehicle for instructors to collaborate, examine their teaching styles, and use common trends and research-based knowledge to establish effective practices to involve students in the process of learning. The professional development workshop goals were the following: to provide information for teaching online GED courses, describe student characteristics needed to effectively participate in distance education courses, and provide details on how online courses will help improve GED retention and graduation rates. The workshop is highlighted in Appendix A. Section 4 will provide a reflection on the overall development of composing the proposal, conducting the research, and executing the final project.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify a potential solution to the educational problem of high numbers of participants not completing the free GED program. The research questions for the study centered on perceived and experienced reasons participants did not complete the program and perceived educational strategies needed to improve retention and increase the completion rates for the program. It is critical that GED instructors use instructional best practices to develop student-centered learning environments to improve retention. I will focus on my strengths and limitations of developing a project, personal awareness acquired as a scholar and a practitioner, and guidance as a prospective leader in the field of adult basic education.

Project Strengths

I was motivated to develop the workshop due to evidence received from the participants suggesting that a professional development training for instructors facilitating the online course being a solution to the local problem. Currently, the instructors for the GED program have training and knowledge of their subject area; however, there are no updated research-based strategies for improving retention or training to facilitate the new online GED courses. I used the literature review from the final project to guide my study. Instructors were not trained on the new test style and needed additional time to execute new test material and curriculum content (GED Testing Service, 2016). Knowles (2005) emphasized the significance of educators possessing knowledge of how and why adults learn, as many of them will participate

in courses and training that interest them or they think will increase their understanding on a topic or concept.

A strength of my project is the professional development will provide the instructors with a vehicle to develop their skills and knowledge of adult learning. The professional development will also provide the instructors with strategies to facilitate the online courses effectively. A final significant strength is the professional development will afford the instructors with an opportunity to collaborate with other instructors and develop an avenue to improve retention.

Project Limitations

According to Lodico et al., (2010), program developers have experienced various obstacles when creating and implementing professional development workshops. A potential limitation is the training is scheduled for 3 consecutive days, which means that the instructors will be out of the building and not able to prepare for the upcoming sessions or to complete other critical tasks. This limitation could be addressed by offering professional development throughout the year. When instructors experience professional development over a period, it has more effect on their teaching (Bers, Seddighin, & Sullivan, 2013). The instructors may find it more feasible for being able to sign up for workshops to accommodate their schedules.

Another limitation might be a lack of participation or buy-in from the instructors. They can have various personal and professional reasons for not being receptive of new challenges and the skepticism that sometimes come with executing and evaluating a new program. When professional development is well organized, educators value it rather

than complain about it (Mizell et al., 2011). Program administrators should do whatever they can to reduce any potential resistance by the instructors. They can develop and encourage collaboration for the instructors to achieve success within an appropriate setting, which would allow them to present their opinions and gain information from different instructors willingly and strengthen their personal and professional knowledge. Collaboration and culture work together, and a program's culture will influence the instructor's attitude regarding collaboration (Mizell et al., 2011).

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

An alternative approach to address GED instructors receiving adequate training to facilitate the new GED test could be a mentoring program. Mentoring has earned extensive coverage in recent decades and this is palpable based on the magnitude of prominent literature and research available to the reader. It has been extolled as a critical resource management approach and a workplace learning activity for individuals in diverse organizational environments such as government departments, large corporations, universities, and schools. Mentoring children does not have the same impact as adults mentoring adults (Menges, 2015).

Although a mentor's role is to promote the personal and professional development of a mentee through the sharing insight, knowledge, and advice, the relationship provides reciprocal benefits for mentors investing their time in order to develop another professional. The core of the mentoring relationship is built on trust, communication, and respect, and it involves both individuals meeting regularly to share ideas, communicate progress and establish goals for additional development. Mentoring also provides the

mentor with the personal satisfaction of being able to share their skills and experiences with willing learners (Denny, 2015).

One of the most beneficial and productive development opportunities offered to employees is mentoring. Having the support, encouragement, and guidance from a credible and experienced mentor can afford a mentee with an immense range of personal and professional benefits. These benefits could lead to enhanced performance in the workplace. A few benefits for mentees could be uncovering new ideas and ways of comprehending recommendations on professional development and promotion, and opportunities to establish new skills and knowledge (Foote & Solem, 2009).

Scholarship

Enrolling in this doctoral program and pursuing this degree has been a daunting experience. Over the past 5 years, I have had several significant life challenges, while still trying to stay focused and keep up with my coursework. This task has not been easy. Despite the challenges, this research has provided a vehicle for me to enhance my research and critical thinking skills. As a result of the in-depth review of the literature, I attained insight about current trends affecting GED retention.

Conducting a literature review on GED and adult learners, in addition to the new course of study introduced me to various assumptions and theories regarding ways adults learn, along with their views and experiences while enrolled in programs. I read various peer-reviewed articles that highlighted perceived and experienced personal and impersonal elements, which influenced motivation and completion rates in GED programs. The problem identified was analyzed using the conceptual framework of

functional context theory, which emphasized the significance of making learning pertinent to the learner's individual experience. This theory also aligned with the findings of this study. The analysis of the data produced themes, which formed the content, rationale and structure for the design of my project.

As a candidate in the doctoral program, I feel that I have grown professionally as a student, practitioner, and researcher. As a student, this process has provided a vehicle of clarification about adult basic education. For example, adults learn more productively when the instructional strategies correspond to their needs and their preferred learning styles (Chen, 2014). As a researcher, I have enhanced my ability to develop a study, provide results, and make a claim of originality of my findings. As a practitioner, I was able to partner with a local agency successfully to research with the intended purpose of improving instructional practices and results. Fundamentally, the most meaningful impact of this scholarship experience was being provided with an opportunity to impart the theories and research-based best practices acquired with other practitioners and instructors working in ABE/GED programs. Finally, throughout the course of designing a valuable, practical professional development workshop, I obtained awareness and learned relevant lessons that will assist me with my new role as an administrator.

Project Development

A primary purpose of the study was to identify a potential solution to the educational problem of high numbers of participants not completing the free GED program. The participants suggested that a curriculum for a professional development training for instructors facilitating the online course is an educational strategy that may be

a potential solution to the local problem. The project was designed to serve as a vehicle for instructors to collaborate and examine their instructional practices to involve students in the learning process. Elements for the professional development training included course goals, course objectives, the target population, course performance measures/assessments, and academic content for the duration of the course and related components. Typically, professional development designers use summative or formative assessment tools to determine the workshops' effectiveness. The effectiveness of this professional development workshop was measured by using a formative evaluation.

Leadership and Change

Educational institutions function in difficult environments. So that instructors and school administrators can accomplish their goal of educating students effectively, they need to be able to facilitate more than just a classroom lesson. Current educators should be able to develop leadership skills to execute changes within the organization; establish unified agreements with other partners; and manage challenges at the federal, state, local, and school levels. Attaining a degree in educational leadership prepares educators and administrators to become leaders through a mixture of relevant coursework and networking experiences (Hattie, 2015).

Throughout this doctoral process, I recognize that I have grown personally and professionally. As I am currently pursuing an opportunity in administration, in higher education, this growth will allow me to use the knowledge, skills and research-based practices I have attained to motivate change in educational communities. Educational leaders must possess the essential tools necessary to enhance continuous teaching and

learning. Additionally, school leaders are also responsible for assisting teachers, and instructors access these tools (Ebell, Hughes, Bockart, Silva, & McBride, 2017).

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Analysis of Self as Scholar

When I think about the word scholar, I think about someone who has excelled academically. I view myself as a scholar in the sense that I can grasp complex theories and systems comprehensively. While attending the University of Pittsburgh, I was exposed continuously to advanced practices. These practices were diverse and complex. I was able to understand and explain them in lectures and through examinations.

Initially, I was apprehensive about being a distance learner. I almost allowed fear to overcome me and keep me from accomplishing one of the paramount milestones of my academic career. There have been times when I have become overwhelmed and discouraged with trying to balance my personal, family, career, and social commitments. When interviewing the participants, I was able to reflect and relate to some of their reasons for not completing their educational goals. My motivation for pursuing this degree has shifted back and forth repeatedly, but I am grateful for the support systems I have in place. They have encouraged me to persevere and complete this process.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

Practitioners possess knowledge and experience in a particular area. As a practitioner, I have engaged in as well as facilitated numerous professional development workshops throughout my careers as a social worker and educator. However, I found it challenging trying to design this project effectively to guarantee that the workshop would

enhance the participants' professional knowledge (Mizell et al., 2011). As I am preparing to transition into leadership in higher education, the knowledge, skills and best practices for leadership that I have gained through research and while developing this professional development will be invaluable.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

A project developer brings an idea from a concept to a completed project. I elected to design a professional development workshop. Professional development should entail a pervasive, structured and literal approach to encourage instructors' effectiveness in developing student-learning outcomes (Mizell et al., 2011). When establishing the professional development workshop for this project, I had to be mindful of the proposed audience, including seasoned and new instructors who may already have cultivated an approach to provide instruction. After considering the participants' expectations, beliefs, and experiences, along with the adult principles of learning, I was able to develop a project that could aid instructors with enhancing their instructional methods.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The project is a professional development workshop titled Planning and Delivering Online Instruction for Adult Learners and was created to educate GED instructors on current trends for online GED courses. Numerous professional development workshops focus on enhancing knowledge and skills, but none provides training and support on facilitating the new online GED. This project has the probability to produce social change, because it offers the program directors an opportunity to discuss the students' needs that were recommended by findings; with school officials and

instructors. Curriculum instructors must acquire fundamental insight by what means adults learn. They should also be conversant of methods to provide instructors support in integrating relevant curricular and instructional techniques for diverse styles of learning. This project also has the potential to influence social change by implementing the workshops to expand instructors' awareness and avenues to techniques that encourage collective methods to enhance the students' learning experiences.

Ongoing research to address the retention of adult learners continues to be essential. Additionally, research continues to be necessary regarding ways for professional development workshops to be useful in supporting instructors who are facilitating the new online test. Researchers who are facilitating the online classes can use this professional development. The implication of sharing with other GED program instructors the research-based assumptions around adult learning and persistence theories is that they will develop professional development that will highlight the needs and interest of the adult learners. Coaching and preparing GED instructors to teach online courses has the potential to not only reach instructors in the Southeastern region but also instructors nationwide with implementing the new online test.

Conclusion

GED instructors encounter challenges. Retaining adult learners in rural areas have been challenging for adult education stakeholders (Bourgeois, 2012; Lester, 2012). Administrators, recruiters, and adult education instructors have been unsuccessful in implementing techniques to sustain adult learners (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). For educational programs and institutions to adhere to their mission, they must be successful

with student retention. When attrition rates are high, it implies that the programs or institutions are not fulfilling their objectives (Blackburn, 2010).

In order to acknowledge this issue, I developed a project for instructors who are facilitating the new online GED test. Through a qualitative case study using Sticht's functional context theory to learning, I investigated two research questions to determine the perceived and experienced reasons participants may not be completing a free GED program and the perceived educational strategies needed to improve retention and increase the completion rates for the program. The project study indicated a need for additional training on the new test style for GED instructors. The study also certified that sustaining GED participants is a primary concern.

The project focused on improving retention by administering a 3-day workshop for instructors at the program. The Planning and Delivering Online Instruction for Adult Learners workshop was designed to educate GED instructors on current trends of online GED courses. The workshop will also provide the GED instructors with the knowledge they need to facilitate the online GED courses with confidence.

Section 4 of the study provided analysis regarding my personal growth as a scholar, practitioner and project developer. As a scholar, I not only excelled academically, but I gained strength and endurance during the process. As a practitioner, through ongoing research, I enhanced my knowledge, skills and best practices for leadership. As a project developer, I learned to develop a structured professional development workshop that could aid instructors in enhancing their instructional methods. It is my expectation that the development of the professional development

workshop will provide instructors with support to facilitate the online courses with confidence, which could in turn boost retention rates and empower adult learners to achieve their learning objectives.

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Appendix A: The Project

Introduction

The research study certified that retaining GED students is a significant concern, in addition to ABE/GED instructors not adequately trained on the new test style. The purpose of the three-day professional development training is to provide research-based information to ABE/GED facilitators concerning online facilitation, online learning, and online resources. The training will be split into modules and require collective participation.

Learning Objectives

- Allow instructors to construct and execute a facilitation plan and method to communicate with the GED students.
- Allow instructors to understand characteristics and learning styles of adult learners.
- Allow instructors to understand effective methods to support adult learning.
- Allow instructors to understand how to apply adult learning theory to e-Learning.
- Allow instructors to understand effective ways to use technology with adult learners.

Purpose

Instructors will have an opportunity to develop additional skills and knowledge on effective methods to facilitate online GED courses.

Goals

Provide ABE/GED instructors with the knowledge needed to facilitate the online GED courses effectively and with confidence.

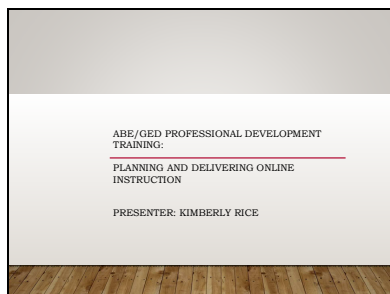
Three –Day Workshop Agenda

Day One	
Time	Breakout Sessions and Activities
7:00-8:30	Breakfast and Registration
8:30-8:45	Welcome
8:45-9:15	Introductions and Overview of Workshop Modules
9:15-9:45	Icebreaker
9:45-10:00	Break
10:00-10:45	Module One: Who is the Adult Learner - Part 1
10:45-11:00	Break
11:00-12:00	Module One: Who is the Adult Learner - Part 2
12:00-1:30	Lunch
1:30-2:30	Module Two: Preferred Learning Styles - Part 1
2:30-2:45	Break
2:45-3:30	Module Two: Preferred Learning Styles – Part 2
3:30-4:00	Wrap Up/Evaluation
Day Two	
Time	Breakout Sessions and Activities
8:00-8:30	Light Breakfast and Overview of Workshop Modules
8:30-9:30	Module Three: Effective Methods to Support Adult Learning – Part 1
9:30-9:45	Break
9:45 -10:45	Group Activity
10:45-11:00	Break
11:00-12:00	Module Three: Effective Methods to Support Adult Learning – Part 2
12:00-1:30	Lunch
1:30-2:30	Module Three: Effective Methods to Support Adult Learning – Part 3
2:30-2:45	Break
2:45-3:30	Group Activity
3:30-4:00	Wrap Up/Evaluation
Day Three	
Time	Breakout Sessions and Activities
8:00-8:30	Light Breakfast and Overview of Workshop Modules
8:30-9:30	Module Four: How To Apply Adult Learning Theory to e-Learning
9:30-9:45	Break
9:45-10:45	Group Activity

10:45-11:00	Break
11:00-12:00	Module Five: Use of Technology
12:00-1:30	Lunch
1:30-2:30	Workshop Reflections/Questions and Answers
2:30-3:00	Conclusion/Evaluation

Workshop Presentation and Slides Day 1

Slide 1



DAY ONE

Slide 2



DAY ONE: MODULE ONE WHO IS THE ADULT LEARNER?

Slide 3



WHO IS THE ADULT LEARNER
 Before we define the adult learner, it is imperative that we understand the Adult Learning Theory. This theory includes, but is not limited to, the term Andragogy, which is correspondent to adult education. According to Knowles, andragogy is not only a method to teaching adult learners, but it is the art and science of adult learning, therefore andragogy pertains to any type of adult learning (Kearsley, 2010).

Slide 4



WHO IS THE ADULT LEARNER
 An important take away from andragogy is adults are self-directed learners. Placing the learning tools in the adult learners' hands is one of the most empowering ways to assist them. The use of technology can assist with this (Thompson, 2011).

Slide 5



WHO IS THE ADULT LEARNER
 Andragogy is seemingly correlative to pedagogy. Pedagogy means to teach. However, there are 4 Principles of Andragogy. They are the following:

1. Involved adult learners
2. Adult learners' experience
3. Relevance and impact to learners' lives
4. Problem-centered (Kearsley, 2010)

Slide 6



WHO IS THE ADULT LEARNER
Involved Adult Learners:
Involved adult learners are adults that want to be involved in planning and evaluating their own instruction (Kearsley, 2010).

Slide 7



WHO IS THE ADULT LEARNER
Adult Learners' Experience:
Learning is acquired through basic learning activities, which also includes learning through mistakes (Kearsley, 2010).

Slide 8



WHO IS THE ADULT LEARNER
Relevance and Impact to Learners' Lives:
Adults are more interested in acquiring subjects that are currently relevant (Kearsley, 2010).

Slide 9



WHO IS THE ADULT LEARNER
Problem-Centered:
 Adult learning is viewed as problem-centered as opposed to being content-oriented (Kearsley, 2010).

Slide 10



WHO IS THE ADULT LEARNER
 Adult learners are defined as a group of diverse individuals ranging from age 25 and older.
 This group of individuals come from various backgrounds.
 Adult learners typically do not follow traditional enrollment processes (SREB, 2005).

Slide 11



WHO IS THE ADULT LEARNER
 Adult learners are identified by several different names to include:
 Adult students, mature learners, adult returners, returning adults, non-traditional adults and many more (SREB, 2005).

Slide 12



Adult learners generally pursue on-line learning as opposed to traditional classroom settings.

Enroll in non-degree of certificate programs at colleges and universities.

Have “stopped out” of education with the intent of returning.

Need remedial or refresher courses to prepare them for continued learning (SREB, 2015).

Slide 13



CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS

- **Autonomous and Self-directed:** Adult learners are generally self-directed and possess a desire to control their own learning.

- **A Foundation of Life Experience and Knowledge:** Adult learners need to be able to connect learning to their knowledge.

- **Goal-oriented:** Provide the learners with support and assist them with identifying and attaining their goals.

Slide 14



Continued

- **Relevancy – oriented:** Learners need to know the reason for or relevance for learning anything new. They also need to know that the learning is of value or pertinent to their work.

- **Practical:** Instructors have to let the learner know specifically how the lesson will be beneficial, because learners may not be interested in acquiring the knowledge for themselves.

- **Respect:**

Learners should be treated with respect and as equals. Recognize and acknowledge what they can offer (Bear, 2012).

Slide 15



DAY ONE: MODULE TWO PREFERRED LEARNING STYLES

Slide 16



Adults have the tendency to learn in their own way. Many of them are able to remember at least one type of learning style from the past; which is primarily decided by their instructor's preferred method of teaching. Adults may at some point learn a different style of learning, or mixture of them all three. They are the following:
 Visual Learners
 Auditory Learners
 Tactile Learners (Goddu, 2012)

Slide 17



Visual learners think in terms awareness. They also utilize images, charts, maps, graphs, diagrams, etc. to acquire knowledge (Goddu, 2012)

Slide 18



Auditory learners learn through music. They depend on speaking and listening as their primary way of learning.

Auditory learners utilize their repeating and listening skills to organize information sent to them (Goddu, 2012)

Slide 19



Kinesthetic learners incorporate movement in their learning. Their learning involves some type of touching. Kinesthetic learners learn by doing (Goddu, 2012).

Slide 20



Other learning styles include the following:

Physical Learners

Logical Learners

Social Learners

Physical learners are always doing something with their hands.

Logical learners are always making list and are very organized.

Social learners are group workers.

They are always involved in some type of activity (Goddu, 2012)

Slide 21



Group Discussion

Question/Answers

Evaluation

Workshop Presentation and Slides Day 2

Slide 1



DAY TWO

Slide 2



**DAY TWO: MODULE THREE
EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODS
TO SUPPORT ADULT LEARNING**

Slide 3



Jarvis and Rubenson (2011) identified the following effective teaching techniques for adult learners:

Teachers should facilitate learning. Teachers are responsible for creating environments where learning occurs and the student is guided through the process of learning; however, the outcome of the learning experience should not be dictated by the teacher.

1. *Teachers should provide autonomy and independence.* Providing autonomy and independence could propose the freedom of content, method, choice, pace, or assessment. For example, students “should be free to work at their own speed, choose to study particular aspects of a course, adopt whatever learning style suits them best, and be free to choose what they learn” (Jarvis, 2004, p. 154).

Slide 4



Continued:

3. *Teachers should empower learners.* As a result of autonomy and independence, teachers should share decision-making roles and power with the students. Teachers should not be in the habit of just “giving the right answers.” They should be responsible for making sure that the students have equal access to any resources that are needed. Finally, teachers need to be open and direct about what is happening regarding the learning process and why (Rubenson, 2011).

Slide 5



There are various teaching methods that can be utilized to support adult learning. These methods can be separated into five categories: self-directed, active, experiential, collaborative and narrative.

SELF-DIRECTED

Self-directed learning is independent. Self-directed learning affords the learner with an opportunity to make choices and take responsibility for their own learning. It also allows the learner "the capacity to articulate the norms and limits of learned society and personal values and beliefs" (Goddu, 2012). In self-directed learning the instructor switches to the "facilitator of learning."

In the online environment, self-directed learning can be provided through the conception of "dynamic learning environments where students may go beyond content presented by the instructor to explore, interact with, comment on, modify, and apply the set content and additional content they discover or create through the learning process" (LeNoue, 2011).

Slide 6



ACTIVE

Active learning affords the student with an opportunity to improve their skills, enhance their critical thinking skills, and "gain knowledge in an efficient way" (Karege, 2011).

In active learning, students are also provided with an opportunity to apply their own prior experiences and instructors are provided an opportunity to assess current student knowledge. There are some additional components relating to active learning: Didactic Teaching; Socratic Teaching; Problem Based Learning; and Tell-Help-Check.

Slide 7



- **Didactic Teaching**

This approach can be effective when it is used to encourage learners to evaluate the course content as opposed to just simply learning it. The learning process is initiated by encouraging the learner to ask questions.

- **Socratic Teaching**

This method “introduces questioning into the teaching and learning process; it consists of the teacher directing a logical sequence of questions at the learners, so that they are enabled to respond and to express the knowledge that they have, but which they might never have crystallized in their own mind.” The Socratic method is an effective method to employ when teaching adults because it:

“utilizes both their store of knowledge and their experience of life”

“help the learners create rather than reproduce knowledge”

“actively engage learners in the learning process (Jarvis, 2004, p. 151)

- **Problem Based Learning**

Problem based learning is self-directed and active. Here, learners are presented with actual life issues or situations and a few guidelines on how to resolve them.

The distinct characteristic about problem based learning is “the focusing of the learning process on the identification, exploration, and attempted resolution of realistic problems” (Tight, 2003, p.105).

Slide 8



Slide 9

**EXPERIENTIAL**

Experiential learning affords the adult learners with an opportunity to make reasonable use of their knowledge and make it applicable to knowledge used in real life (Goddu, 2012). Experiential methods, such as simulation, discussion, problem-solving and case method explores the learners' experiences, engaging them in the learning process (Caminotti & Gray, 2012).

A key component to experiential learning is simulation.

- **Simulation**

Simulation is known to be a successful method because it encourages active, experiential, and reflective learning. Students "create knowledge using prior knowledge. It creates an atmosphere where internal and external processes of learning can occur" (Rutherford-Hemming, 2013).

Slide 10

**COLLABORATIVE**

Collaborative learning has been described as being effective because it allows the adult learners to utilize their "shared connections and experiences to explain and build upon concepts from class in ways instructors cannot" (Davis, 2013).

Adult learners have made known their gratitude for the "learning environments" that were developed through collaborative learning (Schherling, 2011).

Slide 11

***NARRATIVE***

In narrative learning, adult learners are extended an opportunity to develop connections between “lived experience and curricular connect. Because adult learning has to do with meaning making, these autobiographical connections are integral to the process” (Clark & Rossiter, 2006).

Slide 12



Group Discussion and
Question/Answers
Evaluation

Workshop Presentation and Slides Day 3

Slide 1



DAY THREE

Slide 2



DAY THREE: MODULE FOUR HOW TO APPLY ADULT LEARNING THEORY TO E- LEARNING

Slide 3



HOW TO APPLY ADULT LEARNING THEORY TO E-LEARNING

According to research, there are four important principles to eLearning for adult learners. These assumptions and principles can be utilized in any eLearning product to provide the adult learners with a broad range of benefits.

Slide 4



Principle One

Adults must have a hand in the design and development of their learning experience. It is extremely important for the adult learner to feel that they are taking an active role in their own learning experience (Smith, 2002).

Principle Two

Experience should be at the root of all eLearning tasks and activities. Here the e-Learning experience should be attained activities and instruction. It is important to create develop exercises and projects that will encourage and motivate the adult learners to gain experience by exploring the subject matter (Smith, 2002).

Slide 5

***Principle Three***

Real life applications and benefits must be tied to the eLearning course. The adult learner wants to be able to connect the subject matter to real world experiences, benefits, and applications (Smith, 2002).

Principle Four

Give adult learners the opportunity to absorb information, rather than memorizing it. All content that is provided in adult eLearning classes should be problem-centered. They need to see immediately how instructors will assist them with solving problems that could possibly occur outside of the eLearning setting (Smith, 2002).

Slide 6

**DAY THREE: MODULE FIVE**

Slide 7



DAY THREE: MODULE FIVE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Slide 8



Technology can be defined in various ways. In the academic arena, it is considered to be more than just machines and tools (Thompson, 2011).

Slide 9



The widespread connection of the Internet, personal computers, productivity software, social media, networking, mobile devices and more have placed the world's information and knowledge base at our fingertips. Basically, just click, keystroke or drag away (Thompson, 2011).

Slide 10



There are a number of challenges that have been discovered in adult education settings with unbalanced technology framework; however, there are creative ways to provide instruction. The key to success is variety. One simple, but important component would be to make sure everyone knows the basics of logging onto a computer (Silver-Pacuilla, 2007)

Slide 11



Another important component is making sure that each person has an email address; at most such as Gmail, Yahoo!, or Hotmail. This way, you are able to communicate with your students digitally. Instructors can also utilize different technology tools to give students more practice with getting acclimated with using technology (Silver-Pacuilla, 2007).

Slide 12



Some of these practice tools could include:

E-Mail Supplemental Materials to Learners – Discuss material and work expectations in advance with the learners, while they are in class and then use it as an exit or debriefing exercise.

For example, if the instructor wants the learners to perform Web-based research, explain ways to organize their findings and what they learn (Silver-Pacuilla, 2007).

Slide 13

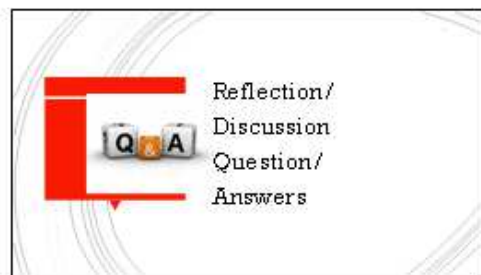


Another practice tool is:

Survey Learners for Technology Tools They Have in Their Pockets –

Inquire to find out if any of the learners have smart phones and a data plan which allows them to access their email in the class. The instructor can also search for applications that can be sent via text or through the email. Also search for mobile software programs that are compact for learners that are working with smaller screens or devices (Silver-Pacuilla, 2007).

Slide 14



Reflection/Discussion
Question/Answers

Presenter's Notes

Day 1

I. Welcome

II. Introduction and Overview of Workshop Modules

- Presenter will provide an introduction, presentation objectives and an overview of the workshop modules.

III. Icebreaker Activity

- Presenter will engage the participants in an icebreaker activity “Human Bingo.” Bingo cards will be given to each participant. A prize will be given to the winner.

IV. Module One: Who is the Adult Learner

- Presenter will review and define who is the adult learner? (Slides 3-4)
- Presenter will discuss andragogy vs pedagogy and the four Principles of Andragogy. (Slides 5-9)

Involved adult learners

Adult learners' experience

Relevance and impact to learner's lives

Problem-centered (Kearsley, 2010)

- Presented will discuss the characteristics of adult learners. (Slides 10-14)

Autonomous and self-directed

A foundation of life experience and knowledge

Goal-oriented

Relevancy

Practical

Respect (Bear, 2012)

V. Module Two: Preferred Learning Styles

- Introduce and discuss the three preferred learning styles. (Slides 15-19)

Visual (See to Learn)

Auditory (Hear to Learn)

Kinesthetic (Move to Learn) (Goddu, 2012)

- Presenter will engage participants in a discussion regarding their personal preferred learning styles.
- Introduce and define other learning styles. (Slide 20).

Physical learners

Logical Learners

Social Learners (Goddu, 2012)

VI. Wrap up: Reflection, discussion, question and answers.

VII. Evaluation

Day 2

I. Introduction and overview of the workshop and objectives.

II. Module Three: Effective Methods to Support Adult Learning

- Provide participants with research-based effective teaching techniques for adult learners. (Slides 3-4)

Teachers should facilitate learning

Teachers should provide autonomy and independence

Teachers should empower learners (Rubenson, 2011)

III. Group Activity

- Ask the participants to think about effective ways that they have or could support adult learners. Have them to list at least three. Have them share.
- Presenter will continue with part two of the module. Participants will be introduced various teaching methods that can be utilized to support adult learning. These methods can be separated into five categories.

(Slides 5-11)

Self-directed

Active (discuss different components)

Didactic Teaching

Socratic Teaching

Problem-Based Learning

Tell-Help-Check

Experiential (discuss a key component)

Simulation

Collaborative

Narrative

IV. Group Activity

- After the last break, have the participants participate in a final group activity.

Divide the participants into four groups. Using the resources from the workshop, identify some best practices for the following learning experiences:

Life Application

Example of situations:

Instructing a Class

Utilizing a Reference Desk

Chat Room on the Internet

V. Wrap up: Reflection, discussion, question and answers.

VI. Evaluation

Day 3

I. Introduction and overview of the workshop and objectives.

II. Module Four: How to Apply Adult Learning Theory to e-Learning

- Introduce and share research-based information regarding e learning for adult learners. (Slide 3)
- Discuss the four important principles to e Learning for adult learners. (Slides 4 -5).

III. Group Activity

- Divide the participants into four groups. Use their electronic devices to create interactive lessons they could use to teach learners how to navigate different electronic resources. Ask two volunteers to share.

IV. Module Five: Use of Technology

- Ask participants their definition of technology. Provide them with the definition of technology that will be used for this module. (Slides 8-9)
- Introduce and discuss creative ways to provide instruction through technology and different technology tools that instructors can use to give the learners practice. (Slides 10-13)

V. Workshop Reflections, Questions and Answers.

VI. Conclusion and Evaluation

Conclusion

I would like to take this opportunity to say thanks for participating in this professional develop workshop. It is my hope that this workshop has provided you with strategies to not only enhance your ability to facilitate the online GED courses effectively, but also improve retention. For additional information about this study, and how the workshop was developed, please feel free to contact the presenter via email at Kimberly.rice@waldenu.edu.

Day 1: Icebreaker "Human Bingo"

HUMAN BINGO

B I N G O

Has Brown Eyes	Has Black Hair	Birthday in January	Has 2 or More Children	Has More than One Stamp on Passport
Is an Only Child	Last Name Begins with W	Favorite Color Is Blue	Has a Tattoo	Has a Pet
Had Braces as a Child	Married more than 5 Years	FREE SPACE	Drinks Coffee	Has a Gym Membership
Have Run a 5K	Have Never Flown on a Plane	Wears Glasses	Is Bilingual	Works Out 3 Days a Week
Has More than 5 Keys on Chain	Has a iPhone	Gets 8 Hours of Sleep Nightly	Is a Sports Fan	Eats Healthy

Day 1-3: Evaluation Form
Workshop Evaluation Form

Date: _____

Time of training: _____

Presenter: _____

Instructions: Please mark your response using the statements listed below.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1. The training objectives were defined clearly.					
2. The workshop was well-organized and structured.					
3. Interaction and participation were encouraged.					
4. Presenter was prepared and effective.					
5. The trainer was insightful about the topics.					
6. The workshop topics were pertinent to my role.					
7. The workshop content was clear and organized.					
8. The objectives for the training were met.					
9. The training sessions will be useful during my instruction.					
10. I would recommend this workshop to other instructors.					

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Appendix B: Invitation Letter

Invitation Letter

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about individuals that participated in the new GED program. This study is being conducted by researcher Kimberly Rice at the Neighborhood Network Center. The researcher is inviting individuals age 18 and up, who were enrolled in the free GED program to be in the study.

I would like to invite you to tell me your views in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The information that individuals provide in the interviews will be used to help me and the program coordinator explain the results of the study more fully, and decide possible ways to improve the new GED program so that individuals will be more successful.

There are no right or wrong answers to this. I am eager to gain a wide variety of opinions. Your decision whether or not to share your views is strictly voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one at Neighborhood Network will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Before you decide whether or not you would like to tell me your views, it is important for you to understand why I am doing this research and what it would involve for you if you decide to participate. Please take time to read the enclosed informed consent carefully and take time to think about whether or not you would like to take part.

If you are interested in participating, you may contact the researcher via email. My email address is Kimberly.rice@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**

I look forward to hearing for you,

Sincerely,

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Interview Guide for Interviews with GED Students

Date:	Location:
Time started:	Time ended:
Date started the GED:	Total time:
Male/Female:	Date left the program:
Identification Code:	Age:

COMPUTER SKILLS AND USAGE

1. Do you have the proper computer skills to complete the new GED program? If not, what computer skills do you need to be successful?

TECHNOLOGY USED to INCREASE COMPLETION OF GED

1. What technology skills do you think might contribute to participants completing the GED?

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Please describe your experience while enrolled in the GED program.
2. What are your motivations for earning your GED?
3. What barriers prevented you from obtaining your GED?
4. What specific enrollment obstacles prevent participants from applying for the GED program?
5. Why do you think the GED completion rate is low for this organization?
6. What support do you think you need to ensure completion of the GED? Why do you think you need these kinds of support?
7. What, if any, GED preparations resources, assistance, or materials did you find helpful and why?
8. What might be a potential solution to the low GED completion problem in this organization?
 - a. How does this potential solution address the GED completion problem?
 - b. What individuals should be involved with this potential solution and why these individuals?
 - c. What resources do you think might be necessary to ensure the success of the potential solution?
9. Why should GED participants be given more autonomy or opportunities to test out of certain subjects to accelerate progress to increase retention?