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A Qualitative Study of Successful GED Program Participants' Self-Perceptions of Self-Confidence, Motivation, and Perspectives on Learning

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SUCCESSFUL GED PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS'
SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE, MOTIVATION,
AND PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING

A Thesis

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Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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This qualitative study obtained data from six recent GED graduates and one GED program participant on self-perceptions of self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, views of selves as learners, and view of learning in general. Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with seven participants. Participants were asked to describe barriers to completing high school and also barriers that delayed their goal of obtaining a GED.

The data analysis indicated that participants had higher self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, views of themselves as learners, and views of learning in general after being successful in a GED program. The majority of the participants planned to pursue postsecondary education and expressed a higher level of self-confidence by obtaining a GED as well as the motivation to achieve further goals. The themes discovered from this study provide a basis for further research.

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This thesis is dedicated to my sons, Isaiah and Nolan.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Rationale for the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that influence self-confidence, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and perceptions of learning in participants in GED classes. Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation programs rely on funding primarily from the federal and state governments in order to operate their programs. Federal and state funding to adult literacy programs rose between 1980-1991 from \$174.3 million to \$779 million. However, the amount of federal funding decreased from 57% in 1980 to only 20% in 1991 which caused adult literacy programs to rely more on state funding (Quigley, 1997). Funding for adult literacy education is minimal compared to that provided to public schools responsible for K-12 education. Unfortunately, the statistics of those who are eligible to and actually enroll in adult literacy education do not help the argument for more funding. Only 8% of those eligible for adult education actually enroll, and 20% who state they will attend do not come to the programs. The overall attrition rate in 1993-1994 was 74% according to the (U.S. Department of Education, 1995, as cited in Quigley, 1997). Another study calculated the drop out rate of 18% after 12 hours of instruction, 20% at sixteen weeks of instruction, and 50% after 16 weeks of instruction (Development Associates, 1993, as cited in Quigley, 1997).

The GED is intended for those who do not obtain a high school diploma with the purpose of obtaining better employment and postsecondary education opportunities. Hart-Landsberg and Reder (1992) found that adults who completed occupational degrees from community colleges were 8% more likely to be employed and averaged \$4,400 more per year than those who did not enroll in training programs after obtaining the GED (as cited in Park, Ernst, & Eunyoung, 2007).

Prince and Jenkins (2005a) conducted a study found that less than 13% of ESL students and less than 30% of ABE students pursued postsecondary education or training after obtaining the GED (as cited in Park et al., 2007). In addition, college completion rates were much lower for GED recipients than those with high school diplomas. Cameron and Heckman (1993) found low-skilled dropouts were among those with the lowest in earnings (as cited in Park et al., 2007).

Participation in Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) are reported to Congress each year. The most recent data from 2002-2003, showed just less than 40% of participants were enrolled in ABE, 17.5% in adult secondary education, and 42% in ESL programs (Park et al., 2007). Despite the fact that states are required to submit reports on subsequent employment and postsecondary enrollments of these participants, only 28 out of 50 states were able to provide this information. Most of these reports relied on participant surveys (Park et al, 2007). Consistent reporting has been a problem due to a diversity among the students, a diversity of goals among adult learners, and lack of uniformity of assessment systems. Data from programs was also incomplete due to the fact that adults do not remain in the programs in order to be tested and retested. More than 50% of adults leave programs within 16 weeks (Park et al., 2007).

A study by Tyler (1995) found overall data showing 10-19% of White, or Caucasian, students who dropped out of high school and later obtained the GED credential had an increase in earnings, but there was no significant difference between minorities who obtained a GED or did not (as cited in Park et al., 2007). One concern is that the GED has been perceived as not being equivalent to a high school diploma. However, according to Don Block, Executive Director of Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council, this view is changing. In his article in the April 29, 2013 edition of "The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette" he states, "The GED is no longer viewed as a

second-class or low-level high school credential. Research has shown that many regular high school graduates would be unable to pass the exam” (Block, 2013, pp. E1- E2).

Postsecondary Education Statistics of GED Recipients

Strawn (2007) found data that nontraditional students, those older than the traditional age of high school students, who enrolled in postsecondary education were half as likely to complete a degree within five years (as cited in Park et al., 2007). Those who enrolled in vocational training were as likely as high school graduates to obtain certificates. A longitudinal study of students attending Indiana University-Purdue University found that GED recipients were, on average, three-and-one-half years older than traditional students and had lower grade point averages (GPAs) and were more likely to enroll part-time during the first year. Positive findings for GED recipients was that GPAs began to improve to the level of traditional students and by the fifth year, there was not statistical significance when compared to traditional students. However, Dobbs (2003) discovered that retention rates among GED recipients declined more rapidly than those of traditional students (as cited in Park et al., 2007). The National Commission on Adult Literacy made the requirement that postsecondary and adult education systems work together to service the needs of low-skilled adults (Parks et al., 2007). According to Bragg and Reder (2002), Community colleges were particularly encouraged to partner with outside groups in the fields of business, industry, labor and community in order to assist students with the transition from high school or GED programs and postsecondary training (as cited in Park et al., 2007).

More recent data shows a decline in overall enrollment in U.S. adult education programs by 10% between 2001 and 2007. English as a Second Language program constituted 46% of all enrollments between 2006-2007 (National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2008). In 2006-2007, 35% of those enrolled in adult education were enrolled in Adult Basic Education (ABE) which is

defined as those with reading and/or math levels below eighth grade (National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2008). However, only 16% of adults were enrolled in adult secondary education (ASE) which includes high school equivalency or GED (National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2008). The result is many GED students as well as those with high school diplomas need to take remedial courses when enrolled in postsecondary education (National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2008). Another concern is that although 50% of GED candidates state they plan to attend postsecondary education, only 27% actually enroll compared to 63% of high school graduates (National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2008).

The research cited by Park, Ernst, and Eunyoung (2007) is similar to findings by Caputo (2005) that financial well-being and overall health statistics show a significant discrepancy between those with a traditional or conventional high school diploma and GED recipients (Caputo, 2005). Statistics on financial well-being show a significant discrepancy between those with a high school diploma (family income of \$41,625), GED recipients (family income of \$34,415), and high school drop outs (family income of \$25,222) (Caputo, 2005). In addition, health issues were also evaluated using The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) which measures symptoms of depression and discerns those who are clinically depressed (Caputo, 2005). High school graduates had lower scores on this assessment than did GED recipients (Caputo, 2005). GED recipients were found to have significantly worse mid-life outcomes than high school graduates and significantly better late-life outcomes than high school dropouts (Caputo, 2005).

Citing various other research studies, Caputo (2005) states, "The findings corroborated previous studies indicating that GED recipients fell between high school dropouts and conventional graduates on many income- and/or employment-related measures" (Caputo, 2005,

p. 90 as cited in Gall, 2013). The conclusions challenged the merits of the GED to a conventional high school diploma. Even though the conclusions also supported a significantly more productive life, it was not to the same extent as those experienced by high school graduates (Caputo, 2005). There are other factors that contribute to mid-life physical and mental health as well as socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, there is evidence indicating that including GED recipients in the same statistics as high school graduates may be misguided (Caputo, 2005). The findings imply that there are other ongoing issues involved with people who drop out of high school even when they obtain a GED.

Student Stories in Adult Basic Education

Adult students who enroll in classes to pursue their GED are doing so because they failed to obtain a high school diploma for a variety of reasons. While some struggled in certain subjects, others cite family obligations or lack of interest in academics. Experiences in primary through secondary school can lead to a lack of self-confidence in their abilities to obtain a GED in order to pursue further education or career goals. While many have emotional support from their families to obtain their GED, the reality of being back in a classroom after being out of the routine of being a student can pose significant challenges and frustration. Many adults who struggled in school may have specific learning disabilities that were not diagnosed. The difficulties they encountered in primary and secondary school bring back feelings of inadequacy when they return to an academic setting such as an adult basic education program.

I taught an adult education class that has consisted of both male and female students whose ages ranged from 20-81. I gave them a writing assignment asking them to reflect on past experiences as a student, why they dropped out of school, why they decided to pursue a GED, family support in the past and present, and what type of learner they considered themselves to be.

My goal was to start the writing assignment with several questions for them to address in order to help them organize their thoughts and also allow them to self-reflect on past experiences and current goals. In addition to discovering the need for my students to further develop their writing skills, I also found that all of the students who submitted their writing sample had negative experiences in public school which they believed resulted in their decision to drop out of school. I have noticed that most of the students made negative comments about their abilities while being supportive of others. The names of the students have been changed to protect their identity.

One of my students, Robert, who was in his mid-fifties, decided to pursue his GED after being unemployed for over a year. His response to the question, "What made you pursue a GED?" was "Losing my job more than a year ago, filling out applications and returning for interviews to hear 'You don't have a high school diploma' or 'We will get back to you.'" Robert explained to me that he did not have the family support while in school and due to family obligations including the need to provide financial support, he decided to drop out after being short of two English credits.

Natalie described her ongoing struggle in math classes. She stated she could not learn as fast as the other kids in her class (Natalie, personal communication, November 15, 2012). She stated she gave up and would "hang out with older students and smoke weed because I thought it was cool." She continues to express frustration with the fact she was allowed to pass to ninth grade without learning the math skills she should have had by the time she entered high school. This is similar feelings expressed by another student who I worked with one-on-one for several months. Matt had a high school diploma, but only a first to second grade reading level. He often stated that he should not have received a high school diploma because he could not read. Mike stated he was in special education classes and received speech-language therapy in school, but did not

know what his official diagnosis was. He described himself as the “class clown” and believed he was passed through. He often stated, “You should have to stay until you get it right,”

My oldest student, Joseph, age 81, still remembered the disheartening experience of being scolded by his fourth grade teacher for writing a poem in response to an assignment asking the students to write a paragraph. He had been held back in second grade when he became ill with rheumatic fever and missed a significant amount of school. His negative experiences continued when he enrolled in three different high schools. He was not satisfied with any of them, so he dropped out and joined the navy. Joseph’s habit getting frustrated and quitting school continued with his GED class. At the end of December, Joseph decided math was too frustrating for him, so he left the program. However, he continued to study on his own through the use of videos he obtained on mathematics and was able to pass a GED practice test in mathematics as well as other areas.

According to data collected in the Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS) program through Central Queensland University in Australia which will be described further in the literature review section, students enter adult education programs with long-held assumptions about themselves as learners and can be problematic for students “who bear emotional scars from long-remembered negative schooling experiences,” (Willans & Seary, 2007, p. 434). The data collected in this study supported the idea that once the self-assumptions the learners had were identified and they were able to overcome them, personal change was able to occur (Willans & Seary, 2007). The specific assumptions cited were “perceptions of intelligence, the fear of being ridiculed and hurt, and a perceived inability to succeed in a formal learning context,” (Willians & Seary, 2007, p. 435).

Problem Statement and Research Questions

This study explored the factors that influence self-confidence, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and perceptions of learning for participants in GED classes and what influence their success has had on their future goals of pursuing postsecondary education. While there are several types of barriers (institutional, dispositional, and situational) that influence participation and retention in adult basic education programs, this study primarily addressed dispositional barriers (self-confidence, self-esteem, and motivation) that affect the outcomes. This study addressed how GED programs influence students' beliefs about themselves as learners, learning in general, and changes in self-confidence and self-esteem through participation in adult basic education programs, specifically GED preparation programs. Some of the specific items that were addressed were past experiences in education, current experiences in adult education programs, motivational strategies, learning philosophies that can produce improvements in retention and goal completion.

The purpose of this study was to understand from the adult learners' perspectives, the role of self-confidence, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and the value learning has on participation and success in adult basic education, particularly GED preparation programs. The research questions are:

1. Are there changes in self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning by participating in GED preparation programs?
2. What are the adult learners' perceptions of the differences in participation in GED preparation classes compared to primary and secondary school?

3. If the GED program has improved levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning, what experiences in the program have contributed to this change?
4. What specific aspects of the learning environment in the GED program have led the participants to persist in the program in order to obtain a GED?
5. Have participants' gains in self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning encouraged them to pursue postsecondary education?

Definitions

Adult: A person who has reached a certain age that society believes they should display a certain level of maturity (Paterson 1979). Adults can be classified into several categories according to age: young adult, working-age adult, and older adults (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Education: Planned activities that result in learning. This is different from learning that can occur in everyday experiences.

Adult Education: Two components make up this definition. The person must be meet the status of adult and be participating in a planned educational activity. This can include those who are pursuing a GED, taking classes in adult literacy and numeracy, and those who are working and pursuing education on a part-time basis.

Continuing Education: This refers to those who have received a degree such as an associates or bachelor's, have employment, and are pursuing further education.

Adult Learning: There are three types of adult learning: formal education, nonformal education, and informal education. Formal education is institutionalized and involves programs with a curriculum and leads to grade, diplomas, or certificates. Nonformal education involves education in organizations that are not part of an educational system. Informal education refers to learning

throughout an adult's daily life in work, home, and community settings (Merriam and Brockett, 2007).

Motivation: This concept was divided into levels by the well-known psychologist, Abraham Maslow, who proposed that certain needs must be met before humans can move to higher needs (Marsh 1978). Human behavior is goal-oriented (Hablemitoglu, Ozkan, & Purutcuoglu, 2010).

Wlodkowski (2008) defines motivation as an explanation of why people think and behave. There are differences in how children and adults are motivated to learn (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Wlodkowski (2008) has linked neurological explanations for learning based on recent research in neuroscience.

Self-Confidence: "Confidence in one's powers and abilities (Merriam-Webster, 2013). This is based on the definition of confidence which is a feeling of consciousness of one's powers or reliance on circumstances and a faith or belief that one will act in a right, proper or effective way (Merriam-Webster, 2013).

Self-Esteem: The definition of self-esteem can be used interchangeably with self-confidence.

Self-esteem is the belief of one's worth and is often linked to a strong affect (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011). There are two types of self-esteem, contingent and uncontingent (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011). Contingent self-esteem refers to people holding themselves to interpersonal expectation and achieve self-esteem through actions while uncontingent self-esteem involves people feeling worthy of love and respect without the need to achieve certain standards (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011).

Self-efficacy: The definition of efficacy is "the power to produce an effect" (Merriam-Webster, 2013). Self-efficacy is defined in the field of psychology specifically by Albert Bandura who developed social learning theory, later changed to social cognitive theory, which involves four

processes: attention, retention or memory, behavioral rehearsal, and motivation (Bandura, 1977).

The term, self-efficacy, refers to how a person feels about their competence in a certain environment with the focus being on the learner (Merriam & Brockett, 2007).

Self-Concept: The mental image one has of oneself (Merriam-Webster, 2013). There are two types of self-concept, independent and interdependent. Independent self-concept refers to how one feels about oneself while interdependent self-concept refers to relations with others (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011).

Barriers: Three types of barriers to participation in adult education were developed by Patricia Cross which include situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers (Cross, 1984). Situational barriers include aspects such as child care, transportation, and finances; institutional barriers include scheduling, location, and “red tape” involved in registration; and dispositional barriers include learned fear of academic failure, dislike of school, and self-esteem (Quigley 1997).

Adult Literacy and Literacy Education: This is a term that has not been able to be defined among professionals in the field. Much of the discrepancy among professionals is the lack of documented history (Quigley, 1997). The definition could be defined in economic terms that includes the need to obtain basic literacy and numeracy skills in order to obtain a GED or employment.

GED: There are three terms for this acronym: General Education Diploma, General Equivalency Diploma, or Graduated Equivalency Degree. The GED is an alternative to a high school diploma for those who did not complete high school and therefore, did not obtain a high school diploma. Despite the negative stigma, the GED is now considered a degree that leads for better employment and a step to postsecondary education. Many who have high school diplomas would not be able to pass all test sections of the GED (Block, 2013).

Humanist Perspective: Promotes the improvement of self-esteem through the role of the teacher and the student (Quigley, 1997). Bloom's taxonomy is the most popular approach among ABE/GED educators which is to enhance cognitive reasoning, discussion of learners' history, and can alter behavior through selected reading (Quigley, 1997). This approach is still used in ABE/GED programs, but the statistics remain bleak.

Transformational Learning Theory: According to Jack Mezirow, transformation in a belief or attitude which involves being inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Paulo Freire is known as the founder of this theory. Freire believed the way to approach teaching was through dialogue which allowed learners to influence the content of the learning process and make it relevant to their lives (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Freire proposed learning through dialogue which involves sharing experiences and curiosity in order to develop critical thinking (Freire & Macedo, 1995).

Self-Determination: The perceptions individuals have of the origins of their behaviors which is the root cause their actions have on causality (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Research on the self-determination theory proposed that teachers who had a controlling behavior had negative effects on students in secondary school (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011). Teachers and parents who were less supportive of autonomy resulted in students feeling less competent and self-determined which led to lower performance and self-determination contributed to students dropping out of high school (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011).

Limitations

Although this research is designed to provide information that can be useful to GED students in general, due to accessibility and time constraints, there are limitations. First, the students will be residents a metropolitan area and surrounding communities and a nearby rural area. Second,

participants were all students in GED preparation programs at two agencies although they were not necessarily be in the same classes. Third, the population of the research group consisted of only seven participants.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to study self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation, and perceptions of learning among learners in adult basic education programs. The extensive literature review is divided into several sections. First, characteristics of adult learners are described with a focus on those enrolled in adult basic education. Detailed definitions of motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-concept are provided from several sources. In addition, how self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-concept contribute to social issues and participation is also reviewed. Next, biological factors in these areas are discussed which provide more insight into traditional educational and psychological theories. The second section reviews adult basic education programs such as literacy and GED preparation. This section also described the history of the and upcoming changes to the GED. The third section explores characteristics of adult educators as well as learning perspectives and theories. The fourth section discusses curriculum issues such as educational materials and instructional approaches. The fifth section provides insight into the political factors involved in adult basic education and the role of students' stories. The sixth, and last, section looks at reasons students drop out of school, the public school environment, and possible solutions to increasing participation and success.

Characteristics of Those Who Pursue Adult Education

One basic issue to address is who participates in adult education and in what type of programs are they enrolled. A study by Johnson and Rivera (1965) found that 22% of all American adults participated in some type of learning activity (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Beginning in 1969, the National Center for Educational Statistics collected data on adult

education participation (Merriam et al., 2007). Data from 1969 to 1984 showed an increase in organized adult education from 10% to 14%. A study by Kopka and Peng (2005) showed an increase in 1991 to 32% and in 1995 to 40% (as cited in Quigley, 1997). Participants with children under the age of sixteen were more likely to participate in adult education. The ratio between males and females is basically 1:1. Racial demographics showed the following: white 33%, black 23%, and Hispanic 29% (Merriam et al., 2007). The greatest differences in participation reflect prior educational attainment of 16% with less than a high school diploma and 58% for those with a bachelor's degree or higher (Merriam et al., 2007). These figures are consistent with Quigley's findings cited in Chapter I stating that only 8% of those who are eligible to participate in adult basic education or adult literacy education actually pursue this education.

What is an Adult and What is Adult Education?

In this section of the literature review the nature of adult education and definitions of adults are addressed. Adult education can include activities or classes that range from aerobics classes, continuing education programs for hospital staff, literacy or job-training skills programs, or training employees of companies as a consultant (Merriam et al., 2007). The meaning of an "adult" can vary according to culture, religion, the legal system, or biological factors (Merriam et al., 2007). The definition presented by Paterson in 1979 is those who are of the age that society can justify the requirement that they display qualities of maturity (Merriam et al., 2007). Wlodkowski (2008) uses a chronological definition of an adult and divides age into three groups for the purposes of discussing motivation and learning in adult education. Younger adults are between the ages of 18-24 which can also be considered traditional age for undergraduate students; working-age adults are between the ages of 25-64; and older adults are age 65 and over

(Wlodkowski, 2008). Adult education refers to individuals who work at least part-time and go to school (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Another area that requires clarification is the difference between education and learning. Merriam , Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) refer to “education” as planned activities that result in learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Whereas “learning” can also occur outside of planned activities and can be unintentional. An example of the difference between the two is when an employee learns job skills through formal training by the employer which is “education” and learning skills through the course of doing the job which is “learning.”

Official definitions of adult education include two components: the adult status of students and the activity being purposeful or planned (Merriam et al., 2007). Many theorists have proposed definitions of adult education, some focusing on adults participants and others on the educational activities (Merriam et al., 2007). One theorist, Apps (1979) suggested that “continuing education” has also been used to differentiate those who are pursuing further education as opposed to those who are participating in adult basic education which implies the need to “catch up” (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007). For example, a person who has obtained a bachelor’s degree and decides to pursue postgraduate education, this could be considered “continuing education” which is different from someone who does not have a high school diploma and is pursuing a GED. Coombs, Prosser, and Ahmed (1973) classified adult learning into three typologies: formal education, nonformal education, and informal learning (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007). Formal education refers to education that “is highly institutionalized, bureaucratic, curriculum driven, and formally recognized with grades, diplomas, or certificates” (Merriam, et al., 2007). Nonformal education usually involves organized learning activities that occurs in organizations that are not part of an educational system (Merriam et al., 2007).

Agencies and community organizations that offer courses or programs that are designed for participants to learn based on a curriculum or program are providing nonformal education. Informal learning refers to the everyday learning in settings such as home, work, and neighborhoods. The three forms of informal learning identified by Schugurensky (2000) include self-directed, incidental, and socialization (tacit) learning (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007). Self-directed learning has been the most studied type of informal learning and considered to be intentional and conscious. A person makes the decision to learn about an area of interest. In this sense, self-directed learning could be considered nonformal education even though it does not involve education being provided by an organization.

Although those identified as nontraditional learners, which now account for 73% of all college students, have one of the following characteristics: “delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, part-time attendance, financial independence, full-time job, dependents other than a spouse, being a single parent, and having a nonstandard high school diploma” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002 as cited in Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 32-33). More specific demographics include the following: 65% of nontraditional students are women and 12% are ethnic or racial minorities (Wlodkowski, 2008).

What is Motivation?

Motivation plays a critical role in adult education. Participation is usually voluntary and in order for programs to survive, consistent participation which leads to completion of goals is necessary. Adults need to feel that what they are learning is relevant to them and that they can be successful in the learning process. Once basic needs are addressed, a person can focus on goals such as pursuing education. Studies on motivation in education have been limited to children, but

the results can be related to adults as well. Identifying motivation in underserved groups is important especially when the studying areas of adult basic education.

The term motivation is closely tied to the psychologist, Abraham Maslow, who designed the hierarchy of needs. Abraham Maslow is of the most well-known contributors to psychology and is considered to be the founder of humanistic psychology (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Maslow introduced his hierarchy of needs in 1943 as a paper titled, "A Theory of Human Motivation" (Cherry, K., 2014). The first level of needs is physiological needs including water, air, food, and sleep. The second level of needs is safety and security which include steady employment, health insurance, safe neighborhoods, and shelter (such as housing). The third level of needs is social needs including belonging, love, and affection. The fourth level of needs is esteem needs which are important once the first three levels of needs are met. They include self-esteem, personal worth, social recognition, and accomplishment. The fifth, and final, needs are self-actualizing needs which include becoming self-aware through personal growth, less concern about the opinions of others, and interest in fulfilling potential (Cherry, K., 2014). The first four levels of needs are deficiency or deprivation needs (D-needs) that results in a deficiency which causes motivation in people to meet these needs. The fifth or top level of needs, self-actualization, are considered growth needs (<http://www.learning-theories.com/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs.html>).

Even though Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been quite popular, the theory has had limited research evidence to support it. Maslow's 1970 revision of "Motivation and Personality" stated that he had yet to think of a way to test it in a laboratory (Marsh, 1978). The hierarchy leads one to believe that a present-time need must be met in order for someone to seek the future-time component of that need. Maslow theory supports the idea that one must be seeking future control of a need. A person who has an immediate need of water or food would not starve with the hope

of being able to have food another day (Marsh, 1978). In the case of social needs, a person may not accept isolation in the hope of a friendship tomorrow (March, 1978). Therefore, if present-time needs are not satisfied at least partially, then one is not able to pursue the satisfaction of a future-need (Marsh, 1978).

Human behavior is considered to be goal-oriented. Maslow's lower level needs must be satisfied in order for to strive for satisfaction of higher needs (Hablemitoglu, Ozkan, & Purutcuoglu, 2010). Hablemitoglu, Ozkan, and Purutcuoglu (2010) conducted a research study in Ankara, Turkey of 150 housekeeping employers working in government affairs. In addition to demographic questions, analyses were performed on physiological, safety/security, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization assessments. Based on past literature, individuals buy a house based on level of motivation, involvement, personality, perception, knowledge, desire, and expectation. The results of the study found that features of the house alone did not provide a sufficient explanation of hierarchy of needs because houses were considered to be to more than just shelter. Statistically significant results found that the participants reported that physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization aspects contributed to buying a house (Hablemitoglu, & et al., 2010). Overall, this study found that shelter is a basic human need, but that it also satisfied social and economic needs in order to provide opportunities to achieve self-actualization (Hablemitoglu et al., 2010).

This article provides an example of how basic needs such as physiological and safety/security needs can be linked to social and self-esteem needs especially in industrialized countries. The overlapping of needs suggested in Marsh's article are demonstrated in Hablemitoglu, Ozkan, and Purutcuoglu's (2010) research that when needs in a certain area are partially met, then pursuit of satisfaction in higher level needs can be pursued. Applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs to

underdeveloped countries where food, water, and shelter are a daily struggle would likely have different results. For the purpose of this literature review, this article serves as an adequate application of how the levels of needs proposed by Maslow are relevant to when including research of adult students in the United States.

Social scientists define motivation as an explanation of why people think and behave (Wlodkowski, 2008). According to Ratey (2001, p.247), more recent findings in neuroscience provide the definition of motivation as a process that “determines how much energy and attention the brain and body assign to a given stimulus - whether it’s a thought coming in or a situation that confronts one” (as cited in Wlodkowski, 2008). Wlodkowski describes motivation as:

Motivation is basic to our survival. It is the natural human process for directing energy to accomplish a goal. What makes motivation somewhat mysterious is that we cannot see it or touch it or precisely measure it. We have to infer it from what people say and do.

(Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 2)

Motivation as it pertains to adults including those in underserved groups will be discussed in detail in the next several sections.

Adult Motivation to Learn

The differences between learning in adulthood and childhood is also apparent in how these groups are motivated to learn. One key aspect of adult motivation is responsibility (Wlodkowski, 2008). In 1968, Malcolm Knowles introduced the idea of androgogy which focused on adult learning and how it differs from pedagogy which refers to the education of children (Merriam et al., 2007). Knowles presented four assumptions of adult learning:

- a) As a person matures, his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directed human being, b) An adult accumulates a

growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning, c) The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role, d) There is a change in time perspective as people mature-from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. (Knowles, 1980, p. 44)

Thus, an adult is more problem centered than subject centered in learning (Knowles, 1980).

Knowles later added two more assumptions: “e) The most potent assumptions are internal rather than external and f) Adults need to know why they need to learn something” (Knowles, 1984, p. 12).

According to Knowles (1980, p 47) several distinctions between learning in adulthood versus learning in childhood is that adults are more independent and self-directing and the learning environment needs to make adults feel accepted, respected, and supported with mutual sense of learners and teachers as “joint inquirers” (as cited in Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Vella who was influenced by Knowles, used this idea and incorporated the laws of quantum physics into her explanation of the role of a teacher of adult learning (Vella, 2002). Vella compared ‘mechanistic thinking’ to ‘quantum thinking’ by using the term “both/and” thinking which led to her development to twelve principles for effective adult learning (Vella, 2002).

Adults more so than children tend to have the following characteristics:

1) To use relevance, 2) To be more critical and more self-assured about judging the value of what they are learning, 3) To be reluctant to endorse content they do not find of value, usefulness, or contributing to their goals, 4) To be sensitive to a require respect from teachers, 5) To want to test what they are learning to work and real life settings, 6) To want to use their experience and prior learning as consciously and as directly as possible

while learning, and 7) To want to integrate new learning with their life roles as parents, workers, and so forth. (Wlodkowski, 2008, p.99-100)

Linking Motivation and Adult Learning: A Lack of Research and a Need for Underserved Groups

Participation in adult basic education is lacking when compared to other areas of adult education. The material in adult basic education consists of academic material presents in K-12 education. Using research linking motivation and learning from a major study of children in first through twelfth grades provides a basis for understanding the link between motivation and learning in adulthood.

Research has been done on adult motivation as it relates to participation in education, but little research has been done on the relationship between adult motivation and learning (Wlodkowski 2008). In fact, Wlodkowski (2008) stated that no major research study has been conducted to address this relationship. Most studies in education connecting motivation to learning have been in youth education which found a significant, positive relationship between motivation and learning (Wlodkowski, 2008). One major study by Uguroglu and Walberg (1979) consisted of a sample of 637,000 students in first through twelfth grades and found 232 correlations between motivation and learning (as cited in Wlodkowski, 2008). Ninety-eight percent of the correlations were positive and the relationships between motivation and learning increased as the students age also increased (Wlodkowski, 2008). These results can indicate that as age increased, so did the positive relationship between motivation and learning, then the assumption could be made that the relationship between the two would be significant for adults (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Wlodkowski offers the arguments supported by research that adult students who felt they were intrinsically motivated received higher grades and learners who have a learning experience in which they feel motivated are more likely to develop an interest in to use what they have learned (Wlodkowski, 2008). Wlodkowski (2008) warns that motivation alone cannot account for learning. Personal skill, learners' capacities, and quality of instruction are factors that can also influence learning (Wlodkowski, 2008). However, if a learner is engaging in a challenging task that s/he is capable of accomplishing, then motivation to make further progress can influence the outcome (Wlodkowski, 2008). The ability of the instructor to make an effort in assisting students by being accessible and culturally aware can result in learners that are motivated to learn more and be cooperative (Wlodkowski, 2008).

As a field, adult education has promoted increased access and success in higher education through political action, literacy efforts, and program development (Wlodkowski, 2008). Minority groups (African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans) and low-income adults remain underrepresented in higher education (Wlodkowski, 2008). Of those between the ages of 25-29 in the United States, 29% overall have complete four years or more of college. Racial demographics show that the percentage of participation of whites is 36%; African-Americans, 18%; and Latinos, less than 9% (Wlodkowski, 2008). Only 7% of those who were considered low income completed a bachelor's degree and 8% completed an associate's degree. Forty-two percent of traditional age students, 18-24, completed a bachelor's degree (Wlodkwoski, 2008). Over 70% of jobs require some form of postsecondary education and those who do not pursue or complete this level of education are likely to remain in low-income jobs (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Over 50% of African-Americans and Latinos live in poverty which Wlodkowski (2008) states is the result of not having education beyond high school. While these statistics may seem bleak

in their own context, they are even more significant when addressing the statistics of those who do not obtain a high school diploma. The current economy in the United States over the past few years has forced many formerly gainfully employed individuals into the job search market. With the national unemployment rate still over 8% and as high as 13% in some states, the competition for obtaining a job is greater. The changes which will be implemented to the GED test in 2014 require more analytical and critical thinking than the current 2002 version. As Wlodkowski (2008) discovered, research on the connection between motivation and learning in adult education is lacking. However, research obtained on youth in first through twelfth grades can be generalized to adults especially because the correlation between the two increases as youth get older.

What Motivates Adult Learners

Wlodkowski (2008) identified four ways instructors can motivate learning in adults. First, inclusion involves the approach instructors can take to make students feel respected and connected (Wlodkowski, 2008). This method allows students to engage in a nonthreatening manner in the educational setting and allows them to share their stories and experiences while also developing a sense of connection to the other students and the instructor (Wlodkowski, 2008). Second, addressing attitudes and cultural differences of students allows the instructor to make students feel safe (Wlodkowski, 2008). This is especially important for students who approach the learning experience with a negative or hostile attitude (Wlodkowski, 2008). Addressing learning that is relevant to students can positively influence students' attitudes about learning and towards their instructors (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Third, adults make meaning of their learning experiences by learning new information built upon previously acquired knowledge (Wlodkowski, 2008). This concept can be described research in neuroscience which has found that when a person is presented with new information, their brains search for currently developed neural networks based on previous knowledge (Wlodkowski, 2008). However, the information must also be of importance to the person in order for them to be able to apply the information to these previously developed neural networks (Wlodkowski, 2008).

The fourth method is of particular importance to this thesis as it relates to how adults develop competence which leads to confidence (Wlodkowski, 2008). The practice and mastery of new skills results in positive emotions and feelings of efficacy (Wlodkowski, 2008). Adults are more sensitive than children to social and cultural issues and how it affects their feelings of competence (Wlodkowski, 2008). Adults who feel they are making progress have an increased motivation to learn because they know they need to apply what they learn to the 'real world' (Wlodkowski, 2008). When they receive feedback that they are making progress, they can begin to internalize feelings of efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Wlodkowski, 2008). According to Schultz and Dickenson (2000), Poldrak and others (2001) from a biological standpoint, learning increases activity in the brain and activates pleasure structures in the brain as students proceed (as cited in Wlodkowski, 2008).

The interest in the learning activity result in the motivation to learn and competence in the activity increases the sense of competence (Wlodkowski, 2008). When a person feels they are competent in a certain area of learning, they acquire the self-confidence which leads to to them engaging in more learning activities (Wlodkowski, 2008). "Instructors can help adults learn to be

confident by establishing conditions that engender competence. It is a wonderful gift” (Wlodkowski, 2008. p. 112).

Adult learners often engage in education because they need a job, a promotion, and money involved with these two reasons (Wlodkowski, 2008). Therefore, they approach the educational setting with the attitude that they just want to learn what they need to know (Wlodkowski, 2008). Adult educators also deal with students who are dependent and lack self-confidence.

Wlodkowski (2008) identified three of the most common reasons: 1) adults have not been socialized to see themselves in control of their own learning; 2) their experience in school or prior learning environment have been negative; and 3) they do not feel they have free choice in enrolling in a learning or training program. Incorporating motivational purposes of respect, self-efficacy, expectations for success, and engagement and challenge in addition to developing competence and self-direction can influence change in these beliefs (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Vella stresses the importance of respect for learners through a Learning Needs and Resource Assessment (LRNA) (Vella, 2012). Vella warns that instructors who have come to their own conclusions about who the learners are can experience problems such as covering too much content, the wrong content, or not allowing students to identify the value of what they are learning (Vella, 2002). Vella developed six design steps: Who, Why, So What, When, Where, and What (Vella, 2002). Vella advocated that contacting students prior to a class to identify their interest and learning needs is a necessary process in order to engage students in the learning process (Vella, 2012). Vella developed an ASO Triangle in order to assist adult instructors in how to acquire information from the prospective learners. The first dimension is ‘Ask’ which involves who will be asked, what will be asked, and how to ask, and who and how to observe (Vella, 2012).

Defining Confidence and Self-Confidence

Confidence and self-confidence are one of the key issues to be investigated both the literature review and in the research. Developing a working definition these concepts will help to identify them do guide the research. The definition of “confidence” is “1) a feeling of consciousness of one’s powers or of reliance on one’s circumstances or 2) faith or belief that one will act in a right proper, or effective way” (Merriam-Webster, 2013). The two definitions demonstrate that a person can have confidence in themselves or in others. The definition of “self-confidence” is “confidence in one’s powers and abilities (Merriam-Webster, 2013). “Self-esteem” is defined as “a confidence and satisfaction in oneself” (Merriam-Webster, 2013). The terms confidence, self-confidence, and self-esteem are used interchangeably in the literature.

Tett and Maclachlan (2007, p.158) defined self-confidence as “assuredness in oneself and one’s capabilities; confidence in abilities in personality; and positive self-evaluation,.” Self-confidence was measured from participants’ responses to the question ‘what impact has your participation in the Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) programme had on your personal, family, and community life?’ (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007). Participants reported psychological changes including increased self-esteem; a growing sense of their potential, ability, and achievements; more independence; being happier as a person; being able to express their own opinions; talking openly about learning difficulties in the ALN program; improved health; and an enhanced awareness and understanding of aspects of the world around them (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007).

One of the most important difference in the learners was their sense of achievement in learning by realizing they were capable learners and their positive attitudes affected other aspects of their lives. The percentage of students reporting achievement in learning rose from 32% to

48% from the first to the second interview. In fact, participants reported achievements that had already accomplished in the second interview (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007). Just over half, 51%, of participants also reported improved job/promotional prospects and confidence in being able to perform these tasks at work. In addition, many participants cited their participation in the ALN programs as building their self-confidence as learners that they decided to enroll in further study (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007).

Defining Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is another concept being explored in the literature review and the research. Marcic and Kobal Grum (2011) defined self-esteem as the belief about one's worth and is often linked to a strong affect. Self-esteem can range from high to low levels (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011). Although self-esteem can fluctuate over time, those with unstable self-esteem are often influenced or contingent on negative or positive events instead of an approval of self without a need to justify this feeling (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011). Marcic and Kobal Grum (2011) differentiate self-esteem into two types, contingent and uncontingent. According to Deci and Ryan (2005) contingent self-esteem involves people holding themselves to certain interpersonal expectations and achieve self-esteem through actions (as cited in Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011). Those with uncontingent self-esteem perceive themselves as worthy of love and respect without the need to achieve certain standards (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011).

Self-esteem is also referred to as self-concept, self-efficacy and self-image. Lipenvich and Beder (2007) completed a comprehensive review of literature in adult literacy education and cited self-confidence as one of the six major barriers. In a review of outcomes and impacts of adult literacy education from the late 1960s to 1999, 23 out of 159 were found to be the most credible and self-esteem was included in eight out of 10 studies (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007).

These studies were based on self-report which consisted of one to two questions on a survey that addressed self-esteem. The research identified the presumption that low self-esteem deters people from participating in adult literacy education and higher self-esteem is an outcome, the research was not compelling (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007). The assumption made by these researchers is that low self-esteem is a result of failure in school which leads to negative perceptions of school, low self-esteem and lack of success in adult literacy education (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007). Adult education policy is designed to address overcoming past negative experience and schooling and assumes that a culture of illiterates is inferior to the mainstream culture (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007). Adult literacy educators are assumed to believe that their students have lived lives of failure which has resulted in low self-esteem. This has led to the deficit model of adult literacy education which assumes low self-esteem must be overcome before learners can progress and influences how learners are treated (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007).

Self-Concept: Independent vs. Interdependent

Self-concept is another term that is closely related to self-confidence and self-esteem and this term is used in some of the research in this literature review in order to better understand . The definition of self-concept is “the mental image one has of oneself” (Merriam-Webster, 2013). The article, “Gender Differences in Self-Concept and Self-Esteem Components” by Marcic and Kobal Grum (2011), addressed two types of self-concept using the independent/interdependent theory that took place in Slovenia. Independent self-concept relates to aspects that affect what people think of themselves such as physical appearance, intelligence, education, possessions, and achieving goals and religion. However interdependent self-concept focuses on one’s relation to other people including popularity, kindness, relationships with others (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011). Those with this second type of self-concept seek to obtain and nurture relationships

with others (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011). Self-esteem is defined as the belief about oneself. Although self-esteem can fluctuate over time, those with unstable self-esteem are often influenced or contingent on negative or positive events instead of an approval of self without a need to justify this feeling (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011).

This article described Marcic and Grum's (2011) research of gender differences in self-concept and self-esteem. Based on the previous research they reviewed, males had a higher level of independent self-confidence than females who exhibited higher relationship interdependence. Males also had higher self-esteem than females in previous research conducted by Kling et al. (1999), but another study by Patton, Bartrum, and Creed (2004) showed that the difference was not statistically significant (as cited in Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011). Most of the 339 participants in Marcic and Grum's study (110 males and 229 females, ages 19-63 years) had a college or university degree. The Adult Sources of Self-Esteem Inventory (ASSEI) measured self-concept and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) measure self-esteem. In addition, the Instability of Self-Esteem Scale (ISES) and Contingent Self-Esteem Scale (CSES) were also used (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011).

The results of the study found statistically significant differences between the genders in interdependent self-concept. Overall, females had better interdependent self-concept. Males and females were found to have similar independent self-concepts and self-esteem (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011). One reason for the difference between the results of this study compared to previous research is that more women are obtaining higher education in Slovenia based on higher high school achievements and equal opportunities for both males and females which has led to more similar socio-economic factors (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011). One issue identified is that females sense of self-worth may vary more than males based on daily events. Bio-socio-

psychological differences between the genders was only apparent in interdependent self-concept, but the increase in the number of females who obtained university degrees showed that gender roles are more androgynous and is believed to contribute to the similarities among the genders (Marcic & Kobal Grum, 2011).

This recent study is useful for further research. When investigating the development of self-confidence and self-concept in adult education, students do not necessarily need to be selected based on their gender). Both Rogers' (2004) and Tett and Maclachlan's (2007) articles include subjects of both genders. The issue of interdependence needs to be considered if the research subjects include both males and females as this is a possible variable in how students perceive self-confidence in relation to participation in adult education programs.

Self-Esteem Comparison of Adult Learners

Self-esteem can be broken down into different types and can distinguish the whether or not participants in adult basic education possess global self-esteem and how this can influence success in adult basic education programs. Lipenvich and Beder's (2007) article, "Self-Esteem Among Adult Literacy Learners" used the definition of global self-esteem as a basis for their research. Global self-esteem is at the highest hierarchical level with other lower levels that are defined by individuals' lives (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007). One aspect of self-esteem is academic self-esteem tied to Bandura's theory of which an individual's confidence that they can achieve certain levels of performance in a particular area (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007). As proposed by Bandura those who are believe they are ineffective in coping with environmental demands have higher emotional arousal, focus on deficiencies, and lead to cognitive difficulties that make individuals question competencies (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007).

An alternative theory proposed by Steele, the self-affirmation theory suggests that those who have experienced low or negative outcomes in one domain and achievements in others, may still lead to high global self-esteem (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007). Lipenvich and Beder (2007) proposed the idea that adult literacy learners, those in adult basic education programs, may have been successful in other areas of their lives and have positive self-esteem. To test this idea, their research study compared global and academic self-esteem of adult literacy learners to doctoral students (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007). Assisted self-completion was given to adult literacy learners who needed to help understanding the meaning of the items on the self-esteem questionnaire, but both groups were provided with the same one. A global self-esteem measure developed by Panteleev was used in this study and an measure of academic self-esteem was also used. This instrument was developed from an extensive review of literature and existing instruments so that the adult literacy learners could understand the items on the instrument. Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores from the students' records were also reviewed (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007).

Results showed no significant difference between self-esteem levels of adult literacy learners and doctoral students. The Sheffe test that compared differences among adult literacy learners in several different programs, also showed no statistically significant differences. Learners with higher self-esteem performed better on both the TABE reading and math tests (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007). A positive correlation between academic and global self-esteem was also found. The results suggested the presumption that a deficit perspective of adult literacy learners exists and must be overcome in order for learning to occur (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007). The concern is that the instruction is not only condescending, but also stigmatizes this population of learners (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007). Adult learners are those who choose to enroll in programs to solve

problems in their lives and adult basic education is available to provide this help (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007).

Although higher TABE scores were positively correlated with higher academic and global self-esteem, the authors of this research did not infer causality citing that they could not determine if higher achievement led to higher self-esteem or vice versa. Lipenvich and Beder (2007) also concluded that high correlation between academic and global self-esteem also showed those with lower achievement also had lower self-esteem. These conclusions only provide a correlation between higher TABE scores and higher academic and global self-esteem, but do not infer causality.

The results of this study are important when looking at students enrolled in adult basic education programs. The main issue identified in this study which presents the need for further research is whether or not students' self-confidence influences their academic skills and performances on tests or whether or not higher achievement influences academic and global self-esteem. Performance of doctoral students in undergraduate or master's level study was not obtained in order to be correlated with their academic and global self-esteem ratings on the instruments. The study stated that students compare themselves to those in their own groups (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007). The results of the study cannot conclude that adult basic education students have higher self-esteem than doctoral students and does not account for prior academic

Possible Selves as Self-Concept

"Possible selves" is another concept to explore when trying to understand the level of self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-concept one has when beginning an adult basic education program and how these concepts are developed throughout participation in adult basic education programs. Adult basic education programs rely on funding. The majority comes from

government funding and additional funding comes from private or charitable donations. Adult educators can have an influence on how students view their futures by providing encouragement and information which can help students develop possible selves. 'Possible selves' is defined as an individual's conceptions of a future self that one either hopes for or fears and are linked to past and present self-concept (Rossiter, 2007). Individuals apply meaning and value to present events and accomplishments in education (Rossiter, 2007). For example, a pre-tenure assistant professor who desires to become a tenured professor has a different meaning of having an article published in a peer reviewed journal than a professor emeritus who wants to be a novelist (Rossiter, 2007). This view considers self-concept to be based on selves that are accessible and meaningful (Rossiter, 2007). Self-concept can be linked to motivation and goal-oriented behavior (Rossiter, 2007). The field of psychology has studied possible selves and current affective states by Marcus and Nurius (1986), the influence of social groups and psychological well-being by Cameron (1999), and among four different age groups by Cross and Markus (1991) (as cited in Rossiter, 2007).

Research on possible selves has been conducted across the life span and have found that the number of possible selves declines with age (Rossiter, 2007). Younger adults tend to focus more on occupation and family while older adults focus more on physical and health issues (Rossiter, 2007). Older adults reported lower efficacy in regards to envisioning actual hoped-for selves and preventing feared possible selves than younger adults (Rossiter, 2007). Possible selves shift across the life span from social comparison to temporal comparison (Ryff, 1991, as cited in Rossiter, 2007). Older adults are less likely to criticize themselves and incorporate imperfections into their views of their hoped-for selves (Ryff, 1991, as cited in Rossiter, 2007).

The concept of possible selves has been used in career development. According to Ibarra (1999, p.8), developing possible selves in the work settings occurs when three activities are implemented by the learner including “1) observing role models to develop a repertoire of possible selves, 2) experimenting with provisional selves, and 3) evaluating the new self conceptions against external and internal standards” (as cited in Rossiter, 2007). The assumption that adults learn in work settings is apparent. By addressing these three activities, learners/workers can further develop career goals and types of people who adults want to model (Rossiter, 2007). Applying these concepts to students in an academic setting such as a GED or ABE class can allow these students to begin to develop their possible selves beyond the classroom setting as they identify their strengths and future career goals.

Rossiter (2007) addressed the issue of possible selves and the helping relationship in adult education. Rossiter (2007) explored teaching and mentoring relationships in adult education among returning college students and their teachers, mentors, and advisors (Rossiter, 2007). This group of adult learners can be compared to those who return to formal education after dropping out of high school. Rossiter (2007) identified educational helping relationships as a way of presenting options to students that they may not have previously considered. The example used was a student who was interested in the sciences, particularly biology, and thought about being a biology teacher. The professor suggested other fields such as physical therapy or audiology and the student decided to research the possibility of being an audiologist which was a field she can not considered before (Rossiter, 2007).

Research findings of possible selves supported the similar concept of career development in educational settings (Rossiter, 2007). In addition to instructors providing information on possible careers, interactions with teachers and mentors allow students to obtain details of their possible

selves by assessing the strengths and qualities of their instructors and how this can contribute to their own goals (Rossiter, 2007). The relationships between educators and students can help students develop steps in accomplishing future goals and recognizing possible setbacks (Rossiter, 2007). When educators develop a sense of trust in their students, they can help promote the efficacy and self-confidence of the learners (Rossiter, 2007).

Types of Barriers

Three types of barriers to participation in adult education were developed by Patricia Cross in 1982 and include situational (child care, transportation, finances), institutional (scheduling, location, “red tape” involved in registration), and dispositional (learned fear of academic failure, dislike of school, self-esteem) (Quigley, 1997). Quigley gave an example of how a program in southwest Texas identified transportation is the most important situational barrier. The local military reserve agreed to provide transportation to and from the program. However, after only one to two trips, students were not at home when the transportation arrived (Quigley, 1997). Dispositional barriers can be controlled by adult educators who can influence the way students feel about learning and about themselves as learners (Quigley, 1997).

The current GED test was designed in 2002. This year, 2013, is the last year this version will be offered. The 2014 GED test includes major changes that will require much more critical thinking and assessment of knowledge from the learners. Research has shown that analytical and critical thinking skills are best acquired through a transformational, or liberatory, approach to learning. One major change to the 2014 GED test includes providing information on strengths and areas of need which will be provided to teachers and learners in order to assist them in deciding on future education and employment goals.

Wlodkowski (2008) identified one way instructors can increase motivation in students is to encourage them to increase their level of competence, making progress in educational activities. When students feel they have achieved competence in certain skills, they are more likely to have the motivation to continue to learn because they have developed self-confidence (Wlodkowski, 2008). When considering the bleak statistics of GED recipients, if those who have achieved success while enrolled in Adult Basic Education or GED preparation classes can become intrinsically motivated to continue education, then they prepare themselves for self-sufficient employment and avoid the stigma involved of being a high school dropout. If students complete programs in postsecondary education after obtaining the GED credential, the focus of their education will be on the postsecondary education obtained instead of the fact that they dropped out of high school and later obtained their GED.

Barriers to Participation

Three types of barriers to participation in adult education were developed by Patricia Cross in 1982 and include situational (child care, transportation, finances), institutional (scheduling, location, “red tape” involved in registration), and dispositional (learned fear of academic failure, dislike of school, self-esteem) (Quigley, 1997). Quigley gave an example of how a program in southwest Texas identified transportation is the most important situational barrier. The local military reserve agreed to provide transportation to and from the program. However, after only one to two trips, students were not at home when the transportation arrived (Quigley, 1997). Dispositional barriers can be controlled by adult educators who can influence the way students feel about learning and about themselves as learners (Quigley, 1997).

The current GED test was designed in 2002. This year, 2013, is the last year this version will be offered. The 2014 GED test includes major changes that will require much more critical

thinking and assessment of knowledge from the learners. Research has shown that analytical and critical thinking skills are best acquired through a transformational, or liberatory, approach to learning. One major change to the 2014 GED test includes providing information on strengths and areas of need which will be provided to teachers and learners in order to assist them in deciding on future education and employment goals.

Wlodkowski (2008) identified one way instructors can increase motivation in students is to encourage them to increase their level of competence, making progress in educational activities. When students feel they have achieved competence in certain skills, they are more likely to have the motivation to continue to learn because they have developed self-confidence (Wlodkowski, 2008). When considering the bleak statistics of GED recipients, if those who have achieved success while enrolled in Adult Basic Education or GED preparation classes can become intrinsically motivated to continue education, then they prepare themselves for self-sufficient employment and avoid the stigma involved of being a high school dropout. If students complete programs in postsecondary education after obtaining the GED credential, the focus of their education will be on the postsecondary education obtained instead of the fact that they dropped out of high school and later obtained their GED.

Research regarding barriers to participating in adult education programs have consisted of data from large-scale national and international studies (Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009). Qualitative studies have also been conducted, but the data has not been comparative (Rubenson et al., 2009). Most studies use the classification system developed by Patricia Cross (1981) which are situational, institutional and dispositional barriers (Rubenson et al., 2009). Previous studies on barriers have shown that situational barriers are the ones most frequently reported by nonparticipants (Rubenson et al., 2009). The most commonly reported specific situational

barriers are lack of time and family situation which is more prevalent among women (Rubenson et al., 2009). Financial reasons were the main institutional barrier with 30% of those in North America citing this reason and in Europe, only 12-21% would agree to pay for the all of the cost and over 50% would not agree to paying any of the cost (Rubenson et al., 2009). Situational and institutional barriers among nonparticipants was statistically the same for participants and sometimes more so for participants than nonparticipants (Rubenson et al., 2009). Dispositional barriers among those who have no interest in participating and those who participate are reported the most among older adults, low-educated adults, and blue-collar workers (Rubenson et al., 2009). Those who felt participation would result in better and higher paying jobs found that participation was meaningful (Rubenson et al., 2009).

The study divided countries in North America and Europe into four groups. Group 1 comprised of those countries close to or at 50% participation including the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). Group 2 had participation of 35-50% and included Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Group 3 had participation of 20-35% and included Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, France, Italy, and Spain. Group 4 had participation below 20% including Greece, Portugal, Hungary, and Poland (Rubenson et al., 2009).

Patterns of inequality found that age, family background, educational attainment, and work-related factors all contributed to the inequality of participation in all of the countries, but the inequalities were much lower in Nordic countries than in Anglo-Saxon countries (Rubenson et al. 2009). Patterns of inequality in adult learning also contributed to other societal factors including income, education, and skill attainment (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000 as cited in

Rubenson et al., 2009). These patterns reflected the three different “welfare state regimes” that related to arrangements between state, market, and family (Rubenson et al., 2009).

Comparisons of Past School Experiences and Current Experiences in ABE and GED Programs

Rebecca Rogers conducted a Critical Discourse Analysis using interviews with 15 adult learners, ages 25-75 years old, all of whom were African-American and enrolled in an Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) program in St. Louis, Missouri (Rogers, 2004). The interview protocol included three domains: past and present experiences with school, family and community language and literacy practice, and involvement with children’s education (Rogers, 2004). Past experiences with school largely consisted of statements of negative ability and affect which included a retelling of negative messages from teachers and other students. Present experiences with school also retold statements from teachers in addition to family members, but were much more positive. Both experiences included an explanation of a similar discourse, methods of presenting ideas, such as reading from workbooks and memorization, but the descriptions of the teachers’ and students’ ‘voices’ were very different (Rogers, 2004). Participants projected an active sense of self when describing experiences in the other two domains (Rogers, 2004).

Rogers pays particular attention to literacy learning and how they are attached to subjectivities that vary across contexts (Rogers, 2004). One example is Natasha who described literacy in an academic setting as a process which included reading words and memorization, but described literacy as purposeful when discussing the family and community domain. During the course of the interview, Natasha began to question the idea that she was a ‘slow learner’ because of how quickly she learned in work environments (Rogers, 2004). Overall, the participants’ sense

of self was open to change especially in the context of involvement with their children. They also reported positively about their adult education teachers. Statements about present experiences in their educational program, family, and community were used with an active ‘voice’ in contrast to the ‘passive’ voice used in statements about past educational experiences in K-12 (Rogers, 2004).

The article, “A Teacher’s Words Are Tremendously Powerful: Stories from the GED Scholars Initiative” (Golden, Kist, Trehan & Padak, 2005) described the experiences of students who dropped out of high school, later obtained their GED, and went on to post-secondary education. Although this article only addressed students who dropped out of high school and not those who completed it, it is still important to look at these issues when working in GED courses because the students’ experiences in this article represent many who are enrolled in GED classes. What was striking was the number of students who still had strong emotions when explaining their high school experiences (Golden, et al., 2005). Similar to the students Rodgers interviewed, almost every student interviewed in this study expressed negative experiences in high school including organizational barriers, teachers, guidance counselors, curriculum practices, or instructional approaches (Golden et al., 2005). Many students noticed a contrast between high school and college in the sense that there were more opportunities for support from instructors, the instructors were more accessible, and students’ decisions and individuality were more respected (Golden et al., 2005).

Many students also felt a lack of support from high school staff while having family issues at home which resulted in their decision to drop out (Golden et al., 2005). The important issues gleaned from this article were the support and respect individuals felt as adult students in a college setting and how the difference of being treated as individuals encouraged them to

continue with their education. It was also apparent that these students had positive experiences in their GED programs which led to their success in both obtaining their GED credential as well as deciding to enroll in post-secondary education.

The Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS) program offered through Central Queensland University (CQU) in Australia was developed in order to service residents within the catchment area of CQU. This population tended to have a low percentage of enrollment in higher education and the STEPS was designed as a follow up to a pilot program, The Preliminary Studies Program for Disadvantaged Groups (Willans & Seary, 2007). The program is offered free of charge, offers both full and part-time instruction in a face-to-face setting, and is located at the main and regional campuses. The four courses the program offered were “Language and Learning,” “Transition Mathematics,” “Computing for Academic Assignment Writing,” and “Tertiary Preparation Skills” (Willan & Seary, 2007).

Willan and Seary presented the argument that many students who enroll in the STEPS program present with negative assumptions about themselves from past school experiences. The research conducted through the STEPS program provided evidence that students who had ideas of themselves such as not being intelligent, had fears of being ridiculed, and did not believe they could succeed in an academic environment were able to reflect on how these assumptions developed and experience personal change (Willan & Seary, 2007). The program has students reflect upon past experiences and how it influenced current self-perceptions. Learning experiences centered on “their understanding of self, in particular learning style and their personality type, as these influence their view of self, others and the world,” (Willan & Seary, 2007, p. 438).

Data was gathered from nine students out of 25 enrolled in the “Language and Learning” course for this research study and three of the students’ experiences and transformations were described. One student described herself as “too stupid” because she was not as well-educated and did not have the same “serious” personality traits of her family including her parents and sibling. Another student was described as “too scared” because of his risk of being hurt due to past experiences of humiliation especially after a period of being unemployed. The third student described as academics as “too hard” because she had the belief that she would not be successful and if she did fail, it would not be a surprise (Willan & Seary, 2007). These three students were able to change their assumptions about themselves (Willan & Seary, 2007).

The concepts incorporated into the academic programs were meant to result in transformative or transformational learning. All of the academic components incorporated the concepts that the learning process can cause uncertainty and confusion which leads them on the path of self-discovery (Willan & Seary, 2007). The program strongly emphasizes Cranton’s (2003, p.442) concept of perspective transformation which is “an individual’s revision of a meaning perspective or a worldview as a result of critical self-reflection and discourse” (as cited in Willan & Seary, 2007).

One common theme among the research is the positive portrayal of the adult educators, both by the students and researchers. Students reported about positive feedback they received from their adult educators. The positive view of adult educators is in contrast to stories told about past experiences in K-12. In fact, these adult students had negative memories and emotions when discussing their experiences in grade and secondary school. Rogers described the negative accounts of the participants she interviewed involving a passive ‘revoicing’ of what teachers and other students said about them as students (Rogers, 2004). These research findings are

encouraging for adult education programs in that they provide evidence that overall the educators are positive, supportive, and want to their students to succeed.

Understanding the Causes of Dropping Out of High School

(Hickman, Batholomew, & Mathwig, 2008). Educators have determined that a child's shift from home life to school is an important transition which creates an academic identity. Despite differences including genetics, school, community, and home life, the American schooling process is based on traditional Socratic and 18th-century hierarchical models (Hickman et al., 2008). The research question posed by Hickman, Bartholomew and Mathwig was when does the pathway between high school graduates and dropouts begin to differ. Research has shown that reading levels in third grade are a strong predictor of which students drop out of high school (Hickman et al., 2008). If these academic deficits are not addressed at this time, academics can continue to decline to the point when students drop out of high school. Attendance was another predictor supported by research. Dropouts averaged 16 days of absenteeism compared to 10 days for graduates in a study by Alexander (1997) that was linked to future academic attachment, identity, as well as success orientation defined by Rush & Vitale (1994) (as cited in Hickman et al., 2008).

Problematic behaviors in adolescents, most of whom are in high school, also led to increased drop out rates. In a study by Hickman and Garvey in 2006, referrals to a mentor program was higher for younger students, age 14.68, who later dropped out of school compared to the age of students who graduated, which was 15.44 years. According to statistics obtained by Kazdin and Moffett (1993), high school graduates had an average of suspension of 1.51 days compared to drop outs who had an average of 6.20 days (as cited in Hickman et al., 2008). These problematic behaviors have been shown to begin in kindergarten due to poor parental disciplining by age five

which result in conduct-disorder behavioral problems. This leads to rejection by peers in the earlier years of school and peer associations with delinquent peers during adolescence (Hickman et al., 2008).

Familial factors were found to have a great influence on students dropping out of school. Students with older siblings who dropped out of school, who come from lower socio-economic status (SES), and families who have more frequent transitional moves are more likely to drop out of school (Hickman et al., 2008). According to Smink and Schargel (2004), although familial factors have been shown to provide a critical role in dropout rates, little efforts have been made to connect family and school (as cited in Hickman et al., 2008).

The longitudinal study conducted by Hickman, Bartholomew, and Methwig addressed two research questions: “(a) Do differences exist in the developmental pathways of high school graduates compared with high school dropouts? (b) If differences exist in the developmental pathways of high school graduates compared with high school dropouts, when and across which variables do these differences occur?” (Hickman et al., 2008, p. 5-6). Participants included students enrolled in the 2002-2005 cohort who would have entered kindergarten between 1990 and 1993. School data was obtained and 60 graduates and 60 dropouts were selected using random sampling (Hickman et al., 2008). Data from the students’ files “included report cards, progress reports, letters to parents, attendance records, disciplinary infractions, family background variables, standardized test scores, high school transcripts, credit hours earned, and that dates when students dropped out of school. Juvenile court records were also obtained” (Hickman et al., 2008, p. 6).

Grades in K-2 were measured by applying a numeric values to the follow ratings: Satisfactory, Needs Improvement, and Unsatisfactory. Performance in reading, writing, and

mathematics were all found to be statistically significant in that dropouts scored lower in these areas compared to graduates (Hickman et al., 2008). Analyzing GPA from grades 1-8 using both descriptive and inferential statistics showed the same statistically significant results as K-2. GPAs among 9-12 grade students showed lower scores for dropouts than graduates and remained consistent throughout each semester the GPAs were evaluated. In addition, high school dropouts took more core courses than graduates (Hickman et al., 2008). Stanford Achievements Tests showed similar results. High school dropouts were also more likely to be retained, held back in a grade, than high school graduates (Hickman et al., 2008).

Absenteeism in first grade was significantly higher for dropouts than graduates and this trend was even more apparent in middle school.

Dropouts were more likely to be non-White. Family demographics including family structure, place of birth, gender, siblings, free and reduced lunch, and Title I participation was not statistically significant. Also, no significant differences existed between high school dropouts and graduates place in juvenile detention placements, but participants placed on juvenile probation were more likely to be dropouts than graduates. (Hickman et al., 2008, p. 11-12)

Not only did statistically significant differences occur among the two groups beginning in kindergarten, the differences persisted during elementary school and became greater in middle school and again in high school (Hickman et al., 2008). In high school, dropouts were more likely to be required to take more core courses that require more academically demanding classes in order to comply with standards and prepare for standardized tests. At this point, these students may not be prepared for such demanding coursework considering their past performance (Hickman et al., 2008). A comparison of standardized tests in fifth grade to eighth grade

performance in mathematics. Dropouts only scored slightly lower on the tests than their performance in class, but graduates who scored higher on the standardized tests showed the same results for graduates even though their scores and performance were higher. The results of this study found that the developmental pathways that began in kindergarten continued through high school. The researchers suggested more specific research on students who had developmental pathways of dropping out of school, but graduated and what led to this change (Hickman et al., 2008).

This study is relevant to adult education for several reasons. First, adult educators must create an academic environment in adult basic education programs that prepare students for the GED test with a focus on past experiences and how these students can be motivated and encouraged to achieve this goal. Second, the methods used by adult educators should receive attention and consideration in K-12 education. Third, parents who are adults need to be educated on expectations of K-12 academics on their children. The first two issues are relevant to the adult students themselves who are often high school dropouts and did not succeed in this environment for various reasons. The third issue addresses the need for parents to be educated and involved in their children's schooling to prevent their children from dropping out of school.

Evidence that Contradicts the Myth of Being “Too Old to Learn”

Schaie completed the “Seattle Longitudinal Study” from data collected from 1956 to 1991 (Schaie, 1994). Schaie's (1994) study began in 1956 as his doctoral dissertation which concluded with the sixth cycle of data analyzed in 1992. The subjects of the research consisted of 5,000 people who were members of a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) in Seattle, Washington and were in the upper 75% of the socio-economic spectrum (Schaie, 1994). This group included both white and blue collar employees who received these health benefits through employment

(Schaie, 1994). Schaie found that intelligence quotient (IQ) did not accurately account for age-related changes and identified five intellectual abilities that were analyzed through this study (Schaie, 1994). They are: verbal meaning, spatial orientation, inductive reasoning, number, and word fluency (Schaie, 1994).

Data from the study showed that modest gains for all latent abilities increased from young adulthood to early middle age (Schaie, 1994). Gender differences were discovered showing women maintained verbal meaning and inductive reasoning longer and men maintained spatial orientation and number longer (Schaie, 1994). Sex-role socialization patterns may also contribute to the reasons for decremental age change (Schaie, 1994). Cohorts of younger subjects, such as “baby boomers” included in the study, resulted in fewer gender differences in abilities (Schaie, 1994). “Linear negative age differences existed from young adulthood to old age for inductive reasoning, spatial orientation, perceptual speed, and verbal memory “(Schaie, 1994, p. 307). Numeric ability peaks in the mid-40s and declines significantly by age 60 (Schaie, 1994). Verbal ability peaks around age 39 and declines modestly (Schaie, 1994).

Longitudinal data found that these psychometric abilities could not be reliably confirmed prior to age 60 except for word fluency which began to decline at age 53 (Schaie, 1994). All abilities declined significantly by age 67, but then only modestly until they reached their 80s (Schaie, 1994). Positive age changes occurred at the latent construct level “from young adulthood to age 60 for inductive reasoning, spatial orientation, verbal ability, and verbal memory” (Schaie, 1994, p. 308). However, numeric skills and perceptual speed declined by a full standard deviation (SD) by age 60 (Schaie, 1994). When comparing those at age 25 to 88, “there is little decline in verbal ability, but inductive reasoning and verbal memory declined by

0.5 SD, spatial orientation by 1 SD, and numeric ability and perceptual speed by more than 1.5 SD.” (Schaie, 1994, p. 308)

The level of education appeared to be the main factor that accounted for cohort differences (Schaie, 1994). Similarities were found among family members including parents and their offspring with the exceptions of attitudinal measure of social responsibility and perceptual speed (Schaie, 1994). Only inductive reasoning was found to not to be influenced by heredity, but by environmental influences (Schaie, 1994). Verbal meaning and spatial orientation increased showed an increase in younger generations of a family (Schaie, 1994).

Schaie identified seven antecedents that contributed to individual differences in early decrement for some and high maintenance of intellectual abilities for others. They are: “1) No cardiovascular or other chronic disease, 2) living in favorable environmental circumstances or high socio-economic status (SES), 3) involvement in intellectually stimulating activities (reading, travel, cultural events, etc.), 4) a flexible personality or performance on motor-cognitive perseveration tasks, 5) marriage to a spouse with high cognitive status, 6) maintenance of high levels of perceptual processing, 7) satisfaction with life’s accomplishment in midlife or early old age (Schaie, 1994). Declines in intellectual functioning were attributed to “decrease in flexibility during the past seven-year period, low educational level, male gender membership, and low satisfaction with life success.” (Schaie, 1994, p.310)

Fluid abilities were found to decline earlier than crystallized abilities and were more resistant to educational intervention (Schaie, 1994). Fluid abilities include being able to reason quickly and think abstracting. Crystallize abilities involve the learning, knowledge, and skills acquired over a lifetime. These finding led to further research by Sherry Willis (Schaie, 1994). A subsample of those who participated in the longitudinal study were age 65 or over (Schaie,

1994). Subjects were assessed to determine if they had declined in either inductive reasoning, spatial orientation, or both since the previous data was collected 14 years prior (Schaie, 1994). Those who declined in only one ability were given training for that ability, those who declined in both abilities or remained stable were randomly assigned to the two trainings (Schaie, 1994). The results showed that two thirds of the participants showed significant improvement and 40% of those returned to their predecline abilities (Schaie, 1994). Overall, training was more effective for inductive reasoning and even more so for men than women, women made more progress in spatial orientation, and training was also more effective for those who had declined in these abilities (Schaie, 1994).

Those who continue be engaged in learning activities or become engaged in these activities at a later age are able to maintain or regain skills that were lost. Dispositional barriers to participating in adult education programs include an individual's belief that s/he will succeed in learning. This data is promising for adults who are interested in participating in adult education programs particularly those who are older and have not participated in formal education and training for a significant amount of time. Additional encouragement comes from information acquired in the field of neuroscience that has found the new neural pathways are developed as a person learns and that these abilities are more likely to occur when adults are intrinsically motivated to learn.

Findings in Neuroscience

Research in neuroscience supports the concept that most learning and development occur in the brain through the strengthening and weakening of synapses (Wlodkowski, 2008). When humans learn, connections are made between the neurons. At the micro-level, learning results in lasting change in neural networks and adult learning involve building and modifying these

networks based on what has already been learned (Wlodkowski, 2008). This is why connections cannot be removed by an instructor simply explaining something such as an attitude or belief. Instead neural networks must be created through repetition, practice, and time (Wlodkowski, 2008). The most pragmatic way to introduce new learning is by building upon what a learner already knows (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Research in psychology also supports the idea when adults learn and can make meaning and sense of what they are learning, motivation occurs (Wlodkowski, 2008). The neuroscientific understanding of intrinsic motivation supports the importance of motivating learners from within (Wlodkowski, 2008). Theories of intrinsic motivation incorporate the value of culture on learning which is particularly important in adult learning because adults have already developed perspectives, language, values, and ways of knowing (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, 1995 as cited in Wlodkowski, 2008). Both research in the neurosciences and intrinsic motivation have supported the importance of emotions in learning, especially in the development of memory (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Adult Education Programs

The History of ABE and the GED

Adult Basic Education (ABE) became linked to economic development which led to the accountability factor in the 1990s that focused on productivity and employment (Quigley, 1997). The endorsement of ABE came in 1991 when the National Literacy Act of 1991 was passed (Quigley, 1997). This act became the way to fund ABE programs, but the political and media perspectives had lost interest in this area during this time (Quigley, 1997). Although low literacy levels have been cited by politicians as contributing to crime and economic issues, the

stereotypes have developed to pose the idea of 'illiterates' as a menace to business and the economy (Quigley, 1997).

The economic statistics presented in Chapter I indicated that those who receive a GED experience lower pay and higher unemployment than those who receive a high school diploma. Quigley looked at hiring patterns and found that years of schooling are more important than reading levels (Quigley, 1997). Many learners come to adult education programs to help their prospects in the job market (Quigley, 1997). Jobs and employment have become the focus of ABE (David, 1992 as cited in Quigley, 1997).

GED stands for the General Education Diploma, General Equivalency Diploma, or Graduated Equivalency Degree. These terms all refer to the same test that is an alternative to a high school diploma. The GED was established during World War II to allow veterans who did not complete high school to become eligible for post-secondary education and take advantage of the GI Bill (Caputo, 2005). In 1946, the American Council on Education began to argue that the GED was appropriate for non-veterans as well, but it was not until the 1950s that the option was available to anyone without a high school diploma and became widely recognized (Caputo, 2005).

Due to the high unemployment rate caused by The Great Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was developed in the 1930s which provided employment to men 18-25 years of age. What was discovered was that many of them required further literacy skills (Quigley, 1997). This finding was also true when men were drafted into the military during World War II. A total of 443,000 men could not meet the military literacy requirements which led to the military becoming the 'largest school' for literacy education (Quigley, 1997). Literacy was considered a means to national defense (Quigley, 1997). Both ABE and GED are part of a human capital formation (Quigley, 1997). One focus of the 1950s and 1960s was human capital

(Quigley, 1997). At this time, literacy education became adult basic education (ABE) which is defined as “a level of literacy beyond basic reading and writing - in brief, a set of ‘useful’ skills” (Quigley, 1997, p.86).

The Latest Changes to the GED Test: The 2014 GED Test

The year, 2013, marked the end to the 2002 GED Test Series which consisted of five sections including Reading, Science, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Reasoning Through Language (referred to as Writing). On January 2, 2014, the GED Testing Service introduced the 2014 GED Test to serve as a tool to encourage further education, training, and employment (GED Testing Service, 2012). Four content areas include Reasoning Through Language Arts (RLA), Mathematical Reasoning, Science, and Social Studies. In addition to providing a credential equivalent to the high school diploma, the 2014 GED Test also measures career and college readiness skills as well as provides a score report which will include test-takers strengths and developmental needs (GED Testing Service, 2012). “The new assessment targets are derived from Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and similar career- and college-readiness standards in place in Texas and Virginia” (GED Testing Service, 2012. p. 1.3).

The items on the RLA, Science and Social Studies section will include: multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, drag-and-drop, drop-down sections. The Mathematical Reasoning, Science, and Social Studies section will also include ‘hot spot’ items which include graphic images with virtual sensors (GED Testing Service, 2012). The Science section will include a ‘short answer section’ and the RLA and Social Studies will include an ‘extended response’ component that assesses analytical ability, written organization, and fluency (GED Testing Service, 2012). The ‘extended response’ section for the RLA includes a 45-minute extended response item and for the Social Studies sections include a 25 minutes response item (GED Testing Service, 2012). The

new assessment will provide four options instead of five (GED Testing Service, 2012). ‘Hot spot’ items will include multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, drop-down items. and ‘hot spot’ items that involve the navigation in a two dimensional field to assess proficiency in quantitative, algebraic, and geometric skills for mathematics and understanding of a relationships between textual or graphic stimuli (GED Testing Service, 2012).

The score scales on the 2014 GED test are referenced with the performance of graduating seniors beginning in January 2014 which is referred to as “norming” based on those who will take the test in July 2013 (GED Testing Service, 2012). The passing standard will represent the increase in rigor that is expected to take place in K-12 education; will measure performance on career- and college-readiness knowledge; will provide feedback on the test-takers’ knowledge and skills, and will allow test-takers to enroll in credit-bearing postsecondary education without needing developmental education courses (GED Testing Service, 2012).

Adult Educators and How They Teach Adults

Learning Perspectives in Literacy Education

The most popular approach among literacy or ABE educations is the humanist approach. Humanism promotes the improvement of self-esteem of the student through the role of the teacher and the student (Quigley, 1997). This approach can make some adult learners feel as if they are in a child like role (Quigley, 1997). The humanist perspective promotes the deficit perspective through the history of failure in public schools which undermines learners’ confidence in the ability to learn (Quigley, 1997). The humanist perspective also places self-esteem as a primary goal, but not critical thinking and puts the teacher in a position of authority (Quigley, 1997). However, one strength of the humanistic approach is that it leads to enhanced

cognitive reasoning, involves the discussion of the learner's history, and can alter behavior through selected reading (Quigley, 1997).

Bloom's taxonomy which is based on the humanistic philosophy has the greatest following among ABE educators. Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council, one of the main programs in Allegheny County that provides ABE, GED preparation classes, and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes trains tutors to use Bloom's taxonomy. In 1956, Bloom identified six levels within the cognitive domain including: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Forehand, 2010). Knowledge is the simplest of the cognitive domains and involves mostly a recall of information. The other levels focus on the ability to develop more complex and abstract cognitive functions (Forehand, 2010). The humanist philosophy also can also lead to independent and self-directed learners (Quigley, 1997). However, Bloom's taxonomy and the humanistic philosophy have been used for years in ABE, but the results of those who persist and obtain their educational goals remains bleak (Quigley, 1997).

Liberatory literacy education is designed to empower learners to achieve personal and social change (Quigley, 1997). This philosophy adopts the views of transformational learning theorists. Models based on theorists such as Freire who work which promoted worker education and feminist liberation are not shared with incoming literacy educators and tutors (Quigley, 1997). These models are also ignored by the mainstream in adult literacy education in America which ignore social contexts of learners' lives (Quigley, 1997). The focus on individual improvement is encouraged in ABE programs. but social problems are not (Quigley, 1997). Liberatory or transformational learning theory incorporates the concepts of instilling motivation to learn, critical thinking, and transfer of knowledge in students.

Transformational Learning Theory

According to Mezirow, transformative learning involves a transformation in a belief or attitude which involves being inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective. Transformative learning involves responding to an experience through self-examination and discourse which then leads to action (Merriam et al., 2007). Discourse is defined as dialogue in order to develop a better understanding through discussing it with others which should to empathy or the ability to incorporate others' views prior to taking action (Merriam et al., 2007).

Freire believed the way to approach teaching was through dialogue which allowed learners to influence the content of the learning process and make it relevant to their lives (Merriam et al., 2007). Freire argued that education could be and largely had been approached from the idea that the teacher had all of the knowledge and “deposited” knowledge into passive students, a concept he called “banking education.” According to Freire, this approach gives the teacher the authority and continues to domesticate the oppressed. Freire stated that learners start in a least-aware state where they question nothing about their current situation or external forces that are responsible for it, then reach the midway where they begin to sense that they have some control over their lives and begin to question. The goal is to achieve critical conscientiousness which is the understanding that people control their own life and can become active in changing their reality into one that is more just (Merriam et al., 2007).

The concept of dialogue in this sense is quite the opposite of sitting around in a circle talking about experiencing and feelings with a lack of direction, the explanation from the source of incorporating dialogue into education, Freire, provides the best clarification. Donaldo Macedo posed the idea to Freire that educators who try to follow Freire's ideas relinquish their authority

in order to develop a democratization of power within the classroom and resort to being “facilitators” (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Freire argued that being a teacher involves facilitating, but that they still have authority due to the fact that they grades the students’ work and design the curriculum. Freire continued by stating that teachers cannot be non-directive as no educational practice can exist without an objective (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Being indifferent, a characteristic of a facilitator, is not encouraging the learners to think critically.

According to Freire, an educator has the responsibility of placing an object (the objective to be learned) as the mediator between him/her and the students (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Freire further explains the concept of dialogue in regard to education:

That is to say, the dialogue about which we are now speaking, the dialogue that educators speak about, is not the same as the dialogue about a walk up the street, for example, which becomes no more than the object of mere conversation with friends in a bar. In this case, people are not necessarily engaged in a search for the delimitation of a knowable object. Here I am referring to dialogue in a strictly epistemological perspective. (Freire et. al, 1995, p. 385)

Macedo summarized Freire stating that the idea of dialogical teaching as a process of sharing experiences equates to teaching as a form of group therapy. Macedo pointed out that many Freire-inspired teachers have not read Freire’s work and do not require his work to be read as part of the course which leads to the teachers to become promoters of Freire’s ideas of dialogue as a method instead of a process of learning and knowing (Freire & Macedo, 1995). He further explains that dialogue is not a method that allows for sharing experiences without theorizing about the experiences and not linking them to the politics of culture and critical democracy. Dialogue can be misinterpreted as a process of “coming to voice” which continues to encourage

conversation in a group therapy sense (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Freire agreed and again addressed that this process can produce some dialogue, but is overall conversation focused on individuals and removed from the object of knowing (Freire & Macedo, 1995).

Freire explained curiosity as a fundamental and natural aspect of all human beings. He stated that teachers who do not engage education with curiosity are not involved in dialogue as a process of learning and knowing, but rather a conversation lacking the ability to develop experiences into knowledge (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Another stumbling block for many educators who are trying to incorporate dialogue is that they create a mechanistic way of promoting participation by assigning time slots for the teacher and each student to speak. Freire argued that this does not lead to developing curiosity because once again, the teacher and the students are having a conversation that does not lead to learning and knowing (Freire & Macedo, 1995).

Freire warned that the turn-taking approach becomes formalism and “everything, but dialogue.” Two essential tasks of the educator are to “1) remain epistemologically curious and 2) practice in a way that involves epistemological curiosity that facilitates his or her process of learning and knowing,” (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p.384). Freire advises dialogue educators to maintain this epistemological curiosity and continue to increase critical reflection which is necessary to challenge students to engage in this type of learning so as to steer away from reading and thinking in a mechanical manner (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Freire pointed out the amount of effort on the part of the educator is significant and that students are not used to this type of approach to learning. It is apparent from Vella’s principles and steps that the process of dialogue education is time consuming in order to achieve the goal of learning and knowing about

the object of knowledge. Freire summed up a rather detailed discussion with Macedo by clarifying what is and is not meant by dialogue education (Freire et al., 1995, p. 385):

As you can see, Donaldo, my pedagogical posture always implies rigor, and never a *laisse-faire* dialogue as conversation orchestrated by facilitators. A mere appearance does not does not transform itself into the concreteness and substantiality of the actual object. Then, you cannot realistically have a dialogue by simply thinking that dialogue is a kind of verbal ping-pong about one's historical location and lived experiences. (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 385)

Influence of Instructional Approaches and Job Status of Instructors on Adult Learning

Beder, Lipenvich, and Robinson-Geller (2007) conducted a study of approaches used by adult literacy programs by obtaining data from 598 teachers in 12 states via a Web-based survey. The items on the survey were based on Beder and Medina's (2001) classroom dynamics project (Beder, Lipenvich, & Robinson-Geller, 2007). Three factors, or typologies, emerged from the data: Meaning Making (MM), Basic Skills/Individualized Group Instruction (BS/IGI), and Basic Skills/Teacher-Led Group (BS/TLG) (Beder et al., 2007). A fourth group of "other" was also identified which showed that teachers used eight approached evenly (Beder et al., 2007).

The meaning making approach involves a holistic method in which there is a great amount of learner-to-learner interaction, use of authentic materials, and involvement of the learners in instruction (Beder et al., 2007). Both the 'Basic Skills' approaches involve instruction using discrete skills and lessons from commercial texts. The the individual instruction involved each student working individually with the teacher rotating between students and the teacher-led group involved learners answering multiple-choice questions and comments directed to the teacher (Beder et al., 2007). The majority of teachers used various approaches and none of them

were predominate. Only 40% of the sample used a pure approach (only one factor or typology) in their classes (Beder et al., 2007).

Four variables were also considered to contribute to the choice of typologies selected including instructional level, sponsoring organization, enrollment pattern, and other variables which included teachers' job status (Beder et al., 2007). As instructional level increased, the teachers used less of the MM approach and more of the BS/IGI and BS/TLG approach (Beder et al., 2007). Teachers at community colleges used a combination of MM and BS/IGI and BS/TLG approaches, public school teachers used BS/IGI more than those at community colleges or community-based organizations (Beder et al., 2007). Teachers at community-based organizations used MM approaches twice as often as community college and public school teachers (Beder., 2007). Teachers in managed enrollment classes used MM the most followed by MM and BS/TLG and then BS/IGI (Beder et al., 2007). Those who taught continuous enrollment classes were more likely to use BS/IGI which was expected (Beder et al., 2007).

The job status of teachers was also considered as a variable to what instructional approaches were used (Beder et al., 2007). Job status included "paid full-time"; "paid part-time"; and "volunteer" (Beder et al., 2007). The reasoning was that basic skills relied on commercially prepared materials due to less preparation time being involved and those who were employed part-time and did not receive compensation for preparation time would be less likely to prepare using the MM approach (Beder et al., 2007). The results showed that no significant difference existed between job status of the teachers (Beder et al., 2007). This findings are promising considering the concerns presented by Quigley (1997). Although Quigley's concern about staff not having experience in adult education, his other concern was that over 80% of staff were part-time and 75% used volunteer to teach adult literacy (Quigley 1997). Having part-time and

volunteer teachers making an effort to incorporate a blend of approaches to students in order to meet learners' need in adult basic education can be encouraging that adult learners are receiving similar instruction regardless of employment status.

This literature review is designed to provide current, in depth information on several issues in Adult Basic Education especially for students pursuing a GED. The research focused on studies on self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation, barriers to participation, learning theories, and adult educators' influence on students. Definitions on what is an adult, what is adult education, and what types of adult education exist were also explained to provide information on how adults approach learning differently than children and how educators must approach adults. Several research articles based on interviews were also included to be evaluated and later compared to the findings from this research study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The data collected addressed how enrollment in adult basic education programs for a period of 16 weeks or more which may have led to attainment of their GEDs influence participants' beliefs about themselves as learners, learning in general, changes in self-confidence and self-esteem, and ways of overcoming barriers. Particular attention focused on past experiences in K-12 education and how these experiences may differ from experiences in adult basic education. Reflecting on past experiences allowed the researcher to understand how students perceived themselves as learners and the level of self-confidence and self-esteem they had when in K-12 education. Discussion of current experiences in their GED program and explore if and how students have gained self-confidence and self-esteem and if and how the learning process has led to a motivation to learn and to pursue further education. Participants were also asked if and how their goals for further education and employment opportunities have changed from when they first enrolled in a program to how they feel now about their current situation. The statistics show that out of the 8% of people eligible to participated in adult basic education programs, only half of these, or, 4%, are enrolled after 16 weeks (Quigley, 1997). Interviewing those who have participated in GED preparation programs for 16 weeks or more allowed the researcher to obtain more complete data on the development of self-confidence and self-esteem, personal views of learning, and how to overcome barriers that can hinder participation.

The participants were selected from those who attended programs at an adult basic education agency in a large metropolitan area which included satellite offices throughout the county. This

ABE offers programs in literacy, mathematics, GED preparation, and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Students have the option of enrolling in classes or meeting one on one with a tutor. Many students are on a waiting list before being able to enroll in a class or be matched with a tutor. The teaching staff includes full-time paid employees, part-time paid employees, and tutors who volunteer their time. Participants were also selected from an adult basic education agency located in a rural area which also offered GED classes. This programs offers GED classes in a classroom setting. The teaching staff including paid employees and sometimes tutors who available in the classroom to provide one to one instruction with students.

For the purpose of this research, students at are considered a representative sample of those living in a large metropolitan area as well as a rural area. Students and graduates were to participate based on their interest in providing information to the researcher in the form of an interview. Gender, race, ethnic background, or other classifications were not factors in selecting participants. The type of research conducted was applied research. The purpose of this research study was to obtain knowledge about a problem and to propose solutions (Patton, 1990).

his study explored the factors that influence self-confidence, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and perceptions of learning for participants in GED classes and what influence their success has had on their future goals of pursuing postsecondary education. While there are several types of barriers (institutional, dispositional, and situational) that influence participation and retention in adult basic education programs, this study will primarily address dispositional barriers (self-confidence, self-esteem, and motivation) that affect the outcomes. This study will address how GED programs influence students' beliefs about themselves as learners, learning in general, and changes in self-confidence and self-esteem through participation in adult basic education programs, specifically GED preparation programs. Some of the specific items that will be

addressed are past experiences in education, current experiences in adult education programs, motivational strategies, learning philosophies that can produce improvements in retention and goal completion.

The purpose of this study is to understand from the adult learners' perspectives, the role of self-confidence, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and the value learning has on participation and success in adult basic education, particularly GED preparation programs. The research questions were:

1. Were there changes in self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning by participating in GED preparation programs?
2. What were the adult learners' perceptions of the differences in participation in GED preparation classes compared to primary and secondary school?
3. If the GED program improved levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning, what experiences in the program contributed to this change?
4. What specific aspects of the learning environment in the GED program led the participants to persist in the program in order to obtain a GED?
5. Have participants' gains in self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning encouraged them to pursue postsecondary education?

Setting

This research included participants from both a large metropolitan area and a rural area . The 2010-2011 school year graduation rates were obtained by reviewing the 2010-2011 State Cohort Graduation File. The public city school had an overall graduation rate of 68.46% with 1,346 students out of 1,966 graduating who were in 12th grade obtaining a high school diploma. All of the school districts in the outlying areas of the metropolitan statistical area had graduation rates

of 80% or above. Two districts areas had a graduation rates below the city school district with 53.49% with 46 out of 86 students in 12th grade receiving a high school diploma and a graduation rate of 54.61% with 225 out of 412 students in 12th grade receiving a high school diploma. The overall graduation rate in the state was 82.63% with 126,871 out of 153,546 students in 12th grade receiving a high school diploma. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014). The graduation rates for school districts in the rural area including neighborhood counties ranged from 89% to 93% (Wikipedia, 2014).

The dropout rate for the rural county including all students enrolled in grade seventh through twelfth is 1.13%. This figure is derived from 55 dropouts out of 4,853 students enrolled. The dropout rate for the metropolitan county was 0.86% derived from a total of 72,835 students enrolled in grades seventh through twelfth and 630 dropouts. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014). Although the graduation rates are higher for the rural area, the dropout rate is also higher than the metropolitan area. The dropout rate accounts for students in grades seventh through twelfth which captures those who drop out before twelfth grade, but the graduation rates are based on the percentage of those in twelfth grade who receive a high school diploma.

There are currently forty thousand residents in the state who have passed one or more sections of the GED test, but have yet to pass all of them. With the implementation of the 2014 version of the GED tests,described in detail in the literature review, any student who has not passed all sections of the test will have to take all sections of the 2014 GED test. The U.S Census showed that 92% of residents age 25 and older had a high school diploma or higher between 2007-2011. This is an average of people in the metropolitan area and does not address whether or not student who did not obtain a high school diploma before the age of 25 went on to pursue a high school diploma or GED. The results of the census also showed that the median income was \$118,700 of

those who owned their homes, but a per capita money income of \$30,530 (United States Census, 2014).

The state in which this study was conducted has a high school graduation rate of 88.3% which is slightly higher than the national rate of 85.7% (United States Census). The rate for bachelor's degrees is 27.0% which is slightly lower than the national average of 28.5% (United States Census, 2014). The city had a graduation rate for high school was 89.8% and for bachelor's degrees or higher was 35% (United States Census, 2014). The city in the rural area had a graduation rate of 96.4% and for those with a bachelor's degree or higher was 41.0%. It should be noted that there is a university located in this city which could account for the higher rates.

The city located in the metropolitan area has had a decline in the unemployment rate from 7.0% in July 2013 to 5.7% in December 2013. Employment exists in a variety of fields with the top three being: education and health; trade, transportation, and utilities; and professional and business services (United States Census, 2014). The per capita income of the metropolitan area was \$26,535 and the median income is \$38,029 based on the US Census results from the years 2008-2012 (United States Census, 2014). This city's income is well below that of the state. The per capita income for the state was \$38,029 with a median income of \$52,267 (The small city in the rural area in which participants were also recruited had an unemployment rate of 6.5% as of December 2013 (United States Census, 2014). Employment exists in a variety of fields as well with the top four being: sales and office; professional and related occupations; service; and production, transportation and material moving with almost the same number in this field as services (Speriling's Best Places, 2014). The per capita income of the rural area was \$14,972 and a median income of \$27,680 (United States Census, 2014). These amounts are even more

significantly below the state's average. However, the cost of living per area varies, so this could account for the differences.

The state's percentage of those living at or below the poverty level was 13.1% which is slightly lower than the national percentage of 14.9% (United States Census, 2014). However, both the metropolitan area and the rural area where participants were recruited had much higher levels of those at or below the poverty level. The metropolitan area had 22.5% of the population living in poverty and the rural area had 43.2% of the population living in poverty (United States Census, 2014).

Participants

The sample will include a non-probability, purposive sample that has been selected from students who are currently enrolled in a GED program or have recently obtained their GED after attending a GED program, had been attending their current or most recent program for 16 weeks or more and had plans to pursue further education. According to the agencies' policies, students must agree for staff to disclose their personal contact information to the researcher. The researcher worked with staff at both programs who approached students who met the criteria via letter, telephone call, or email. Students who gave permission to disclose their personal information to the researcher were contacted. The researcher was interested in addressing self-confidence and self-esteem among those who are pursuing or have obtained a GED and have plans to pursue further education. The purpose was to obtain information on how participating in their current GED programs had changed their views of learning and themselves as learners. Self-reported changes in self-confidence and self-esteem both as learners and in general were explored. The reason for selecting students who have been enrolled for at least 16 weeks is based

on statistics. After 16 weeks only 50% of students who enrolled in programs were still enrolled (Quigley, 1997). These students were considered to have overcome barriers to participation.

Potential participants were informed that they were required to participate in an interview that addressed their reasons for participating in a GED program and how their feelings about learning and themselves as learners had been influenced by their participation. They were told that they would be asked to reflect on past educational experiences including primary and secondary education and participation in previous adult education programs. They were also informed that all data obtained from interviews were strictly confidential and they will not be personally identified in any way.

Data Collection

Students who met one of the following criteria were recruited to participate in the study: having a GED or currently attending a GED programs for sixteen weeks or more and had a goal of pursuing further adult education. Students were contacted via a flyer, telephone call, or e-mail which explained the request for students to participate in an interview about educational experiences and goals. Students who were interested informed a staff member and their contact information were given to the researcher. The researcher contacted the potential participant to discuss the interview process and answer questions. If the potential participant was still interested, then an interview was scheduled. The participants were informed by the researcher that the interview included questions about past experiences in school, experiences in their GED program, and perceptions of themselves.

A standardized, open-ended interview was the method for obtaining data. The questions for this type of interview allowed the researcher to use the same sequence when asking the same questions in order to minimize variation and prevent bias (Patton, 1990). The standardized open-

ended interview is appropriate when the interview is time-limited and participants will only be interviewed once (Patton, 1990). Each participant was asked the same questions in the same sequence with variations in probing questions depending on the responses. The probing questions asked were limited to clarify responses or to have the participants expand on their responses. The interview questions were designed to address several issues including barriers, motivation, changes in self-confidence and self-esteem, and differences in current learning experiences and those in primary and secondary school. The standardized open-ended interview was the method used because the data collected was analyzed using a cross-case analysis. The interviews consisted of specific questions and allow each participant to expand upon his/her response. Some follow up questions are built into the questions. However, some probes were asked by the interviewer in order to clarify the questions and responses. The questions were designed to obtain information on past and current perspectives and their future goals while acquiring specific examples of experiences that have influenced self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation, and views of learning.

The following interview questions were asked of each participant:

1. Were there certain academic areas you had strengths and/or weaknesses
2. What grade were you in when you dropped out of school? What influenced you to decide to drop out?
3. How many adult basic education programs (ABE) or GED preparation programs have you been enrolled? If more than one, why did you not complete these programs?
4. What are the similarities and differences you have experienced from this program compared to previous ABE/GED programs? What about primary and secondary education?

5. What specific educational and employment goals did you have when you enrolled in your current program?
6. Do you feel more, less, or about the same level of confidence in being able to accomplish these goals since you enroll in this GED program? Why?
7. Have your views about yourself as a learner and learning in general changed since you enrolled this program? If so, how? If not, why not?
8. How have your life experiences influenced the way you think about yourself as a learner and learning in general? Do you feel that your past experiences are recognized in your current program? If so, how? If not, why not?
9. Do you have any suggestions what could be improved in your current program? If so, what?
10. Are there certain aspects of your current program that you think have helped you become prepared to take the GED tests? If so, what are they?
11. Have you changed the ways you approach learning since being enrolled in this program?
How much do you credit yourself for your accomplishments? How much do you credit the program?
12. Do you have any suggestions what could be improved in your current or most recent program? If so, what?
13. Are there certain aspects of your current program that you think helped you become prepared to take the GED tests? If so, what are they?
14. Have you changed the ways you approach learning since being enrolled in this program?
How much do you credit yourself for you accomplishments? How much do you credit the program?

Data Analysis

Qualitative research involves a different method of analysis than quantitative research where tests of reliability and validity are used. The type of research influences the way qualitative data is analyzed (Patton, 1990). When using applied qualitative research which was used in this study, the audience can vary (Patton, 1990). The intended audience for this research includes both those interested in academic research and those who administer adult education programs. The analysis of the research should address both contributions to theory and applicability of the findings (Patton, 1990). Although the participants were all students or recent graduates from an adult basic education programs the purpose of the data analysis is not to provide a summative or formative evaluation the adult basic education programs.

A cross-case analysis was used when analyzing the interviews. Using a cross-case analysis allowed the researcher to identify common experiences and themes among the participants rather than focus on their individual situations (Patton, 1990). Personal experiences, ideas, and communication abilities varied among the participants and influenced what follow up questions were asked by the researcher. However, follow up questions were focused on obtaining clarification or more detail that was related to the particular research question.

Although the participants had diverse backgrounds and interests, the interview questions were designed to elicit self-perceptions which would generate responses about the areas of interest. Responses will be compared to see what areas the participants' have similar and contrasting self-perceptions of self-confidence, self-esteem, view of themselves as learners, and learning in general. Data on which barriers prevented graduating from high school and caused delays in pursuing a GED will also be collected. Both similarities and differences among participants were analyzed.

The data collected expressed each participant as an individual, but the intention is to find similarities in how the participants were able to be successful in pursuing and obtaining their GED. Certain trends will also be analyzed such as if gender, age, racial, or socio-economic status influences each participant's responses and whether or not those responses are similar due to belonging to a certain group. Each transcript was reviewed for participants' statements that addressed the research questions and were compared to the other participants' responses to obtain common themes as well as review how a few participants' may have responded differently than the majority.

The interview questions were developed to target the areas of interest which were self-confidence, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and value of learning. Barriers to success in secondary school and prior attempts to obtain a GED were also explored. Interview questions one through five addressed past experiences in school, reasons for dropping out of school, how many programs participants attended, how long they wanted to get their GED. Question six addressed insight into how the GED programs differed from school and why they were successful now, but not when they were in secondary school. Question seven assessed motivation to complete the GED by asking participants what their future goals were. Questions eight and part of 14 were designed to assess self-confidence and self-esteem which were one in the same for the purpose of this study. Questions nine, 10, 11, and the first part of 14 assessed what value the participants placed on learning as well as addressing the self-confidence they had in themselves as learners and what role the program and life experiences influenced their perceptions. Questions 12 and 13 were designed to determine the influence the program had on their success and what could be perceived as set backs.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Although certain questions were designed to elicit a particular area of interest, some of the responses included statements that supported self-perceptions of another area of interest. Using a cross case analysis, each response was reviewed for each participant to determine similarities. The themes were developed partially from how the questions were designed, but also by the responses. Certain key words and phrases were identified as statements about motivation, self-confidence and self-esteem, and views about learning even if it was a response to a question that was not specifically intended to address one of the areas of interest. Using colored highlighters, statements from each interview were highlighted when they addressed one of the research items. This process was done without regard to which question was being asked even though the questions were designed to elicit responses for certain themes.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This study explored the factors that influence self-confidence, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and perceptions of learning for participants in GED classes and what influence their success has had on their future goals of pursuing postsecondary education. While there are several types of barriers (institutional, dispositional, and situational) that influence participation and retention in adult basic education programs, this study will primarily address dispositional barriers (self-confidence, self-esteem, and motivation) that affect the outcomes. This study will address how GED programs influence students' beliefs about themselves as learners, learning in general, and changes in self-confidence and self-esteem through participation in adult basic education programs, specifically GED preparation programs. Some of the specific items that will be addressed are past experiences in education, current experiences in adult education programs, motivational strategies, learning philosophies that can produce improvements in retention and goal completion.

The purpose of this study is to understand from the adult learners' perspectives, the role of self-confidence, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and the value learning has on participation and success in adult basic education, particularly GED preparation programs. The research questions are:

1. Are there changes in self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning by participating in GED preparation programs?
2. What are the adult learners' perceptions of the differences in participation in GED preparation classes compared to primary and secondary school?

3. If the GED program has improved levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning, what experiences in the program have contributed to this change?
4. What specific aspects of the learning environment in the GED program have led the participants to persist in the program in order to obtain a GED?
5. Have participants' gains in self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning encouraged them to pursue postsecondary education?

Seven students agreed to participate in the research study. Of these seven students, six of them had received their GED diploma. One student, who was not a native English speaker, took the GED test and passed all of the sections except the reading section. He was working with a tutor and is scheduled to retake the reading section in December 2013. Despite the small sample, the demographics were diverse. They included two females and five males. Three of the participants were Black, three were White, and one was biracial, White and Hispanic. The age range of participants was 22 years old to 82 years old. Six of the students planned to enroll in postsecondary education including one that had completed postsecondary education. The other student, age 82, planned to informally continue his passion for writing and pursue informal education.

Five of the students lived in the metropolitan area and the other two students resided in the rural area. Six out of seven participants indicated they had strength in reading/English and two had strength in mathematics. Several participants also indicated strengths in science, social studies, art, and spelling. Four the participants indicated a weakness in mathematics and one a weakness in reading because he would fall asleep whenever he read. The ESL student indicated a strength in reading in his native language, but difficulty with English. Three of the participants completed eighth grade, two of whom dropped out in ninth grade; one completed ninth grade and

dropped out in tenth; two completed tenth grade, one did not enroll in eleventh and the other left three days before the end of the school year. The ESL student did not graduate, but in Ghana, a student either graduates or does not. Pseudonyms are used for all participants to ensure confidentiality.

Participant Case Studies

In this section, each participant is described. The participants' educational and family backgrounds are addressed to provide a foundation for understanding their comments presented in the themes which were analyzed in the cross-case analysis.

Joseph

Joseph, a White male in his early eighties, obtained his GED diploma in April 2013. Joseph was able to have a career in film editing and recognized that the employment he was able to obtain is not possible in today's job market. Joseph first thought about pursuing his education at the age of 45. He took a grammar course at a local high school. Joseph explained that he has also had a passion for writing essays, letters to the editor, poems, and song lyrics. Joseph won the essay contest at his GED program in 2013. He wrote about how he regretted not pursuing his education which could have led to a career as a writer. In his reflections, he encourages students of all ages to "mine their minds" referring to students "mining" information from what teachers have to offer. Joseph lives with his wife and has three adult sons who encouraged him to pursue his GED and attended his graduation ceremony in September 2013 at GPLC. Joseph plans to continue to write on an informal basis and feels more confident in his writing abilities from his classroom experiences in his GED program.

Tammy

Tammy, a Black female in her mid-thirties, is originally from Nashville, Tennessee and

relocated to Pittsburgh several years ago. Tammy described the hospitality she received from all of the staff at GPLC as something that she has not found since she came to Pittsburgh. Tammy had been enrolled in several GED programs in Tennessee and had enrolled several times in GED programs at GPLC. Tammy stated that “life would get in the way” including working and caring for her children. Tammy has raised her own two children as well as her niece and nephew. When Tammy’s mother became terminally ill, she decided the time was right to get her GED. Tammy is the first person in her immediate family, including her mother and two sisters, to obtain her GED which she did in June 2013. Tammy also described being motivated by the fact that one of her children had graduated high school and the other three would all be graduating within the next few years and she did not want to seem to be a hypocrite by not completing her GED while insisting that they complete high school and go to college. Tammy believes that now that she accomplished her goal of obtaining her GED she is ready to continue by taking business courses to use in conjunction with her medical assistant diploma so she can start her own home health care business.

Sabrina

Sabrina, a Black female in her early twenties, described herself as a child who got into trouble and had a difficult time in school. Sabrina recalls having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for academics and behavior. Sabrina attributes her behavioral issues as the reason she was not able to change the impression of what others thought of her which led her to hang out with the wrong crowd and get into trouble. Ultimately, this led to legal trouble, and dropping out of school.

Sabrina stated that she has been thinking about getting her GED since she was 17, but did not pursue this goal until she entered her early twenties. Sabrina stated she began to think about

her future and wanted to be more worthy of a person and look better to potential employers. A lot of Sabrina's preparation for the GED was acquired by helping her cousins with their homework. Sabrina stated she wants to be a welder because she is a kinesthetic learner and likes to "get her hands dirty." Sabrina also knew that in order to attend a school for welding, she needed her GED. Sabrina currently works in the fast food industry and is seeking other employment before applying to a welding program.

Daniel

Daniel, a White male in his early forties, spent the majority of his career in manual labor positions. Daniel described himself as an excellent athlete especially in basketball. Daniel was being recruited by scouts to play college basketball when he injured his knee. The knee injury did not ruin his chances, but during preoperative testing it was discovered he had a heart murmur. The previous year, a college basketball player collapsed and died on national television due to a heart murmur. With an intolerable situation at home with his father, Daniel decided to drop out of school three days before the end of his junior year and go out on his own. After years of manual labor and playing sports, Daniel had two shoulder surgeries and was not able to fully recover. While recovering, Daniel decided to take the opportunity to pursue his GED. His goal was to use his brain to have a career which would lead to stability and a retirement. After obtaining his GED in 2012, Daniel continued postsecondary education at Bidwell Training Center and obtained an Associate's Degree in Chemistry. Daniel was hired at the company where he did his internship. Daniel stated that without the support of his wife, he would not have accomplished what he has. He stated that in order to be successful in education, you have to have a strong support structure.

Jacob

Jacob, a White male in his mid-twenties, was raised in the Amish culture. Jacob attended a private, Amish school from kindergarten through eighth grade. The Amish school system ends in eighth grade and children are educated for labor intensive careers including working on the family farm. Jacob worked on his parents' farm even though he had the idea in his mind at a young age that he wanted to go to high school and pursue an education in engineering. Jacob remembers reading an engineering article in his English book in sixth grade. He stated he snuck out to a bookstore to buy some engineering magazines and the idea was always in the back of his head. Jacob also worked in an underground coal mine while working on the family farm. Jacob explained that working in the coal mine and being interested in engineering has led to his goal to design mechanical equipment and work with metallurgical materials. Jacob stated he believes about 98% of Amish quit school in eighth grade and do not later pursue further education which makes him quite different from other Amish people. Jacob was able to complete his GED within six months of enrolling in the program. Jacob is now enrolled as a freshman at The Pennsylvania State University and is pursuing his goal of being an engineer. He no longer considers himself Amish.

Paul

Paul, a White and Hispanic male in his early twenties, described struggling in school. He had difficulty paying attention and not receiving specialized instruction despite being diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Paul stated he tried several medications and had negative side effects, so he was not able to take them. He also stated school officials told his parents that he had behavioral issues. When Paul was in ninth grade, he was sent to an alternative school which he described as being helpful by having teachers who would

provide one on one support; but he stated that the curriculum was so easy that he did not need it. The easy curriculum did not prepare him for returning to his regular, public high school in tenth grade. After being far behind and feeling overwhelmed, Paul dropped out. He stated he was also having family issues at the time. He stated he was warned by teachers that he would have difficulty finding employment without a high school diploma or GED and when he was 19 years old, he realized this and decided to enroll in GED classes at ARIN. Paul stated it took him several years to be prepared for the GED and that he had to retake the math test. Paul stated that he was happy to have his GED, but what made him the most proud was passing the math test. Paul has a passion for culinary arts and worked in several restaurants. He is interested in pursuing his postsecondary education in culinary arts and is currently looking at several culinary arts programs as well as employment.

Franklin

Franklin, a Black male in his mid-thirties, immigrated from Ghana to the United States approximately five years ago. Franklin is fluent in several languages including English although he described the difficulty for himself and other immigrants in GED classes. Franklin stated that due to their accents, many students would state they did not understand them which resulted in them being quiet in class. Franklin did not complete the equivalent of high school in Ghana, but did complete a technical program in electronics. Franklin attributed lack of family support both emotionally and financially as the reason he was not able to complete high school. After obtaining his diploma in electronics, Franklin worked in the field before applying for the “lottery system” to obtain a Visa to come to the United States. Franklin stated he stayed with several friends and family members in different parts of the United States who informed him about getting a GED. After working a commission job in New York City, Franklin relocated to

Pittsburgh where he was able to begin GED classes. He took GED classes for several years at a program that offered a classroom setting before enrolling at GPLC. Franklin stated he learned a lot in the previous program, but that changed when the teacher left and a new teacher started. Franklin has passed all of the GED test sections except for the reading which he is scheduled to take in December 2013. He is currently working 1:1 with a tutor. Franklin currently work two jobs and plans to enroll in college once he passes the reading test section of the GED.

Thematic Analysis

This section addresses the themes that were developed in the data analysis. The themes include barriers in primary and secondary school, barriers to obtaining a GED, goals as motivation, support from others as motivation, self-confidence, perspectives on learning, perceptions on age and learning, life experiences, and the influence of curriculum and staff.

Barriers in Primary and Secondary School

Barriers contributing to not completing high school identified in data analysis include lack of family support, peer pressure, medical or disability issues, and familial financial issues.

Lack of family support. All seven of the participants indicated that they experienced a lack of family support during school age. Despite their diverse demographics and backgrounds, this was one theme that was dominant in all of the interviews. What was also discovered in the interviews was that all of the participants were either able to improve relationships with family members or develop new, supportive relationships at the time they became successful in their pursuits to obtain their GEDs. The newfound support and encouragement from others which will be discussed later in this chapter was identified as a motivator for these seven participants.

Joseph, a White male in his early eighties, stated that his father had diabetes and was a double amputee. "I wanted to play music and take guitar lessons, but he said no. My parents were more into themselves with the war going on."

Tammy, a Black female in her mid-thirties, described having to work since she was 12 to help out the family. "I worked in a ma-pa restaurant when I was 12, I was trying to help out. I wasn't focusing or my focus was not where it was supposed to be. I worked different places. I worked there for almost two years and when I was able to, of legal age, I worked in the restaurants; Ms. Winters, Chrystal's, McDonald's, different places like that." Tammy went on to explain she was too busy working to help support her mom and her two sisters to focus on school. Sabrina, a Black female in her early twenties, explained that she lived with her mother, but they did not have a positive relationship at that point. "I got kind of expelled and did not really have anyone there to push me to go back to school. My mother, she was there, but we did not have the best relationship and she was working and maintaining herself and I was just the wild one." Paul, a White and Hispanic male in his early twenties, described difficulty in school and mentioned having ADHD, but also indicated that family issues contributed to his decision to drop out. "I was going through some family issues at the time when I dropped out at 17. I was going through family issues as well as being far behind in my studies."

Daniel, a White male in his early forties, described, in detail, his desire to leave his household which he did three days before the end of his junior year. Daniel's father was in the military and had six sons and had been married six times. Daniel stated, "My father, he was very difficult to get along with. As I got a little older and got my own identity, I excelled at sports and getting into sports was a social outlet for me. I shattered my knee and the year before that a guy playing at a university died on national TV, he had heart murmur and died while playing basketball."

When they did the pre surgical testing, they found out I had a heart murmur which made all of the people who wanted to give me a scholarship back off, so I was like all right, I can't play ball anymore, basketball. That was my hope of getting college funding for me - with six boys college funding was not abundant and when that was taken away from me, what I thought was the one outlet for getting college paid for and a higher education. So with my father hard to get along with and things tough at home, I figured I would take out on my own and quit school three days before the end of my junior year."

Jacob, a White male in his mid-twenties, completed eighth grade which was the highest grade in the Amish school system. Jacob's family was Amish and in this culture, children complete school at the end of eighth grade and are expected to work. "All Amish children are educated for labor intensive careers. I was expected to help on my parents family farm after school which I did." Despite wanting to attend high school, Jacob worked on his father's farm. While working on his father's farm, Jacob also worked full-time in an underground coal mine. This contributed to his interest in getting a GED, so he could go to college to study engineering. "Two years ago I became serious on academic pursuits. The reason I didn't obtain my GED earlier was because of the work load on my dad's farm. The reason for enrolling was to attend an engineering school afterward."

Franklin, an African male in his mid-thirties, was born in Ghana. He described living between both his mother and father who were divorced and both remarried. "My mom was from Togou. I was six years old when I started. school. They speak French. It is a French country. I went to that school for three years and went back to Ghana. English is the official language in Ghana. I went to Canda Estates I and II, GSS, and City School, that was that high school. I did not complete it." Franklin explained that he attended NVTI, a technical school, where he learned electronics. The

main reason for not completing the equivalent to high school was he could not afford it financially. The schooling is not free as it is in the United States and Franklin stated, "I was doing everything on my own, the beginning was not good for me. I was more or less a street child. It is difficult sometimes. You have like two parents not together, your mom is married to somebody and your dada, you are in between. Your stepdad does not like you, so that was what was going on with me."

Peer pressure. Two of the participants, who are also the two female participants, described influences from the group of friends they were associating with as contributing to their reasons for dropping out of school. Tammy described herself as a good student, friendly, and hard working. She stated she had goals to go to a college.

Of course, once I got older and life got ahead of me, it didn't happen that way. I got to high school and I guess it got more serious. I was a teenager, peer pressure, influenced. That's kind of where it ended for me as much as I liked school and going to school, I ended up having a baby. I was 17 when I had my first baby. My last grade I finished was the 10th grade. I was 17 and got promoted to the 11th grade and dropped out. We used to like to party, stay out and party, go out and have fun. No drugs. I used to like the boys, that is where more than anything got me in trouble.

Sabrina described herself as having difficulties in school from an early age which led her to hang out with peers who did not value school and influenced her to get into some legal trouble. "Well, I wasn't always a good cookie and was like always in trouble and that resulted in me getting help in third grade. As I got older the damage that was done back in the day made it hard to finish up and make my impression." "In high school, ninth grade, it kind of went back downhill for me. It was kind of a rough road for me. You know how people say school isn't for

me? I had to drop out in ninth and did not really think getting your education was that important until I got older and realized, 'Hey! I need my education.'" She further explained why she dropped out in ninth grade, "It was legal issues. I had gotten in trouble, skipped school, hanging out with the wrong crowd, got myself into a lot of stuff, so it became like...the cops and everything were involved, so I had to drop out of school. I really did not have the motivation to go back. It was an embarrassment."

Medical issues/disabilities. Four of the participants described having medical issues or a disability which contributed to how they functioned in school both academically and socially. These issues influenced how these participants perceived their primary and secondary education as well as their futures. Two of the students identified themselves as having ADHD and receiving some specialized support in school, one had a severe illness in second grade which led him to be separated from his friends, and another participant was diagnosed with a medical condition that he felt ruined his chances of a future. Despite the different issues, these students did have the support from their families or the school to overcome these barriers.

Joseph described being afflicted with rheumatic fever in second grade which caused him to miss school for two months. "In second grade, I was happily going along and then I got sick and was off school for two months. With no home schooling at all. I was left behind and had to repeat the whole thing and it was rather traumatic because I was left behind and all of my friends I started school with went ahead by one year up to that point." Joseph recalled that the fact that he was a year behind his friends affected him negatively when he described going into eighth grade. "My next recollection of grade school was going into eighth grade and all of my buddies left that school and went to high school. I lost all contact with those people and spent the rest of

the year with the new friends that I had made which were plentiful nonetheless, but it just wasn't the same in my mind."

Daniel described his diagnosis with a heart murmur as the end of his hope to leave his home and obtain a college education. Daniel explained that his father was very difficult to get along with and he believed his way out of the home was to go to college by getting a scholarship to play basketball. When Daniel was diagnosed with a heart murmur, his dreams were shattered.

I shattered my knee and the year before a guy playing at a university died on national TV. He had a heart murmur and died while playing basketball and when they did the pre surgical testing they found out I had a heart murmur which made all of the people who wanted to give me a scholarship backed off so then I was like all right, I can't play ball anymore. Basketball - that was my hope of getting college funding for me. With six boys, college funding was not abundant and when that was taken away from me what I thought the one outlet for getting college paid for and a higher education. So when my father was hard to get along with, things were tough at home, I figured I would take out on my own and quit school three days before the end of my junior year. I started working and pretty much that was it. I always told myself I did not have the time to go to school.

Two of the participants, Sabrina and Paul, reported they were diagnosed with Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) which caused difficulties in school. Sabrina reported she had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), but Paul stated he did not even though he was placed in an alternative school for ninth grade. Sabrina described her behavioral issues as one of the main reasons she was not able to succeed in school while Paul stated he was behind because he did not receive the individual attention he needed to be able to pay attention.

“Well I wasn’t always a good cookie and was like always in trouble and that resulted in me getting help in third grade. As I got older the damage that was done back in the day made it hard to finish up and make my impression. I had this IEP thing. I wasn’t slow or anything, but had trouble in some areas.” Sabrina stated her IEP was “for some of the gray areas. It was academic, I think and my behavior at the same time. I probably acted out more to make myself look like something I am not which resulted in me failing my classes, so I had it for my classes and my behavior.” “It was rather difficult for me to pay attention in class and the teachers never really gave me one on one, individual attention. It was in a group, I struggled with assignments. When I was younger, I went to the doctor and they diagnosed me with ADHD. I was on a couple of different medications. One, I had a reaction to it and had reactions to other medication for the specific thing.” When asked if Paul had an IEP, he replied, “No. Not that I know of. The school actually told my parents I had behavioral issues, but I had more problems with attention.” Paul described how his experience going to an alternative school in ninth grade caused him to become further behind in his classes which led to him dropping out in tenth grade.

Tenth. I think it was the beginning of the year that I dropped out. I had went to an alternative school and I went back to a regular school and it was a bigger public school compared to the other one that I went to and I just really did not want to go through with it. The stuff they had me be do at the alternative school, the work was a lot easier and there were teachers there that would give you one on one help, but you did not need it because the work was so easy and then they transferred me back to my regular school and I was so far behind from what they were having me do at the alternative school, I could not catch up.

Financial issues. Unlike K-12 education in the United States which is offered through the public school system, in other countries such as Ghana, students must pay to go to school to achieve a high school diploma or equivalent. Franklin, who was born and raised in Ghana, explained that in addition to the lack of family support because his parents were divorced, he also did not receive the financial support he needed to complete high school. "Financially, it is very difficult. The cost of living was just too high. I was doing everything on my own. The beginning was not good for me, I was more or less of a street child."

Although public education is free in the United States, financial factors can play a role in why students do not complete high school as in the case of Tammy who had to start working at the age of 12 to help support her family, her mother and two sisters, financially. "Also, I always worked. I worked in a ma-pa restaurant when I was 12. I was trying to help out. I wasn't focusing. My focus was not where it was supposed to be. I worked different places. I worked at a ma-pa restaurant and when I was of legal age, I worked in the restaurants: Ms. Winter's, Chrystal's, McDonald's, different places like that. I was too busy trying to work. I was supporting my family, my mom and my sisters."

Barriers to Obtaining A GED

The main barrier to participation reported was employment obligations which were also tied into family obligations. Considering his age, Joseph did not have the need to pursue a GED in order to further his career, but the others indicated that they needed their GED to obtain employment and further education. One of the participants cited peer influences and their own priorities while another participant took a long time to be prepared for the GED due to his disability. Two of the participants were only enrolled in GED programs once, two of the participants were enrolled twice, two were enrolled three times, and one was enrolled six times.

Of the two enrolled in one program, one of the participants was Joseph who attended GPLC and the other was Jacob who attended ARIN. Sabrina and Franklin were enrolled in other programs before enrolling at GPLC. Daniel enrolled at GPLC three times. Tammy was enrolled in several programs in Tennessee and three times through GPLC.

“I don’t suppose I was thinking about it too much until I was 45 to 50 years of age, but was only because of all of the things I had written prior to starting at the age of 22 or 23. I figured if I went back and got some smarts in literature and stuff perhaps I could enhance what I had written and do a better job with it, but I never really followed up on it.” “I have to say Caden, my first instructor, made sound as if I could do this. What I told him was all of these students are younger and more needing of what they of what they are going to get, so please skip on me a round or two to give them what they need because I can be here forever.”

Joseph’s understanding of how the younger students needed more attention in order to obtain their GEDs was accurate in that other participants indicated they knew they needed their GEDs not only for a career or further education, but even basic jobs such as what Daniel stated, “I mean like I saw at every turn I was putting in applications at like Giant Eagle, Lowe’s and they required a high school diploma or equivalent. If you want to make any kind of money to provide for your family, you are not going to do it on a McDonald’s salary.”

Daniel described why he did not complete a GED earlier in life despite the fact that he wanted to do so in the past. “That’s something that plagues me my whole adult life. Most of the time I either did odd jobs that did not require the education, fast food manager, built pools, houses, odd jobs...blue collar type stuff. Most of the time I have been in painting. I was a painter and it was only after the shoulder surgeries I realized I could not paint anymore and needed to start using my noodle, because the body doesn’t hold up.” “It was a time thing. When I was in fast food

management, they required you to work so many hours. Most of them are a minimal of 50 hours per week especially at night. You don't want to get up and do anything and just trying to recoup so you can put out a night's worth of fires, so you can deal with that."

Franklin was told about the opportunity to obtain a GED shortly after he came to the United States five years ago, but was not able to pursue it when he lived in New York City before he moved to Pittsburgh. "There was a guy we called uncle and I went to live with him in Virginia. He said there is a program called a GED. I moved away from there to New York. The job I was doing there was a commission job selling tickets to people, the visitors, to be on the bus. The red and yellow buses taking people around the city. We had night tours and day tours. The more tickets you sell, the more money you have. If you did not sell tickets, you did not get paid. I did not have the time until I came to Pennsylvania." Franklin stated he was in his previous program for a long time, but was not sure if it was the teaching or if it was "his fault."

Jacob completed his schooling at the end of eighth grade due to his parents' regulations in the Amish community which included having to work. "All Amish children are educated for labor intensive careers. I was expected to help on my parents' family farm after school which I did. The reason I did not obtain my GED earlier was because of the work load on my dad's farm." Jacob also worked in a coal mine full-time and working on the family farm when he was pursuing his GED. "Work was the only life I ever knew. Except for late at night when I was an avid reader of science magazines and books."

Tammy who stated she always worked described her reasons for dropping out of GED programs as "Call it life. Stuff gets in the way. Something was going on at home in my personal life and I would end up stopping, something would get in the way." "Honestly, again something always happened. Seemed like something always happened within my family or my personal,

immediate family, so I would just stop. And my kids, I would try to put the focus on them, something happened with my mom or family because they are in Nashville. It was just hard to do when you have kids period. I was raising my two plus my sister's two, so you know. Literally in my home and trying to raise four kids and tutoring, still working and trying to focus on them."

Sabrina mentioned her reasons for not pursuing her GED sooner were due to her peers. "It was the crowd I was hanging with. They did not have it, bad enablers. I really did not have the best relationship with my mother, so I really did not take advice from her. I was being young and stupid and stubborn and putting all of my priorities last. Well as I got older, I started thinking about my future and me sitting around wasn't going to get me where I wanted to be." Paul explained that he was able to work while attending GED classes, but also stopped out at times. "It was mostly consistent although there were times I did take a little bit of a break. They let me come back."

Motivation and Goals

All of the participants expressed intrinsic motivation for wanting to pursue a GED as well as extrinsic motivators that helped them achieve their goal. Six of the participants indicated they had support from family members, and one from friends. However, Jacob had to abandon his family values and traditions in order to pursue his passion. The internal desire to obtain a GED was expressed by all of the participants, but for different reasons. The financial and educational goals stated which could be viewed as extrinsic motivators were based on intrinsic motivation.

Joseph described the personal satisfaction of being able to sit for the classes and the test, in addition to the increased confidence he has in his writing. "I had a wonderful time the last year and especially since winning the essay contest. It has been a real kick. Well, I try not to be obnoxious with my pride, but I am kind of proud of the achievement. My writing, that has really

changed. I have gone over some of the things I have written and tried to enhance their quality. Whether I really will be able to in the long run is anybody's guess. I don't know that." Joseph's motivation to obtain his GED was different from the other participants due to his age. "I was so removed from the workforce. I was not striving to get any gain in my personal life as far as making a living, so it really did not affect me that way. Mine was to enhance some of the things I had written. I kicked myself many, many times without having picked up on it at sixteen. There were so many things I was involved in afterwards. I really did not dwell on what I didn't know back then."

Tammy had the goal of obtaining her GED from the time she dropped out after completing tenth grade at the age of seventeen. Tammy described starting a program for six months or so, then stopping because of "life." Tammy explained that now that she has her GED she is not only more confident, but is also motivated to further her education and have her own business. "At this point now what I actually want to do is take a business course and start my own business in healthcare by doing a home health service. I know for a fact I can do wonders in that field. I've been concentrating on it since I have been up here and this is what I really want to do. My next step is to take a business course and focus on trying to get my own business. Right now I am fully taking care of my mom, but I want to get that (referring to business school) out of the way."

Sabrina described similar motivation for wanting to obtain her GED so she could pursue a career and how she made the decision on her own despite her current group of friends. "Well as I got older I started thinking about my future and me sitting around wasn't going to get me where I wanted to be. I would like to have my degree in welding, a certificate in welding and without a GED you can't do either one. You know you can barely get jobs without them. Who wouldn't want to have that on their resume? It makes you look better, makes me more worthy of a person

if I had that (referring to GED).” Sabrina further described her motivation to pursue further opportunities now that she has her GED. “A total change and now I don’t want to stop. I want to further myself, better myself, and better my education and it has been working out.” She further explained her motivation by saying, “Yeah, it changed my mind about a lot of things. Made me want to learn more actually, open up more books than I did back then. I see myself being a businesswoman, a smart, sophisticated person. I would like to teach my kids some things and their kids some things and be able to share the knowledge I have with them.”

Daniel, who explained he always had the idea in his head and it bothered him, took the opportunity after years of manual labor and sports took a toll on his shoulders. “I had two shoulder surgeries. I was a painter and through that plus my hobby activities, bowling and playing golf, I ruined my shoulders. The first time they operated it was worse. Then they operated on it again and so I decided you know what I am going to try to make this painting thing work, so I tried to see if it was really healed and went back twice, but it didn’t work out. I decided I had to use my brain instead of my brawn.” “After my second surgery I tried to go back and fell off of a step ladder because I got dizzy and the boss had to let me go because it was a liability.”

I wanted first of all to get that (GED). There is always something in your conscience, and if you don’t complete something there is always something nagging at you and to get that voice out of your head and feel that pride. I was extremely proud of it. As far as employment, I wanted a career. I had tons of jobs, built pools, mopped floors, worked on roofs, you name it. You know, those are jobs. A career is something you can stay at long term. There is stability there. Something that will allow us to retire comfortably. I am ___ years old. I am not getting any younger. I think I am on the downhill half now.

Paul discovered that finding employment without a GED was as difficult as his teachers had warned him it would be. "I can remember after I dropped out I really did not think about getting my GED and I had teachers who told me it would be very difficult to try and find a job and I said ok and I realized that it was hard to find a job, so I thought maybe I need to take GED classes." Paul also expressed interest in furthering his education which includes a career. "I did think about going to culinary school. Cooking has always been something I was very passionate about. I love to watch the Food Network Channel. Someday I would like to own my own restaurant, but I do like working in restaurants. I have worked in two restaurants before." Currently Paul is looking for employment and considering going to culinary school. "I haven't really looked into it, but I am still thinking about it, sort of debating."

Franklin described despite being enrolled in a program that offered GED preparation in a classroom setting for a considerable amount of time, he continued to attend and pursue his GED which he hopes to obtain this December. "I liked school. My aim is to get my GED to go to college, maybe for electronics. My uncle in Virginia is a doctor and he said to go into nursing, but I want to do what I want to do, get my GED and go to college. I want to go and figure out what I want to do." Franklin also offered the perspective of how his experience in the United States is much different from Ghana and how this has been a learning experience for him and has promoted his interest in learning more even outside of the classroom. "Life is like school. Ghana is the third world and the US is different. People who come back to Ghana are different after they traveled. If they have not, they are ignorant and advise you to do this or that and don't tell you what you need to do it. I see people and want to be like them. I am beginning to get to where they are. I read, watch the news. I do this now more so than in the past even at work. I started from there and now do more than in the past. I read and know a lot of things. Teachers recognize

this. Yeah, they do.” Franklin had support from a friend from Pittsburgh who he met on the job when he was in New York. “He came and we met on the job and he invited me over to Pittsburgh to see if things would be better, so when I came we were living together. I decided to take the program to see if I could get into college.”

Jacob’s motivation to pursue his GED and a college degree in engineering began at an early age and went against his family and culture’s values. “In the Amish school system you only receive an eighth grade education which is the highest you can go within the culture’s limits. I wanted to attend high school, but I couldn’t due to my parents’ regulations. Two years ago I became serious on academic pursuits. The reason I didn’t obtain my GED earlier was because of the work load on my dad’s farm. The reason for enrolling was to attend an engineering school afterwards. I remember back when I was in sixth grade, I came across an engineering article in my English book. That same year I snuck out to a bookstore and bought some engineering magazines. I bought US News college ranking magazines which I read through eighth grade. It was always in the back of my head.”

Motivation: Support from Others

“It was part of my bucket list of things until my three sons started joshing me about it in the past five years or so. ‘You might as well get it. Try to go for it. What else do you have to do around the house?’” Sabrina described that her mother was at her graduation ceremony and how their relationship has improved which Sabrina attributes to her developing maturity now that she is older. “My mother was there with me and she was happy. We are closer now. Mind you, it was when I was seventeen. Now I am more mature, see things clearer, more responsible. It was a good thing.” Daniel credits his wife as being the main support and believes he would not have succeeded without her. “The biggest contributing factor to my success, in any of it, in GPLC or

Bidwell, is my wife. Having a good support group is the biggest factor. I talked to some students that were considering going to Bidwell who had gotten their GED and told them if you want to succeed, make sure you have a strong support group. If you don't have that you are only halfway there, you can have the best intentions, but you will fail." Paul, who attributed one of the reasons for dropping out of high school to family issues, now reported "My family was very supportive of me getting my GED." Franklin was able to enroll in GED classes in Pittsburgh with the support of a friend he met in New York. "My friend came to New York. We met on the job and he invited me over to Pittsburgh to see if things would be better, so when I came we were living together. I decided to take the program to see if I could get into college."

Of all of the participants, Tammy expressed the most influence as coming from her family members. The catalyst for Tammy came when she was told her mother was terminally ill. "I was with a tutor for about three months before I decided to go and take the test. I went down to get my mother to get her here because she is ill, terminally ill. At this point, life was getting in the way again, I just made the decision when I went to get her I was going to make this a stepping stone this time. I was going to just call the tutor and said I am going to take the test." Although Tammy did not pass the first time, she continued with her tutor and took the test again. "It actually pushed me because they said she isn't going to make it, so I said I know it is time for me to not let anything get in the way and this would be nice for her to see me accomplish this, this goal I have been trying to accomplish for the longest and it would be nice for her to see me before something happens, so this was more of a push for me." Another influence was Tammy's four children. "I have four children. I have two, but I also raised my niece and my nephew and two of them just graduated, so this was another influence. I can't tell them and push them and I'm starting and then stop. Like I say, life. At some point I can't let nothing, nothing get in the way,

so I just have to take it.” “I am pushing my kids and think it’s hypocritical to push them and we push our kids and tell them but we don’t do it. Two down, my daughter graduates this year. My niece graduated in 2011 and my daughter graduated this year and my son next year. I had to beat somebody (laughs).”

In addition to family and friends, the participants expressed support from the teachers and staff at their GED programs. Most of the participants admitted they had doubts as to whether they would be able to return to a classroom setting and be able to learn enough to take and pass the GED. Through the words of encouragement from staff and the help of practice tests, they began to realize they could do it.

Joseph admitted he was not sure if he would be able to sit long enough to learn. “I was not sure I would be able to discipline myself to sit long enough to study. I have to say my first instructor made sound as if i could do it.” Daniel had similar concerns about being able to accomplish his goal of obtaining a GED. “I honestly did not think I could do it. I had been out of school way too long to be trying to go back and remember everything I learned in school. You don’t have to remember everything, but I thought it had been way too long since I had used any of this stuff, the math, the literacy skill, but after going through it and having the biggest contributing factor to my success, my wife.” Daniel described how the teachers had students focus on their goals and their futures. “The goals and stuff. They wanted you to have a target where you were going, not so much the past, ‘cause it is a part of you, but it doesn’t always have to be a part of you.”

Tammy explained the overwhelming support she felt from her tutors and the other staff at [GED program]. “All the tutors I had have been so wonderful. They have always pushed me and said I can do it. That encouraged me. They have been supportive. They would say ‘You can do it,

don't give up.' All the [program] staff , even the people from Careerlink. Yesterday, I went to Careerlink for something else. I went for job search and told them I got my GED and they were like very proud of me. That's a great partnership." Sabrina attend another program before coming to GPLC and needed little instruction before taking her GED and spoke of the GED teachers in general. "I had the one on one time with them, so they considered everybody. They did not just work with the whole group, so they got to know everyone individually. Everybody has their own ways, different ways of learning. They gave you a test to see where you were at, so everyone did not have the same test or work. They gave it to you based on what you know. If someone is not as smart as you, they section it off. They are not going to give you the same test or work to set you up to fail." Paul also described the support from his teacher and tutors as being very helpful. "They (staff) spoke very positively to me. It boosted my confidence. My teacher was very understanding. She knew about alternative schools and knew what they were like." Paul also explained that his GED program brought in additional staff to assist the students. "They did a very good job. When there was only one teacher and she could not go from student to student, they brought in volunteers."

Franklin described the difficulty he had after his first teacher left when he was attending his previous program. "What happened was this teacher was one of the best. My teacher was very good and she moved, applied for another job, and moved. When everything was settled, I didn't even feel like a student in the class anymore and everything was moving too slowly for me." Franklin also described the positive effect having a personal tutor has had on his learning, especially in reading. "There's a difference because this is a personal tutor. We talk about a lot of things. She has time for me. We talk about grammar and words I do not understand, so it is different from a class. In one month at [current program] I have improved."

Jacob is the one participant who did not have support from his family or friends because of his upbringing in the Amish culture. Jacob described his interest in engineering as his motivation to obtain his GED so he could go to college for engineering. Jacob did describe support from his teacher. "My GED teacher allowed me to borrow her GED books to take home. I was most grateful for those books she lent me. I had a great GED teacher who noted that I sat and studied during the entire length of the class while others moved about to snack and play on their phones."

Self-Confidence

One question specifically was written to elicit how participants felt about their current levels of confidence compared to when they first enrolled in their GED programs. The majority of students reported that they had even more or the same level of confidence. However, in analyzing the data, all of the participants expressed feelings of higher self-confidence in responses to other questions as well.

Joseph was one who stated that he did not think he had more confidence in himself since obtaining his GED. "I don't think so. I notice a better edge to the phrasing I have. I have given thoughts to what I write and backtrack. That was probably the basis for going back to show my sons I could do it, to have the stamina to go through the classes. Well I don't think that sits in back of my mind as far as confidence. I don't think that is the case. I am sure if I was a younger man that would have been the case." Joseph later stated "I feel more confident in my writing now. It is more rewarding to me after I read it, proofread it, and make more adjustments."

Jacob reported that he had about the same level of confidence since obtaining his GED. "About the same level. I'm the type that lives for a challenge. Once a certain goal is achieved, I move on. I believe if you're born with something in your heart, it is your life work to utilize it."

Jacob did acknowledge that his experience in his GED classes confirmed what he knew about himself. "I discovered I'm still the same person now that I was in elementary school."

Tammy stated she has more confidence to pursue her future goals. "I feel more confident since I got my GED because that makes a difference as far as what I am trying to do. What I want to do is go back to school for business and start my own business and I know I have to have that. I feel more confident. I can say 'I got it now.' I have my GED now. I am able to move forward to my next goals, to reach my next goals." Sabrina expressed similar beliefs in herself and how she feels more confident in pursuing future goals. "I have more confidence in myself. Back then when I did not have it, I didn't have any confidence in myself. I didn't feel I could be successful, succeed. I did not feel worthy, but now that I do have it I feel as if I can keep going with this. It makes me feel good and looks better when I show employers and schools that I do have it. I have a better chance now that I do have it, so why not further my education. Definitely, I have more confidence."

Daniel also expressed more confidence in himself not only by obtaining his GED, but also obtaining his associate's degree in chemistry from [postsecondary program]. "Way more. Just because I mean, actually going through and accomplishing. I put pride back into me of wanting to strive and do more. Just knowing I have that accomplishment underneath my belt. Kind of like golf. Before a guy will make a putt, it is always good to see a guy's go in before you make it. I focus on what I can do, not what I can't do, what is possible. That is a huge factor in deciding what field I would go into. I wanted to challenge myself."

Paul also expressed an increased level of confidence especially when he was able to pass the math section of the GED test. "I feel as though I have more confidence because I just didn't

really give up even though it was so hard. The math was my weak spot. I kept studying and studying and studying and the first time I took the test, I did not pass it and I felt like giving up, but it was only the test I had to do and I knew that I could do it and I studied a lot harder after that. I passed. It really boosted my confidence.” Franklin had a similar experience with being about to pass all but one section of the GED. For him, it was the reading section. “Yes, I have improved. I am good with math. I need help with reading. I am very proud and want to continue. I feel good. Every time I learn I feel good and feel I am improving.”

When the question was posed to participants about how they felt about themselves as learning and learning in general, many participants expressed their feelings about themselves as learners in a positive way. The first part of the question asked participants how they felt about themselves as learners, which provoked responses where students expressed self-confidence. Participants also expressed self-confidence they had in themselves before they entered the GED program. The second part of the question about how the participants felt about learning in general will be discussed in the next section.

Joseph expressed himself as a learner by how much he reads and writes. “I think pretty good because I read the paper from front to end. I read magazine articles. Some things are interesting to me and some things aren’t. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette a few months ago had an article on bridges of Pittsburgh and the moment I saw it — nice photos of them — and that conjured up thoughts of my time I had when I worked downtown. I worked downtown for about eight years and knew all of the bridges except that had been torn down before I got there, but the rest of them. I had been in, over, around them. I even went as far as to write the Post-Gazette a letter thanking them for the article.” Joseph has a history of writing letters to publications and even poems. Joseph described how he wrote a poem about Rosie Rosewell, an announcer for the

Pirates, shortly after his death. “I wrote my first meaningful poem in 1960. I wrote a poem on Rosie Rosewell who was an announcer for the Pirates and he died the year before they won the World Series. He did not get the chance to see the game be played. He had a lot of phrases he used. I used these things and incorporated them into a long poem. That was my first fifteen minutes of fame. A gentleman I worked for at WTAE he read it and liked it. It just so happened they were naming a park on Mt. Washington. He asked if he could take my poem and read it” (personal communication, Joseph, September 2013). “I have written a lot of letters. This is something I have written in the last few years” [showing a large binder] “That is another thing the GED program has done. It had stirred the juices again.”

Tammy described herself in a positive way when she spoke of what type of learner she was. “I think I do pretty good. I think I am a good learner. I am hands on more than any other way. I have to be in it, you know, hands on. I can listen and comprehend well. I am a good student when it comes to anything personal.” Daniel also expressed his abilities as a learner positively. “I feel that when I do approach something or have a new subject to learn, I pick it up quicker than most do. I also think I spend more time on it on purpose so I know how to do it. I do it two to three times repeatedly, so I know it backwards and forwards, so I do not miss anything.”

Sabrina understood what type of learner she was and how this is influencing her future career decisions. “I am kinesthetic learner, so it’s more hands on for me. When it is more in the book (referring to learning material) and everything, that is when I tend to fade off. I don’t know why my mind drifts off when it’s paperwork. I feel like if I am taught to do something, all I have to do is see it done once and I can follow through with it, so that’s why I chose the path of welding. I like to get dirty and everything.” Paul recognized that he learns better when given individual attention. “I feel that I learn better if I have someone individually teaching me. I pay better

attention. If I have things I need to read, I can figure them out myself, but not with math. I think the way people spoke to me when I was taking my GED classes like if they were trying to undermine me or speak down to me it brought me down, but if they spoke positively to me it boosted my confidence.”

Jacob described his interest in learning and how his desire to work hard has contributed to his success. “I very much enjoy learning new perspectives and ideas! When I worked underground, there was only a limited amount of learning. As an engineer, I can apply what I learned in my working experience.” When asked the follow up question, “Do you think your experiences have helped you become a better learner?” Jacob responded, “Yes. In the form of dedication. When things look bleak, I would prefer to keep pressing on. You learn to keep going even when your body would want to do otherwise. I don’t think it’s that much about being smart, rather it’s hard work and perseverance.”

The participants were asked how much they credited themselves for their accomplishments and then asked how much they credited the program. Some of the participants gave percentage figures while others acknowledged they were responsible, but needed the support from the program in order to succeed. The responses to this question demonstrated an expression of gratitude that the programs existed, so the participants could achieve their goals.

Joseph gave himself an A+ and credited the program 100%. “I give myself an A+ just for getting through this with all of the distractions I have gone through. I give the program 100% credit. I would have not done it without the program.” Sabrina gave herself a lot of credit and took responsibility for not following through in the past. She gave GPLC more of the credit because she stated the program needed to be there for her to succeed. “I give myself a lot of credit. I was an outcast, but I made it like that. It was my decision to put myself in that situation

and I stuck through, I strived real, real hard. I have my GED and I feel real good about it. [GED program], more than I give myself. because if it was not for them, I would not be where I am now.” Paul expressed his success and gratitude to the program for it. “I owe quite a debt of gratitude to them. They really helped me succeed. I doubted myself if I could do it.”

The rest of the participants gave percentage figures on how much they credited themselves and the program(s). Daniel credited GPLC twenty-five percent, [postsecondary program] twenty-five percent, and himself and spouse, fifty percent of which he said his wife was fourth-nine of the fifty percent. “I would say maybe fifty percent. [GED program] I would credit them at least twenty-five percent in that they got the ball rolling that put back in my mind that I had the ability to learn. [postsecondary program], yeah, I would say twenty-five percent. That fifty percent. That would be my wife. That is probably fourth-nine of the fifty percent.” Jacob also gave himself fifty percent and the program fifty percent. “I would credit myself and the GED program fifty-fifty. Had I not motivated myself, I would not be where I am. Had the GED program not existed, my chances of completing my lifelong dream of attending college would have been about zero percent.” Franklin’s response was “Yes, I feel like reading all the time even at work. You mean a number? I would say fifty-fifty until I pass the GED. Now I think I am progressing and don’t want to give myself too much credit.”

Perspectives on Learning

All of the participants not only expressed how learning was important for themselves, but also for others and many expressed words of encouragement for other students who want to pursue their GED and further education. In addition, many of the participants indicated that they had wished they had pursued their education sooner, particularly those who were over the age of

thirty. The participants felt that learning was a necessity and realized that in addition to their learning experiences in the classroom, their life experiences were also learning experiences.

Tammy expressed her view of the importance of learning for everyone and how everyday experiences are part of the learning process. "I think it is one of the best things we have and to take it for granted...I think we take it for granted. If it were up to me, I think everyone should graduate and go to some kind of postsecondary school. It is very important. I don't think we realize how important it is and it helps people in life, period. Learning is a part of living whether it's learning in school or learning spiritually. I have a lot of ways I have learned and am still learning today."

Sabrina described her view of learning as a way to change herself. "You have to learn. You have not choice, but to do it. It changed my mind about a lot of things. Made me want to learn more actually, open up more books than I did back then. I see myself being a business woman, a smart, sophisticated person. I would like to teach my kids some things and their kids something and be able to share the knowledge I have with them."

Daniel expressed the need to keep himself mentally active and believed that he did this more now since he obtained his GED and his associate's degree. "I think that a mind that stops learning is doomed for death. You learn stuff everyday whether you think you do or not. You still learn stuff every day. I think if you are aggressive about it and try to learn every day that keeps your mind so much sharper than just being idle. I do that all the time to keep my mind alive such as playing solitaire on my iPod. I will do that all of the time just to keep active. More now. It's a lot more now I would say."

Paul stated the importance of learning, particularly about having knowledge in certain areas to succeed in life. "I think it is important and if you really want to make it in life, you need to have

knowledge in specific things, what you are aiming for you have to have knowledge in that area.”

Jacob believed that being successful at learning requires hard work and responsibility more than being intelligent. “You learn to keep going even when your body would want to do otherwise. I don’t think it’s that much about being smart, rather it’s hard work and perseverance.”

Franklin shared his perspective about his learning experiences not just from his GED programs, but also living in the United States and coming from a third world country. “Life is like school. Ghana is the third world and the U.S. is different. People who come back to Ghana are different after they traveled. If they have not traveled, they are ignorant and advise you to do this or that and don’t tell you what you need to do it.”

Perhaps the most profound expression of learning was provided by Joseph who described regret as well as a message for those who want to pursue their education. The following are excerpts from Joseph’s essay that won the [GED program]’s Essay Contest in Spring 2013:

“I say ‘how pathetic’ because when I was in school it never dawned on me that someday I might like to be a writer, so what did I do back then. I quit school in the tenth grade and joined the Navy to see the world. What did I see...Great Lakes Training Center outside of Chicago. Medically discharged five months sixteen days later I returned home and never looked back at the missed education. Never re-applied myself to acquire the tools that would enable me to paint word images that would bring life to all that I surveyed. Thus enabling a wide audience to comprehend the glorious majesty of our environment as perceived through my eyes.

“Youngsters or even complacent oldsters who may venture through this essay, harken to my remarks. Each of you could and should avail yourselves of my lesson and apply yourselves to the learning or re-learning process. Teachers are ready to inspire you. ‘Mine’ their brains as if it contained the ‘Mother-lode-of-wisdom’ that when it is smelted down, it can be separated and

molded into the substance that will form the foundation to support your life's dreams. Good luck!"

Perceptions on Age and Learning

According to three of the participants in their late thirties through early eighties, going back to a school setting after being out of school for a significant amount of time was a concern. This is a common conception among many adults who believe that after they are out of school for a significant period of time, they do believe they are able to learn as well as children (get a citation for this). However, the longitudinal research study conducted by Schaie which is cited on Chapter II and will be explored again in Chapter V shows older adults who have declined in certain skills are able to regain them with proper instruction.

Joseph's main concern about pursuing his GED in his early eighties was he was not sure would be able to discipline himself to sit long enough to study. The encouragement he received from his instructor increased his confidence in being able to pursue his GED. Joseph also spoke of how he he would be inspired to write something and wishes he could do it all of the time every day, but cannot due to his physical condition. "Sitting through the GED I gained seven to eight pounds and my back was hurting. I got stiff." Despite the physical limitations and his age, Joseph was able to improve his writing skills and acquire mathematics skills, so he could pass the GED.

Tammy explained her life experiences interfered with her goal of achieving her GED, but how the staff continued to encourage her. When she was invited to attend the graduation ceremony at GPLC she thought she would be the oldest person there and said she saw an older man and was in shock. Tammy also expressed that one of her tutors was a younger woman and

felt a little embarrassed that she was taking her time out of her schedule and working a full-time job, but she wanted to thank her for helping her.

Daniel described his first attempts at studying for his GED and taking pretests in other programs outside of Pittsburgh and getting discouraged. "I got a hold of a booklet when I heard the test was going to get harder a few years back and I was getting the wrong answers and wondering why I was wasting my time. Daniel described the nagging thoughts in his conscience to pursue his GED which would lead to a career. Attending a structured program through GPLC increased his confidence as well as his academic skills. "I mean actually going through and accomplishing, proving things to myself, I put pride back into me of wanting to strive and do more." Daniel also described that when he started his GED program he was unsure if he could do it. "I honestly did not think I could do it. I had been out of school way too long to be trying to go back and remember everything I learned in school. You don't have to remember everything, but I thought it had been way too long since I had used any of this stuff, the math, the literacy skills."

Franklin who is in his early thirties and came to the United States from Ghana five years ago had to learn English. He was able to learn another language which could be due to the fact that he already had learned several languages during his lifetime. Franklin described how he was in the GED program for a long time and saw other students come and go. "I was there for a long time. Some would take the test and pass. I was the oldest student there." After clarification, Franklin meant that he had been there longer than any other student, not that he was the oldest. At his first attempt at taking the GED, he passed four of the tests except the reading. The other four tests include writing, science, social studies, and mathematics. The reading section involves understanding grammar and meanings of words which was his focus with his one on one tutor at his current program.

Life Experiences

The participants, in general, believed that their life experiences were part of the learning process and were important to them, but did not believe it was a factor in their GED programs. Instead, their success in the GED classroom had more of an affect on the way they viewed their abilities to learn and how important learning is in their lives.

Joseph stated he did not inform the staff about his personal life. "They were not aware of any of that." Joseph's GED teacher, the author of this thesis, was aware of some of his past from proofreading his writings. Tammy expressed how her life experiences often interfered with her educational goals. "Well, my life experiences...at time I questioned it. I had the classes, did the tutoring, and let life get in the way. I feel like I should have just got past it and wished I had done some things different, stayed focused, and got it. Finished my secondary school and take business courses to be where I want to be." Sabrina described her educational life as her "business" and how it contrasts with her personal life. "The type of life outside of my business isn't where it should be, so it's not doing much for it. But, I have my own mind and am doing better than my affiliations and it's not going to stop me. The people I am around - I can teach them things. It is not that bad, but can be better." Daniel also described his life experiences and learning experiences as a personal accomplishment. "I think my life experiences have helped me become a better learner. My life experiences have shown me how important learning is and the value of it, I would say off the top of my head, I could have earned \$200-300,000 more if I had continued my education the first trip around. At least that. A lot of those experiences that change you on a personal level. But I think my life experiences have made me a better learner, made me appreciate it and made me a better learner."

Jacob expressed how his life experiences of being a hard worker and responsible became

apparent during his time in his GED program. “I do suppose my previous life experiences surfaced during my GED studying time period. I had a great GED teacher who noted that I sat and studied during the entire length of the class while others moved about to snack and play on their phones. My studying preference is likened to my work ethic, for instance, taking responsibility.” Franklin also expressed that his teachers acknowledged the fact that he attended classes and did work such as reading outside of the classroom. “I see people and want to be like them. I am beginning to get to where they are. I read, watch the news. I do this now more so than in the past, even at work. I started from there and do more now than in the past. I read and know a lot of things. Teachers recognize this, yeah they do.”

The Influence of Curriculum and Staff on Participants

Participants had a variety of responses to what was helpful to the programs with all of the participants mentioning that the pre-tests and practice tests were helpful in assessing where the students levels were and if they were ready to take the GED test. Some of the other positive aspects of the programs were one on one tutors, supportive teachers, students being able to work at their own pace, encouraging homework, graduation ceremonies, and flexibility in scheduling the GED test on the computer.

Tammy credited the fact that she was able to have a personal tutor which helped with scheduling. “To get a one on one tutor was a big thing for me because a classroom setting wasn’t working for me. So being able to be supported with whatever needs it was a big difference. The times I needed, being able to meet me at convenient places so I could be close to the house and be there for my kids. Definitely one on one is the way to get the attention you need as opposed to somebody trying to tutor you and six to ten other people, that made a big difference.”

Paul also explained how his program brought in tutors when the teacher could not get to all of the students. "When there was only one teacher and she could not go from student to student, they brought in volunteers. There were about ten students, sometimes only three students in the class." Franklin described the difference between being in a classroom and having a personal tutor. "There's a difference because this is a personal tutor. We talk about things. She has time for me. We talk about grammar and words I do not understand, so it is different from a class where they are students together. I was there for a very long time. I was the oldest student there." Franklin later stated "In one month at GPLC, I have improved." Sabrina described how the program at GPLC was designed to work with each student individually. "I had the one on one time with them so they considered everybody, they did not just work with the whole group, so they got to know everyone individually. Everybody has their own ways, different ways of learning."

Tammy was very emotional when describing the support she had from her teachers. "All the tutors I had have been so wonderful. They have always pushed me and said I can do it. Everybody I dealt with since I entered the program have just been so supportive. I had some small issues, but compared to all they do for you that's nothing. They are just so supportive and have always been able to work with me. Sometimes I was not able to meet. I had to start then stop. Keep doing what they are doing. Doing this makes people feel whole again. The people are so encouraging and that is why I was so mad at myself for not doing it because you have people backing you up saying you can do it, people pushing you, it gets no better than that...to have people there encouraging you."

Paul felt support from his teacher in the way she spoke to him in a positive manner and

understood his past experiences in high school. "My teacher was very understanding because she knew about alternative schools and knew what they were like. They did show me easier ways. I struggle with math and they showed me easier ways and tricks to do the math." Daniel also expressed he sensed the teachers were there to help. "The teachers seemed to want to help. Obviously, they were doing it on their own time and wanted to get as much out of that time as we did."

Jacob expressed how the his teacher contributed to his success and providing him the the texts necessary to be prepare for the GED on his own time. "The GED study guide books were most helpful. Open communication with my GED teacher was also encouraging." Jacob also explained that his GED teacher supported him by lending him books to study on his own time. "My GED teacher allowed me to borrow her GED books to take home. I was most grateful for those books she lent me."

Joseph believe the program encouraged him to do homework and did not rely on him to already know the information. "The program itself encouraged me to do homework at home and they knew I could not just do it from what I learned in school, but by participating and wrapping myself around everything I learned during the day and expand upon that and hopefully something would sink in." Paul also described how it was helpful to do homework once he was shown the right way to solve problems such as with algebra. "I think it helps if you know how to do it. Some of the stuff like algebra, I did not know how to do it, so doing it wrong did not help me, but my teacher would show me then I could take it home."

Jacob was the only participant who was able to take the GED on a computer. Jacob attended the ARIN program located in Indiana, PA which is a rural area. "I took my GED test on a

computer in Johnstown. Taking the computer test was a great advantage since it allowed me to schedule the test at any time of the day. Providing the GED test on a computer ensures test scheduling flexibility.”

Three of the participants interviewed, Joseph, Tammy, and Sabrina, participated in GPLC’s graduation ceremony in September 2013. These three participants also described having emotional reactions to the ceremony due to the large number of attendees and the speakers. The participants who were also graduates at the ceremony explained that it was a much larger event than they anticipated and being able to share it with family members was very important. Joseph was brief in his description of the event, but was proud to show the photo album one of his sons created from his graduation ceremony. “I had a wonderful time the last year and especially since winning the essay contest and my family being participating members in the festivities. It has been a real kick!” Tammy expressed how happy she was to have her mother and her daughter attend the event with her. “I felt like I was in my high school days. I was able to share it with my two leading ladies, my daughter and my mom. If I even thought it was as big as it was, I would have invited more of my family. People get it [GED] all the time. They shocked me and it really blew my mind.”

Tammy also expressed how important she felt the graduation ceremony was for her and for other GED graduates. “The ceremonies...they need to know how this affects people. I thought I would be the oldest person there, but there was an older man. I was so in shock. I was sitting there looking at my life and I wanted to speak so bad especially after I heard the people working at GPLC. One guy, he was the founder, he spoke of his story of coming from another country. They make you see how important, really how important this is and make you feel important.”

Sabrina also described her happiness from being able to share the event with her mother and her surprise at how large the event was. Sabrina suggested one improvement to having some type of a ceremony the day after passing the GED, but described the graduation event as a moving experience. "The only thing they could change or do is after you get a diploma you should have a graduation the next day. Actually I did not think it would be as it was. I thought it was going to be me, my mom, and my teacher, but no! It was wonderful. I cried. I shed a few tear. I came a long way. That moment... I tried, I tried and I finally got it. My mother was there with me. She was happy."

The one helpful aspect of the programs that was mentioned by all of the participants were the practice and post tests. Participants felt as if these tests helped them realize what level they were on as well as when they were ready to take the GED test. These tests are given to students to determine curriculum for each student, but through these interviews, it was also discovered that the test results were helpful for the students to know what level they were on and be able to monitor their progress.

When Joseph left the program to study on his own, one of the staff at GPLC told him to come back to take the practice test for math. Joseph had passed the other tests. "It was sometime at the end of March I came in for a quickie test and they said I did well, so I decided to take the test." Sabrina had been enrolled in a GED preparation program prior to coming to GPLC and needed very little instruction before taking the test. "Well, I did not really see all they have to offer. As soon as I got there, I passed my test, so I did not see the classes all together. They gave you the test based on where you're at." Franklin also expressed the same feeling about the tests. "The practice tests helped and the post tests made it official."

Tammy described how she knew what areas she needed to “brush up” in and how she was surprised by the results of her math test. “There had been a time when I tested. I needed brushing up, so I did not need a classroom setting. I said math was my hardest and I never cared for it, but GPLC and other programs I was in said my math was not as bad as I thought it was.” Paul described a similar experience with the practice tests. “They did show me easier ways. I struggle with math and they showed me easier ways and tricks to do the math. The practice tests helped. I did think those were helpful. When I started, I was doubting myself until when I actually starting doing it and taking practice tests and was passing them.”

Daniel also expressed the role practice tests had in gauging his readiness for the GED as well as his knowledge in a subject such as the classes he took at Bidwell Training Center. “Taking the practice tests and learning how you will do in a so-called game situation is very valuable. I think you should take tests with no notes. That was a big thing at Bidwell. Students wanted to know what tests were open note tests. The only way to take the test is without notes.”

Some of the participants provided feedback on suggestions for improvement including funding, changes in staff, and difficulty having students come into the program after others had started. Overall, the positive feedback outweighed the suggestions for improvement. Those who provided suggestions for improvement reported positive experiences in their programs.

Joseph sensed that GPLC needed money to continue their programs from his experience when his teacher had to leave due to funding issues. “I gather they need money. If they could get some financing from someone they would be all right. They did not have any money to pay anyone after July. My teacher had to go.” Joseph won \$75 for the winning the essay contest and knew GPLC paid the \$75 fee for his test. “So I turned around and wrote them a check for \$150.00. I can’t think of anything more. I sent a letter to Colleen (staff person). My son made a DVD of the

festivities for the Thirtieth Anniversary and I gave them a copy of that which was fifty-five minutes long.”

Another issue that was difficult for Joseph was a change in his teacher which also resulted in the class being fewer hours per week. When the previous teacher left and the new teacher started (please note this author was the new teacher), new students entered the program which resulted in more time being spent on the new students. “It got a little frustrating for me because you were trying to encompass this and help the whole and figure out who needed this or that. I think I was getting frustrated with myself because I did not think I was progressing anymore and if I was not going to progress, but did not want to digress. I figured I was not going to do nothing, but had to progress on my own.” Joseph continued his studies on his own and then took the GED practice tests through GPLC.

Daniel experienced some similar frustration from new students entering the class he was attending. “The only thing I actually would improve, I wouldn’t start people and have them go a couple of weeks and throw people in with them who are at a different place. Keep people on the same path or at the same place on the path when learning different things on different levels. It makes it a little disjointed. Three of you started, you got three weeks into it and then someone starts it and they at Chapter One. That takes time away from you. I understand the scheduling and it is difficult. Even when I was going to Bidwell, people were learning at different rates, so it was kind of the same thing.” Daniel adapted to working at a faster level compared to other students by asking for extra work. “I would ask for extra. ‘Give me as much as you can give me.’ If I did finish faster, then I would not notice I was finishing that much faster.”

Franklin attended a GED preparation program for several years before enrolling at GPLC and being matched with a tutor. He had experiences with the change in his teacher and students

entering, leaving, and returning to the program. “Actually what happened was this teacher was one of the best. My teacher was very good and she moved and when everything was settled, I wasn’t even feeling like I was a student in the class anymore and everything was moving too slowly for me. I wasn’t feeling ok about it.” Franklin added how he continued with preparing for his GED while other students would attend sporadically. “Sometimes when you see new people come in, then you don’t see them anymore or they come for the first and second day and then they stop coming. Sometime they will come back a few months later.”

Summary

The first three research questions asked participants to explain their experiences in primary and secondary school, describe their academic strengths and weaknesses, and what grade they dropped out of school and what influenced their decisions. The first important finding from this data was that all seven of the participants experienced a lack of family support during primary and secondary school. The specific experiences differed, but they were all examples of how the lack of family support influenced their decisions to drop out of school. This was not the sole reason for any of the participants, but it was significant considering the diversity of the participants’ demographics and backgrounds.

Another factor that influenced two of the participants who were also the two female participants was peer pressure. Due to the small sample and the fact there were only two female participants versus five male participants, the data cannot be used to make conclusions that peer pressure is more likely to influence females than male. The data indicates that this could be explored in further research.

Four of the participants reported a medical condition or disability that resulted in a disruption or caused challenges while learning in primary and secondary education. The results of these

issues influences relationships with peers as well as making the decision to drop out of high school. Although the situations among participants was unique, the result was the same for these four participants.

The barriers the participants reported for not obtaining a GED as soon as they wanted to was due to employment and family obligations. This is consistent with the responsibility adults have to maintain a household and care for family members especially children. The only participant who dropped out for other reasons was Sabrina who attributed the influence of her peers and not taking school seriously.

When the data on motivation was identified it showed that the participants expressed both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. The striking difference between the extrinsic motivators while pursuing a GED compared to being in primary and secondary school is support from family and friends. The data supported that all participants had intrinsic motivation to pursue a GED in order to move forward with their educational and career goals. Both of these goals could also be considered extrinsic motivators because participants reported they worked toward their GED to be able to pursue these goals. However, the satisfaction and pride the participants expressed when describing how they felt after achieving their GED showed that this goal also required participants to have intrinsic motivation to pursue this goal which was linked to pursuing future goals.

Most of the participants indicated that shortly after they dropped out of high school, they thought about going back and had planned to do so. Some of the younger participants were able to pursue their GED without many barriers while those participants who were older had financial and family obligations which took priority over pursuing a GED. Some of the participants could pinpoint when the opportunity for them to obtain a GED arose. The others did not have a

defining moment they decided to obtain one. All of the participants indicated that despite ongoing barriers and past experiences with dropping out of programs, this was the time they were going to focus on preparing for and taking the GED test.

Question Eight directly asked the participants to state if their level of confidence increased, decreased, or stayed the same since being enrolled in their GED program and obtaining a GED. The majority of the participants expressed an increase in self-confidence and those who did not expressed that they have the same level of confidence. What was noted in the data was the participants who did not indicated an increase in self-confidence had responses to other questions that were coded as self-confidence.

The participants expressed the importance of learning in order to be successful. The participants also reflected on the idea of informal learning without knowing this label. They expressed how they and others learn from every day experiences and how important this is to being responsible and successful in life. Most of the participants also expressed how learning is important for others with a sense of encouragement for those who want to pursue their GED and further education.

Question fourteen asked if participants had changed the ways they approached learning and how much they credited themselves and the program for their accomplishments. Most of the participants gave equal credit to themselves for doing the work and passing the GED and the other half to the programs for the primary reason that the programs were there to help them pursue their GED. All of the participants had positive comments about many aspects of the program. Even though some of the participants had suggestions for improvement, they also explained ways they adapted to being able to learn when the program was not as helpful.

Four of the participants were over the age of thirty and had been out of school for some time. Jacob, who was in his late twenties, had been out of school since the end of eighth grade. One of these students learned English as a second language. All of them had some concerns about their abilities to learn academic skills after being out of school for so long and how their age was a factor. Joseph was not sure he had the discipline to sit and concentrate, Tammy was concerned she was the oldest GED graduate from her program, and Daniel was clear that he was unsure he could do it when he started his GED program because of the time he had been out of school. Franklin expressed how he was the oldest student, meaning he was the student who had been in his program the longest, and had to learn another language. Passing four of the five sections of the GED and now having a personal tutor to focus on reading increased his confidence in being able to pass the test.

When participants were asked if their life experiences were recognized by staff in their programs, all of the participants said no. The participants either reported they did not disclose this information or that they were taking this opportunity to focus on the future and not what happened in the past. This data indicated that the students focused on academics and disclosing information about their personal lives was not relevant to their goals of obtaining a GED. These statements were in contrast to how participants felt their life experiences contributed to their learning abilities, sense of responsibility, and how making choices in the past affected their current situation and how they wanted to change that.

The students who had one-on-one tutors reported this experience as very positive. Those in small classrooms expressed some issues with being held behind when new students entered the program which resulted in them feeling as if they were not progressing as quickly as they could. Overall, the participants expressed gratitude for their teachers and understood the time and effort

they put into assisting them even though they were often volunteers. Certain gestures such as loaning books so a student could work on his own were recognized and appreciated.

The data supported that the participants who were successful in their GED programs reported high self-confidence, motivation, a positive view of themselves as learners and learning in general, and were able to overcome barriers. The increase in confidence was reported to come from positive feedback from teachers and results of practice tests. Passing the GED bolstered this self-confidence. The participants indicated their motivation while working towards their GED and how accomplishing this goal would lead to achieving their long-term goals of education and employment that would result in careers.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter includes four sections that restate the purpose of the research, the major findings from the research, a discussion on how the research relates to the references in the literature review, and recommendations for further research. The research problem and the questions developed were first presented in Chapter I. The major findings from the study are separated into specific topics to address the themes discovered from the data which was responses from participants. The discussion section relates the findings from the study to other research studies included in the literature review that address similar topics. This section includes ideas for adult education programs to consider when implementing their policies. The recommendations section suggests further research ideas which based on themes identified from this research in order to further explore the themes discovered in this research using other methods.

Statement of the Research Problem

This study explored the factors that influence self-confidence, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and perceptions of learning for participants in GED classes and what influence their success has had on their future goals of pursuing postsecondary education. While there are several types of barriers (institutional, dispositional, and situational) that influence participation and retention in adult basic education programs, this study will primarily address dispositional barriers (self-confidence, self-esteem, and motivation) that affect the outcomes. This study will address how GED programs influence students' beliefs about themselves as learners, learning in general, and changes in self-confidence and self-esteem through participation in adult basic education programs, specifically GED preparation programs. Some of the specific items that will

be addressed are past experiences in education, current experiences in adult education programs, motivational strategies, learning philosophies that can produce improvements in retention and goal completion.

The purpose of this study is to understand from the adult learners' perspectives, the role of self-confidence, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and the value learning has on participation and success in adult basic education, particularly GED preparation programs. The research questions are:

1. Are there changes in self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning among adult learners by participating in GED preparation programs?
2. What are the adult learners' perceptions of the differences in participation in GED preparation classes compared to primary and secondary school?
3. If the GED program has improved levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning among adult learners, what experiences in the program have contributed to this change?
4. What specific aspects of the learning environment in the GED program have led the participants to persist in the program in order to obtain a GED?
5. Have participants' gains in self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and perceptions of learning encouraged them to pursue postsecondary education?

Major Findings

The results are divided into subsections to address the diversity of the small sample, influence of barriers when in primary and secondary school and when as adults trying to obtain a GED. The research questions were designed to address self-confidence and motivation and the data from these interviews demonstrated each participants' self-confidence and motivation.

Perceptions of selves as learners and learning in general were very important to the participants. Most of the participants incorporated informal learning such as every day experiences including caring for children, working full-time, or learning a new language and culture.

Although the sample was small, it was diverse. Participants included males and females of various racial groups between the ages of early twenties to early eighties. Five of the participants lived in an urban area while two of the participants were from a rural area. The participants had different interests in postsecondary education including business, welding, writing, chemistry, engineering, culinary arts, and electronics.

Six out of the seven participants who volunteered for the study had obtained their GED. One student had passed four out of five sections and was preparing to retest for the reading test. All of the participants had goals of pursuing some type of postsecondary education with the exception of Joseph, who is in his early eighties. Joseph planned to pursue his writing informally. Two of the participants had already pursued postsecondary education. Daniel completed an Associate's Degree in Chemistry from Bidwell Training Center. Jacob was in his freshman year at The Pennsylvania State University studying engineering. All of the participants viewed the GED as the pathway to better employment and postsecondary education.

Influence of Barriers

Barriers contributing to not completing high school included a lack of family support, peer pressure, medical or disability issues, and financial issues. The lack of family support barrier was the most prevalent among all of the participants. Four of the participants cited medical issues or a disability as contributing to difficulty in primary and secondary school. Both of the female participants indicated peer pressure influenced them to focus on life activities other than school

which resulted in them dropping out of high school. Franklin who was from Ghana indicated financial issues because education was not free there.

The situational barriers that were present in pursuing a GED as adults were due to financial and family obligations. The participants reported that they had to work and/or care for their children and that this was the priority before making time to pursue their GED. Most of the participants reported events that caused them to pursue their GED including not being able to find a job, wanting family members to see them achieve a GED, and pursuing postsecondary education and better employment.

Motivation

Pursuit of further education was a motivator for many of the participants. Daniel specifically expressed his desire to be able to have a career which he described as something stable that would lead to a comfortable retirement. The other participants did not indicate that improvements to their current financial situation were a factor, but were passionate about pursuing their education. Jacob spoke of being able to design mining equipment which was an interest of his after working in the coal mine and was now pursuing a degree in engineering to be able to accomplish this goal. Tammy wanted to study business and use her diploma in medical assisting to have her own health care business. Sabrina wanted to become a welder and work with her hands which she described as a strength for her. Franklin had a diploma in electronics that he earned in Ghana, but was hoping that obtaining a GED would allow him to go to college to figure out his academic interests.

Another factor in motivation was support the participants had from others that was quite distinctive from the support they had while in primary and secondary school. Joseph identified his sons as contributing to his desire to obtain his GED. Tammy stated wanting her mother who

was very ill to see her obtain a GED before she passed away. Sabrina acknowledged a change in her relationship with her mother that was negative in high school, but her mother attended her GED graduation ceremony. Daniel spoke of the difficult times he had with his father which led him to leave school and run away from home. He also spoke of the support from his wife to the extent that he believed he would not have accomplished what he had without her. Paul described how his family was supportive of him obtaining his GED which was a contrast to one of the reasons for dropping out which was family issues. Franklin mentioned having support from a friend who invited him to move to Pittsburgh in order to pursue his GED. Jacob was the only participant who did not mention support from others in his personal life, but credited his GED teacher for acknowledging his hard work and dedication and lent him texts.

Self-Confidence

When asked directly if participants had more, less, or the same level of confidence in question eight, the majority of participants indicated an increase in their level of confidence while the remaining participants reported the same level of confidence. However, as the data was reviewed and coded, the increase in self-confidence was apparent for all of the participants including those who reported the same level of confidence.

Although not all of the participants indicated an increase in self-confidence from participating in their GED program, the data indicated that all of the participants did express some level of increased self-confidence. The question about how the participants felt of themselves as learners indicated their feelings of self-confidence. All of the participants credited themselves with their success while they also expressed that the programs contributed greatly. Participants cited their perseverance despite distractions, pursuing their goal of obtaining a GED despite past experiences, and the ability to motivate themselves to make progress. All of the participants

acknowledged that if these GED programs had not existed, they would not have been able to pursue their goals. Most of the participants credited the staff's dedication as one of the main reasons that the programs helped them succeed.

Perspectives on Learning and Life Experiences

The majority of participants indicated that they considered every day life experiences as learning experiences. In the field of adult education, this is defined as informal learning. The participants responded to question eleven while reflecting on how they viewed themselves as learners using a holistic approach rather than just focusing on their academic achievements.

All of the participants indicated the importance that learning and obtaining a GED had on their lives and also generalized this importance to others. Some offered words of encouragement that indicated they wanted others to learn from their experiences. Another response that was common among the participants was the recognition that everyday life experiences were a learning experience. Without any coursework in adult education, they were able to describe what is labeled "informal education" by those in the field. When reflecting on how they viewed themselves as learners, most of the participants indicated how they learn from every day experiences. The participants also had positive views of themselves as learners and expressed their learning strengths as well as their ability to learn. The participants viewed learning as a way to achieve their goals and pursue careers.

The participants expressed that their life experiences were not important in their GED classes, but were relevant to how they viewed themselves as learners. The responses were consistent with how they viewed themselves as learners which was to incorporate their life experiences into learning experiences. The participants did not find it necessary to share their personal

experiences in the GED programs, but incorporated this learning experience into all of their learning experiences.

Discussion and Recommendations

Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem

Self-esteem and self-confidence are used interchangeably. The data from this study support the research results that global self-esteem can be possible for those who have positive experiences in most domains in their life even if they have low domains in one area. The participants before obtain their GED or the one who passed four of the sections, now had self-esteem in this area. However, the data also addressed the accomplishments the participants had in other aspects of their lives. High self-esteem in other domains may have also led to having the self-esteem to pursue their GED.

One aspect of self-esteem is academic self-esteem which is tied to Bandura's theory of which an individual's confidence they can achieve certain levels of performance in a particular area (Bandura, 1977). An alternative theory proposed by Steele, the self-affirmation theory, suggests those who have experiences low or negative outcomes in one domain and achievements in others, may still develop high global self-esteem (Lipenvich et al., 2007). Lipenvich and Beder (2007) conducted a study comparing global self-esteem of adult literacy learners to doctoral students. Results showed no significant difference between self-esteem levels of the two groups. Learners with higher self-esteem performed better on the reading and math TABE tests and there was also a positive correlation between academic and global self-esteem (Lipenvich et al., 2007).

The results from this research is consistent with the findings of Lipenvich and Beder's study, particularly among the participants who had a significant work history. Most of the participants reported high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. They credited themselves greatly with

being able to pursue their educational goals. All of the participants had obtained success in certain areas of their lives. The data indicated that the participants did not disclose much personal information to staff and did not feel as if this was necessary in order for them to be successful. However, according to the self-affirmation theory, those who may be struggling or unsure of their academic abilities could have overall high global self-esteem because of accomplishments in their lives.

Some of the achievements of the participants in this study were having children who graduated high school, having stable employment, and having a positive support structure. These were all achievements the participants had before obtaining their GED. Once obtaining the GED, their academic self-esteem improved greatly. Without being intrusive, adult education programs could have participants make a list of accomplishments they have had in their lives which are not necessarily related to education. This could also be turned into a writing assignment by having students list what they consider to be their major accomplishments and then write a few sentences about what steps they took to achieve these accomplishments. This type of reflection would show how long it can take to achieve certain goals which would also give students a realistic time frame of how long they would need to be in a program before being prepared for their GED.

Another suggestion for programs includes not only identifying barriers which is often done at the intake level, but also following up on new barriers or those that have been resolved. A short survey that also includes questions about how the student is feeling about his/her progress at the time will provide insight into the student's self-perceptions of his/her self-confidence and views of learning at that particular point. This survey could be done when students are taking their practice tests which would allow the instructor or other staff person to present the results of the

practice test and also discuss any concerns. The feedback could change the way the student perceived his/her academic self-esteem. Some of the data from this study indicated that participants thought they had lower skills than they actually did based on the results of the practice tests.

Motivation

Several theories of motivation were explored in the literature review. This section addresses who these theories are relevant to the data obtained from the participants. It also explores suggestions for adult education programs to implement in order to enhance students' motivation and also acknowledge the likelihood of success based on the student's current living situation.

All of the participants had their physiological, safety and security, social, and esteem needs met according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Cherry, K., <http://psychology.about.com/od/theoriesofpersonality/a/hierarchyneeds.htm>). All of the participants had stable housing and means to support themselves. All of the participants also mentioned current support from family and friends which was in contrast to their experiences in primary and secondary education. Several of the participant's could be considered to reach Maslow's fifth need, self-actualization because they had were already working on their future goals. The other participants were still making plans to pursue their postsecondary goals and were optimistic about obtaining or being close to obtaining. While they may have achieved the self-actualization need in other areas, they were still in the process of pursuing their educational goals. These participants had already achieved the goals of the first four needs, so it is quite possible they would achieve this need once they completed their postsecondary education.

Wlodkowski warns that motivation alone cannot account for learning (Wlodkowski, 2008). However, personal skills, learners' capacities, and quality of instruction are factors that can also influence learning (Wlodkowski, 2008). These other attributes were also described by the participants. The majority of the responses from participants was they believed they learned quickly, enjoyed learning, and learning was necessary in everyday life. The participants also had positive comments about the staff, particularly their instructors, who provided support and were often taking time out of their lives to volunteer to help them achieve their goals.

According to the statistics, minority groups including African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans remain underrepresented in higher education and have higher rates of dropping out of high school (Wlodkowski, 2008). Out of the seven participants in this study, two were African-American, one was African, and one was biracial including Latino. Although the sample in this study is too small to generalize it to high school drop outs who later obtain their GED in general, the similarities in the responses among all of the participants, regardless of gender or race, relating to motivation, both external factors and intrinsic motivation, were similar. This research is a starting point that could lead to further research that links adult motivation to adult learning including underserved groups.

Adult motivation and learning could be an important topic for all who work with students in all levels of postsecondary education. Those in all types of secondary education could benefit along with those in adult basic education. The correlation of learning and motivation in older high school students could be expanded to learn more about adults in a variety of adult education programs which could include how they may differ between those who pursue different levels of adult education. For those who serve students pursuing a GED, this information could be useful as it is and even more so if expanded upon to establish whether or not students are motivated to

learn. This could lead to inquiring what motivates students to learn. The data from this study identified that although the students knew they would not use some of the academic material they would need to know in the future, they understood the need to learn it now in order to pursue their long-term goals or postsecondary education and/or employment.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is important to those in adult education programs when assessing how successful a student may be depending on which of the student's needs are currently being met. For example, those interested in pursuing adult education may need to address their basic needs such as food and shelter before they are able to focus on pursuing their academic goals. Another important issue is that was reported by participants in this study was the having the support of others had a great impact on achieving their goals. Those who are interested in pursuing adult education such as a GED should not be discouraged from doing so, but it could be beneficial for them to coordinate with other agencies that may be able to help a person address their more immediate needs such as food and shelter before starting a GED program. Some of these programs may also have resources to provide support from others who have experienced similar situations.

Once a student is considered to be ready to enroll in a program, Knowles' assumptions could be considered to determine how ready certain student are to participate or how they can be influenced to want to participate. Knowles' second assumption could be used to have students explore their reservoir of knowledge, how their everyday experiences are valuable to them, and how obtaining a GED is vital to pursuing these beliefs. Knowles' other assumptions are based on readiness for adults to learn related to social change, the immediacy of application, most potent assumptions are internal, and the need adults have to know why they need to learn something (Knowles, 1980). Discovering whether or not these ideas are present in students would include

brief interviews or surveys such as Likert surveys to rate how students perceive themselves. At the beginning of programs, this could be quite difficult because students are more concerned, especially if they have been out of school for some time, whether or not they are able to learn the material and are focused on how obtaining a GED will benefit them in the future based on the data obtained in this study. The participants did exhibit many of these traits during the interview process because they had already accomplished their goals.

The participants understood the need to learn skills even in academic areas that either did not interest them or were not one of their strengths. They expressed the understanding according to Knowles' seventh characteristic of the need to integrate their life roles as parents, workers, and so forth (Wlodkowski, 2008). Knowles' other assumptions were not as relevant to this group of students because they were not in a position to reject or question what they were learning because they were skills that were directly tied to passing the GED. However, as these participants pursued postsecondary education, the other assumptions could be relevant. All of the participants described responsibility for their actions not only now, but also when they were teenagers and decided to drop out of school. According to Knowles, as a person matures his/her self-concept moves from a dependent personality toward one of a self-directed human being (Knowles, 1980). The perspective the participants had on their past decisions was based being an adult, so it is unclear whether or not they felt this way when at the time they dropped out of school. However, it is important to note that through life experiences, these participants who did not complete their formal education displayed clear ideas of how they were more independent and self-directed with obtaining their GED in order to accomplish this goal and be able to achieve their educational goals in postsecondary education and obtain better

employment (Knowles, 1980). The participants clearly met the six criteria of androgogy and how it differs from pedagogy.

Knowles' second assumption is "An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning" (Knowles, 1980). Although the participants did not feel their past, personal experiences were relevant to their success in their GED programs, they did describe how their everyday learning experiences were valuable to them as learners and how obtaining a GED was vital to them pursuing future goals.

Knowles other assumptions including: the readiness for an adult to learn related to his/her social role, a change from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application, the most potent assumptions are internal, and adults need to know why they need to learn something.

Adult more so than children tend to have the following characteristics: "1) To use relevance, 2) To be more critical and more self-assured about judging the value of what they are learning, 3) To be reluctant to endorse content they do not find of value, usefulness, or contributing to their goals, 4) To be sensitive to a require respect from teachers, 5) To want to test what they are learning to work and real life settings, 6) To want to use their experience and prior learning as consciously and as directly as possible while learning, and 7) To want to integrate new learning with their life roles as parents, workers, and so forth" (Wlodkowski, 2008, p.99-100).

These characteristics were relevant to why the participants who did not like math and knew they did not want to ever go into a field that involved math understood they needed to learn this skill in order to pass the GED which led to further goals..

Not only is participation in adult basic education lacking, so is research on the link between adult motivation and learning (Wlodkowski, 2008). Most studies linking motivation to learning have been conducted in youth education (Wlodkowski, 2008). A study by Uguroglu and

Walberg (1979) found positive correlations between motivation and learning with these correlations increasing with the age of the student (Wlodkowski, 2008). This would support the idea that as age increased, so did the positive relationship between motivation and learning and the assumption could be made that the relationship between the two would be positive for adults (Wlodkowski, 2008). The findings from this research demonstrated that despite the fact that all seven participants did not complete high school and made the decision to drop out for various reasons, they still valued the fact that the GED programs were available for them and the fact that they were able to be successful in these programs.

All of the participants cited reasons as to why they decided to pursue their GED. Six participants cited their ability to pursue postsecondary education to achieve their long-term goals and one wanted to achieve a lifelong goal and improve skills as the reasons for obtaining a GED. The participants acknowledged reasons in their past for not pursuing their GED in addition to reasons for why they decided to pursue their GED now. Although some were regretful that they did not achieve this goal sooner, they were proud of their accomplishment. The GED requires students to learn skills that are required of a high school diploma including reading, writing, science, social studies, and mathematics. Despite the fact that participants expressed strengths and weaknesses in certain areas, they persevered to learn what they need to do in order to obtain a GED.

Possible Selves

Six of the participants indicated they planned to pursue or had pursue postsecondary education after obtaining their GED. The data from the interviews indicated that the participants had considered their future goals and saw themselves in certain careers once they completed

postsecondary education. This idea can be considered 'possible selves' which are realistic concepts that are based on past and present experiences and successes.

Rossiter defined 'possible selves' as an individual's conceptions of a future self that one either hopes for or fears and are linked to past and present self-concept (Rossiter, 2007). This view considers self-concept to be based on selves that are accessible and meaningful (Rossiter, 2007). Research on possible selves has been conducted across the life span and the number of possible selves declines with age (Rossiter, 2007). Participants explained how they viewed themselves once they obtained their GED and were able to pursue postsecondary education. They saw themselves as business owners, welders, engineers, etc. Now that these participants had been successful in obtaining a GED with one participants needing to pass only one for section, they were able to think of themselves in the future with goals that were both accessible and meaningful.

Based on the data, the participants who were successful in their GED programs had goals for postsecondary education which motivated them to obtain their GED. One suggestion for adult education programs is to provide surveys on interests and personality types which can be scored by the individual. The results provide what career possibilities are consistent with the individual's skills and interests. This could be a way to motivate students to think of how working toward their GED would lead to future possibilities for a career.

Another suggestion is for ABE/GED programs to offer information on possible postsecondary education and employment interests and revisit their interests on a regular basis. Most of the participants reported they obtained a GED because it was the next step toward pursuing careers which required postsecondary education. At this point, funding is tight and there are not enough volunteers to tutor students. However, the programs from which the participants were recruited

currently both have a partnership with a statewide agency that provides employment and career services and are given classroom space for the classes. The agencies could collaborate on having representatives from postsecondary schools speak to the GED students and clients of the employment agency about educational opportunities. These postsecondary programs could use this as a recruiting tool. This would be similar to how colleges come to high schools and meet with junior and seniors about what programs they have to offer. Having employers, especially those who are seeking to hire a large number of employees come and speak to students and clients would also be helpful. This would allow the employer to recruit potential employees and also allow the students to learn more about different careers and whether or not they are realistic for them.

Barriers to Participation

This research addressed both past and recent barriers to participation. As youth, most of the participants described situational and institutional barriers as reasons for dropping out of high school. These barriers included family issues, medical and disability set backs, and peer pressure. Most of the participants indicated they felt they were capable of doing the work, but other factors influenced their lack of focus on school which led to them deciding to drop out.

The focus of this research was on dispositional barriers for participants while pursuing their GED. The main dispositional barrier for the participants was concern about their age and whether or not they were able to relearn the academic skills they needed in order to obtain a GED. A few of the participants indicated that they had delayed their goal of obtaining a GED by not starting a program when they wanted to or dropping out of programs due to other obligations. This was concern as to whether or not they would be able to complete their program and pass the GED this time without allowing other obligations to prevent them from finishing. All of the

participants reported how the practice tests and posttests were very helpful in realizing the progress they were making and caused them to be more confident to take the GED. The results of their tests encouraged them to decide when they felt they were ready to take the test.

According to Wlodkowski, when students feel as if they have achieved competence in certain skills, they are more likely to have the motivation to continue to learn because they have developed the self-confidence (Wlodkowski, 2008). The research showed this theory to be very accurate. All of the participants had plans to enroll in or had already enrolled in postsecondary education. All, but one of the participants planned to pursue postsecondary education and believed they had the ability to succeed because they had obtained a GED.

According to a study by Rubenson and Desjardins, situational barriers are the only most frequently by nonparticipants with financial reasons being the main institutional barrier especially for those in North America. (Rubeson et al., 2009). Situational and institutional barriers among nonparticipants and participants were statistically the same, dispositional barriers were reported the most among those with no interest in participating and participants who were considered older adults, low-educated adults and blue-collar workers (Rubenson et al., 2009). Participants who believed their participation would lead to better and higher paying jobs found participation more meaningful (Rubenson et al., 2009). This research is consistent with the findings in this study. Participants described how the GED was a hurdle they had overcome in order to pursue careers by attending postsecondary education. Patterns in inequality in adult learning also contributed to other societal factors including income, education, and skill attainment which reflect the three different “welfare state regimes” that related to arrangements between state, market, and family (Rubenson et al., 2009). This finding was consistent with the

fact that none of the participants in this study cited the reason for wanting to obtain their GED was due to a requirement from any public assistance program.

Adult education programs could provide regular feedback in more informal ways that do not take as much time as formal testing. Some examples are giving quizzes and reviewing homework assignments. These materials can be reviewed quickly and will provide immediate feedback to the student. Doing this on a regular basis would allow students to have feedback not only on what they have to learn, but is also a way for them to keep track of their progress. This procedure could be particularly beneficial to those who are voluntary participants, but could also help those who are mandated to attend a program.

One suggestion for implementation of ideas into the program includes not only identifying barriers which is often done at the intake level, but also following up on new barriers or those that have been resolved. A short survey that also includes questions about how the student is feeling about his/her progress at the time will provide insight into the student's self-perceptions of his/her self-confidence and views of learning at that particular point. This survey could be done when students are taking their practice tests which would allow the instructor or other staff person to present the results of the practice test and also discuss any concerns. The feedback could change the way the student perceived his/her academic self-esteem.

Age and Learning

Several of the students reported concerns about how both their age and length of time out of school could impact their ability to learn. Two of the participants were close in age to those graduating high school. The other five had ages ranging from mid-thirties to early eighties. All of these participants were able to learn the necessary skills to obtain their GED.

Schaie completed the “Seattle Longitudinal Study” from data collected from 1956 to 1991 (Schaie, 1994). The subjects of the research consisted of 5,000 people who were members of a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) in Seattle, Washington and were in the upper 75% of the socio-economic spectrum (Schaie, 1994). The group included both white and blue collar workers who received these health benefits from their employment (Schaie, 1994). Schaie discovered that intelligence quotient (IQ) did not account for age-related changes, but identified five intellectual abilities including: verbal meaning, spatial orientation, inductive reasoning, number, and word fluency (Schaie, 1994). Data was collected and analyzed based on these five intellectual abilities. Longitudinal data confirmed these abilities could not be reliability confirmed prior to age sixty except for word fluency which began to decline at age fifty-three (Schaie, 1994). All abilities were shown to decline significantly by age sixty-seven, but then only modestly until the eighties (Schaie, 1994).

Fluid abilities including the ability to reason quickly and think abstractly were found to decline more rapidly than crystallized abilities which include learning, knowledge, and skills acquired over a lifetime (Schaie, 1994). Sherry Willis, Schaie’s spouse, conducted further research on subjects over the age of sixty-five who had declined in at least one of the identified abilities (Schaie, 1994). Those who decline in one ability were given training in that ability and those who declined in both abilities were randomly assigned to training in one of the abilities (Schaie, 1994). The results indicated that training was more effective for inductive reasoning more so for men and than women, women made more progress in spatial orientation, and training was more effective for those who had declined in these abilities (Schaie, 1994).

The findings from this study support evidence shows the participants who were concerned about their ability to learn due to their age or being out of school for a significant amount of time

that they are able to grasp the concepts taught in their GED programs and be able to learn. These findings also support the fact that now that these participants have been able to learn these skills, they can continue to succeed in the learning process when pursuing postsecondary education.

The success of the five participants who had not participated in formal education in years were able to learn the skills needed to obtain their GED. Depending on what grade the participants dropped out of school, they were able to relearn what they had learned before or learned new skills for the first time well enough to be successful in their GED programs.

Schaie's research provided evidence that most intellectual abilities do not begin to decline until the fifties through sixties. Information acquired in the field of neuroscience had found that new neural pathways are developed as a person learns and these abilities are more likely to occur when adults are intrinsically motivated to learn. Information acquired in the field of neuroscience had found that new neural pathways are developed as a person learns and these abilities are more likely to occur when adults are intrinsically motivated to learn (Wlodkowski, 2008). The findings from this study support how the participants who were concerned about their ability to learn due to their age or being out of school for a significant amount of time were able to grasp the concepts taught in their GED programs and be able to learn. These findings also support the fact that now that these participants have been able to learn these skills, they can continue to succeed in the learning process when pursuing postsecondary education.

One suggestion for adult education programs is to provide this information to new students especially those who have concerns about being able to learn due to their age. Although there are other factors involved as to whether or not a student will be able to learn well enough to pass the GED, their age is not likely to be a factor. This data is not only important for students to know, but this information should also be given to staff including teachers and tutors during the

program's training sessions. This would reduce any bias that older students will not be able to learn the material and would also allow the staff to be encouraging to older students who are concerned about their age. The encouragement from staff would be expected to have an impact on the students' motivation to learn.

Humanistic Approach vs. Transformational Learning Theory

Two main approaches to educating adults are the humanistic approach which includes following Bloom's taxonomy, a classification system to provide objective measures for levels of learning (Forehand, 2012) and transformational learning theory or liberator education focuses on a dialogue between the teacher the student, so that both are considered learners and the student is able to understand their current position and become engaged in the learning process (Freire and Macedo, 1995).

Literature was explored on which approached are used in ABE and GED programs. The most popular approach is the humanistic approach based on Bloom's Taxonomy. According to Quigley the humanistic approach promotes a deficit perspective through the history of failure in public schools which undermines learners' confidence and results in placing self-esteem as a primary goal without focusing on critical thinking and puts the teachers in a position of authority (Quigley, 1997). Bloom's taxonomy includes six levels within the cognitive domain including: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Bloom developed this "taxonomy" which is a classification system to measure students' abilities using a standardized system (Forehand, 2012). Training on Bloom's taxonomy is provided as part of the training for tutors at a large adult education agency in the metropolitan area where this student occurred. This agency uses the original Bloom's taxonomy instead of the one that was revised in the 1990s. The revised taxonomy changed the labels for each step or ability from nouns to verbs

including: remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating (Forehand, 2012). According to Quigley, Bloom's taxonomy and the humanistic philosophy have been use for years in ABE, but the results of those who persist and obtain their educational goals remain bleak (Quigley, 1997).

Another approach, liberatory education, can also be considered transformational learning theory which has been promoted by leaders in adult education including Jack Mezirow and Paolo Freire (Quigley, 1997). According to Freire, learners start in a least-aware state where they question nothing about their current situation or external forces that are responsible for it, then reach the midway where they begin to sense they have some control over their lives and begin to question. Friere's theories about the concept of dialogue is a way for teachers to be facilitators which involves educators as having curiosity which is a fundamental and natural aspect of all human beings (Friere et al., 1995). Dialogue involves more than the teacher and student having a conversation, but to increase critical reflection which is necessary to challenge students to engage in this type of reflection which is necessary to challenge students to steer away from reading and thinking in a mechanical manner (Friere et al., 1995).

One of the interview questions, number eleven, was designed to examine the how the participants life experiences influenced they way they thought about themselves as learners and learning in general as well as if their past experiences were recognized in their current or recent program which was designed to elicit how educators may have been incorporated the humanistic or transformational theories and whether or not this had an effect on the success of the participants in the study. The participants overall stated that they did not believe that their past experiences were relevant in their GED programs and did not divulge much information about their past experiences.

All of the participants reported to some extent how the feedback they received from their teachers from their post-test results encouraged them to take the GED test. Some of the participants mentioned how their past and current educational experiences and commitment to obtaining their GED were recognized by staff. None of the participants reported any details of how they engaged in “dialogue” defined by Freire. However, all of the participants reported learning the skills necessary to obtain a GED, knew how they were progressing and when they were ready to take their GED tests from taking practice and post-tests. In fact, all of the participants reported that one of, if the most helpful tool was the tests to show participants their levels. Tammy particularly was surprised when she was informed that her mathematics skills were better than she would have believed had she not taken the practice test (personal communication, Tammy, September 2013).

Based on the data obtained and knowing that one of the programs teaches Bloom’s taxonomy to their staff, the humanistic approach seemed to be the one used in the programs. The participants reported how they did not discuss their personal issues and focused on academics. Most of the interview questions targeted these concepts including the participants’ personal experiences and how they felt about their current success and future goals. However, the responses focused on academic success, but there were some comments made that indicated some of the participants had disclosed some information to their teachers and received encouragement from them once they understood their background. The data supports the humanistic approach worked for these participants who were successful in achieving their goals.

Based on the data obtained, a recommendation that the humanistic approach is recommended cannot be not supported. This study only focused on self-perceptions of successful students and did not account for drop out rates of the agencies. The data obtained from the participants in this

study was used to address ways in which self-confidence, motivation, perceptions of learning, and overcoming barriers could be developed in all students enrolled in adult basic education with the intent of improving completion rates. Further research which specifically targets the approaches being used in adult education programs is needed and will be addressed in the recommendations section.

The Influence of Staff on Learning

The majority of the participants had volunteer staff for their preparation for the GED. Those who had paid staff also had volunteers to assist with one-on-one instruction. The responses from the participants indicated they were aware that their teachers were committing their time to helping student prepare for their GED. The research showed no significant difference between those who were educated by paid staff compared to volunteers.

The study by Beder et al. (2007) found evidence that teachers in ABE programs use Meaning Making (MM) methods to start, but as instructional level increased, the teachers used more of the Basic Skills and Individualized Group Instruction (BS/IGI) and Basic Skills and Teacher-Led Group (BS/TLG) (Beder et al., 2007). Teachers were found to use a combination of these methods (Beder et al., 2007). Another aspect that was explored was if the job status of the instructors affected what instructional approaches were used (Beder et al., 2007). Some of the approaches take more time to prepare and this was thought to possibly influence the approaches used by paid staff or volunteers. No significant difference was found, so those who instructed by volunteers are likely to receive the same type of instruction as those who are instructed by paid staff.

The participants in this research study were cognizant of the time the teachers put into

educating them. From the overall responses from the participants, there was some personal interaction between them and staff, but the focus was on learning basic skills through individual and group instruction. The participants gave the programs a lot of credit for helping them acquire their GED. Most of the participants stated if the programs did not exist, they would not have been able to obtain their GED and pursue further education and employment.

Both the literature available and the findings in this study support the idea that the employment status of the teacher does not make a significant difference in how students are taught. What seems to be the most important factor is how committed the teachers seem to be with helping the students learners in a supportive environment. The one problem that is evident among many adult basic education programs is a lack of funding and volunteers. These agencies are often limited to how many teachers they can hire due to budget restraints. Many agencies also rely on volunteers. Overall, there are more students in need of assistance to pursue adult basic education than there are volunteers who can give up to four to five hours per week of their time to teach these students. Although the focus of this study was not to review participation rates, it was designed to obtain ideas to increase participation rates. An increase in participation rates and graduation rates could only help agencies obtain more funding from both the government and the private sector.

Recommendations for Further Research

The recommendations in this section will address ideas for further research for the academic field. Some of the data from this study in conjunction with the literature review lead to ideas for further research in certain areas. The literature review provided extensive research on the concepts of self-confidence, motivation, view of learning in general and views of themselves as

learners. The data obtained provided substantial insight into some of the research questions, but also posed issues for further research.

One area on motivation where research is lacking is the link between learning and motivation in adulthood (Wlodkowski, 2008). Adult motivation as it relates to participation, but not how motivation influences learning. The study by Uguroglu and Walberg (1979) found positive correlations between motivation learning in children in first through twelfth grades with the correlation increases as the students got older (Wlodkowski, 2008). The field of adult education has been successful in promoting higher education, but not for adults who live in poverty with a high school diploma, let alone those without one. However, the research by Beder and Lipenvich indicated that those pursuing a GED and those pursuing doctoral degrees did not have a significant difference in their levels of confidence (Lipenvich & Beder, 2007).

The first suggestion for a research study is to obtain a large sample from many programs, possibly statewide or nationwide and conduct research on linking motivation and learning in adults. The intrinsic motivational levels of the participants in this study were very apparent from their statements. These are the true success stories which were not influenced by political or other motives. Although these participants represent a small portion of the those who enroll in GED programs, some of them were part of the drop out or stop out rates at one point in their life before they were able to obtain their GED. Having a large sample could allow researchers to evaluate levels of motivation depending on where the students are academically. Having a large, diverse sample which would incorporate all levels of education could produce findings that could be useful for programs that serve adults in all levels of adult education.

Another suggestion for a research is to do a qualitative study comparing students pursuing their GED who are at different points in their progress. The participants would be divided into

groups depending on how long they had been enrolled in their current program. The data would be compared both within the group and among the different groups. A study of this type would provide more information on how the issues of self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, views of learning in general, and views of selves as learners is perceived by students depending on where they are in their current programs. This would more thoroughly address any changes in these themes. A similar study could be conducted to address differences depending on how long students have been out of school.

Two main ideas exist on ways that are best to educate adults. The humanistic approach is based on Bloom's taxonomy which classified each level of academic progress in an objective manner (Forehand, 2012). However, Quigley criticized using the humanistic approach in adult education. The alternative is to implement the transformational learning theory which states that the student responds to an experience through self-examination and discourse which then leads to action (Jossey-Bass, 2007). Freire is probably the most well-known educators and theorist who developed transformational learning theory. One of the main focuses is that teachers engage in education and develop a "conversation" with their students (Freire & Macedo, 1995).

The two main approaches to learning could be used in adult basic education programs. The possibility also exists that teachers are using a combination of the two or have developed their own method. The data from this study attempted to address the participants' perspective on how they viewed the learning process, but the results were inconclusive. Research on what approaches teachers use in ABE and GED classrooms is an area for further research which could be combined with other research that is evaluating other ways to improve participation and success in these programs. This research would involve interviewing teaching staff and also observing the classrooms in order to evaluate the interactions between the students and teachers.

In lieu of interviews or in conjunction with the interviews, a Likert scale survey could also be provided to teachers and students to assess the type of interaction that happens in the classroom.

The suggestions for further research presented were based on findings from this study and a review of the literature review which often concurred with many the findings, but also provided different results compared to some of the articles. The suggestions for further research are rather involved and would likely need several researchers involved in completing these studies. Most of these studies could expand upon what data was obtained in this study in order to provide a more comprehensive idea of what the issues are in adult basic education and GED programs and how adult education programs and researchers can benefit from these findings.

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