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Perceptions of Adult High School Dropouts Concerning Participation in GED Preparation

Programs

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

by

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May 2008

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ABSTRACT

Perceptions of Adult High School Dropouts Concerning Participation in GED Preparation Programs

by

Elizabeth Owens Thomas

This qualitative study was conducted to attain and analyze the perceptions of adult high school dropouts living in the Southwest Virginia region concerning participation in General Educational Development (GED) preparation programs. Mounting evidence underscores the facts that the high school dropout rate remains high across the nation and that many eligible people are not participating in adult GED preparation programs. The people residing in Southwest Virginia are no exception. Nearly 35% of the region's population does not possess a high school diploma and the adult education providers struggle with low participation rates.

In order to better understand the reasons for participation, this study examined the attitudes and issues involved in the decisions of GED preparation program participants to enroll and attend classes in Southwest Virginia. By examining these relationships between attitudes and behaviors, our understanding surrounding educational behavior patterns and adult education participation may increase.

This study resulted in the emergence of 5 themes, which were consistently recurrent. These themes included negative perceptions about early schooling, detrimental impacts on quality of life and self-esteem, informal and limited awareness of available programs, employment-related motivators to participation and situational deterrents to participation. This study concluded with suggestions to increase participation in high school and adult education programs and recommendations for further research.

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
LIST OF FIGURES	8
Chapter	
1. NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY.....	9
Introduction.....	9
Statement of the Problem.....	9
Research Questions	10
Significance of the Study	10
Definitions of Terms	11
Delimitations and Limitations.....	12
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	13
Historical Summary of GED Tests	13
Legislation of Adult Education	14
Adult Education and Contemporary Society	15
Dropout and Completion Rates.....	18
Labor Market Impact	20
Participation in Adult Education.....	21
Adult Learning Theories	23
Motivation for Adult Learning.....	26

Barriers to Adult Learning.....	27
Models of Participation.....	30
Summary of Literature Review.....	33
3. METHODOLOGY	35
Purpose of the Study	35
Qualitative Methodology	35
Description of Southwest Virginia.....	35
Description of Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education Program.....	37
Sample.....	39
Data Collection	40
Interview Guide	44
Data Analysis.....	42
Trustworthiness of Data.....	43
Summary	44
4. PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS.....	45
Introduction.....	45
Interviews of Dropouts of Adult Education Programs	45
School Experiences of Program Dropouts.....	46
Effects of Educational Experiences	47
Knowledge of Available Programs.....	48
Perceived Advantages.....	49
Deterrents to Participation	49
Interviews of Completers of Adult Education	50

School Experiences of Program Completers	51
Effects of Educational Experiences	52
Knowledge of Available Programs	53
Perceived Advantages.....	54
Motivators	54
Interviews of Current Participants of Adult Education.....	55
School Experiences of Current Participants	56
Effects of Educational Experiences	58
Knowledge of Available Programs.....	60
Perceived Advantages.....	60
Deterrents to Participation	61
Motivators to Participation	62
5. INTERPRETATION OF DATA	64
Introduction.....	64
Negative Perceptions of Early Schooling	64
Detrimental Impact on Quality of Life and Self-Esteem.....	65
Informal Awareness of Available Programs.....	66
Employment-Related Motivators to Participation	66
Situational Deterrents to Participation.....	67
Recommendations to Improve Practice	68
Recommendations for Further Research.....	69
REFERENCES	72
APPENDICES	76

Appendix A: Table of High School Completion Rates	76
Appendix B: Human Subjects Approval Form.....	79
VITA.....	81

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
1. Coding Categories: Dropouts from Adult Education Programs	45
2. Coding Categories: Completers of Adult Education Programs	50
3. Coding Categories: Current Participants of Adult Education Programs	55

CHAPTER 1

NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Introduction

As adult participation in General Educational Development (GED) preparation is mostly voluntary, it is important to understand the perceptions of the participants regarding their motivations and barriers. Increased knowledge concerning participation in adult education may lead to more effective educational planning and use of public funds. We know that many adults without a high school diploma are participating in adult education and many adults are choosing not to participate, but we do not know what motivates them to participate. This study attained and analyzed the perceptions of adult high school dropouts in the region of Southwest Virginia concerning participation in GED preparation programs.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives and factors that may have contributed to participation of adult high school dropouts in GED preparation programs. In recent years, the globalization of economy has set the stage for a greater need for individuals to be highly educated and highly skilled in order to compete. Political and educational leaders have emphasized the critical need for people to complete their high school diploma or GED and continue postsecondary education or training. Unfortunately, the high school dropout rate remains alarmingly high across the nation. Many people who are most in need of adult education are not participating in GED

preparation programs and attaining the certificate. Despite significant efforts and resources, increases in participation rates in GED programs have been slight.

Research Questions

The focus of this study is to attain perspectives of high school drop-outs in Southwest Virginia concerning participation in adult GED programs. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the educational backgrounds of the participants?
2. What are the participants' perceptions about the effects of the lack of high school diplomas or GEDs have on their lives?
3. What perceptions do the participants have concerning the opportunities for GED preparation programs in Southwest Virginia?
4. What are the perceptions of the participants regarding the benefits of participating in GED preparation programs and attaining GED certificates?
5. What are the perceived barriers that prevent participants from enrollment in and completion of GED preparation programs?

Significance of the Study

There is limited research on the factors that influence adult participation in GED preparation programs. The results of this study may assist adult education providers to attract and retain individuals in educational settings. A better understanding of personal motivations may lead to development of strategies that translate the benefits of

continuing education and may impact behavior. Identification of potential barriers could help institutions anticipate and proactively address issues related to GED program participation.

Definitions of Terms

As specific terms are used throughout this study, the following operational definitions are provided:

Adult Basic Education (ABE) – a program that was established by Congress in 1964 to offer instruction and assistance to adults with a focus on mastery of literacy skills (Rose, 1991).

Andragogy – a methodological approach to teaching adults that emphasizes experiential techniques and practical application (Knowles, 1980).

At-Risk Students – students who are not experiencing success in school and are potential dropouts (Donnelly, 1987).

Compulsory Attendance – state-mandated attendance for school age students, which varies in different states. Virginia has compulsory attendance to age 18 (Virginia School Law Deskbook, 2006).

Deterrents to Participation Scale (DPS) – a scale developed to reveal six factors of non-participation in adult learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Education Participation Scale (EPS) – a scale of 40 items developed to determine reasons individuals participate in adult learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

General Educational Development (GED) Certificate - a certificate attained after successful scores on a battery of five tests that indicates knowledge acquisition equivalent to a high school diploma (Tyler, 2001).

Globalization – an economy with a world-wide base and characterized by substantial increases in competition for labor and goods (Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990).

Socioeconomic Status (SES) – the social status of individuals as determined by their economic circumstances (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Tests for Adult Basic Education (TABE) – a standardized test used primarily for adults to determine achievement levels in reading, language arts, and mathematics.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study is limited to selected individuals actively participating in a GED preparation program in a rural section of Virginia. It is important to note that the procedures for participant selection and the sample size will not support generalization to a larger population or other geographic regions in the United States. Further, the variables of age, gender, and race were restricted due to the limited accessibility of participants. The inability to triangulate information may have adversely affected the trustworthiness of the study. The study is limited to the accuracy of participant responses and to researcher interpretation of data.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Summary of the GED Tests

The first General Education Development (GED) tests were developed in 1942 as a battery of tests for United States military personnel who had not obtained a high school diploma. During World War II, the issue of illiteracy became a major concern of society. Illiterate citizens were viewed as vulnerable to Fascist propaganda and a threat to national security. Individuals who had not completed their high school studies were perceived as ignorant and detrimental to the future industrial development and economic growth of the nation (Rose, 1991). The GED tests provided an opportunity for these individuals to demonstrate academic achievement associated with a high school diploma. A high school education was adequate for many employment positions during the industrial era. Due to the GED assessment, individuals who were discharged from military service were able to qualify for jobs and pursue postsecondary training or education (American Council on Education, 2005).

In an attempt to assess the academic skills and knowledge indicated by a high school diploma, the GED tests evolved as changes occurred in secondary education. According to the American Council on Education (2005), the 1942 series was used through 1977 and consisted of four subtests of language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics. Content knowledge was assessed in a traditional fashion with the language arts test focus on correctness of expression while the social studies and science tests emphasized interpreting reading material. During this period, over 40% of the individuals

who took the test did so for employment reasons. The second generation of tests was implemented in 1978 to reflect the changes in secondary curricula and public attitudes toward education. This series shifted from a science and social studies reading emphasis to a separate reading test. This series was characterized by a transition from recall of facts toward application of conceptual knowledge and evaluation of information. The emphasis on high school outcomes remained, but real-life contexts and reading materials relevant to adults were introduced. The impetus for the 1988 series was the 1982 release of John Naisbitt's *Megatrends*, which drew attention to the worldwide shift from an industrial to an information society and economy. The test continued to focus on academic content areas but implemented five changes. A direct writing sample or essay was added, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills were emphasized, reflection of the diverse roles of adults in society was increased, sources of societal change were emphasized, and contextual settings relevant to adults were increased. The 2002 series infused four enhancements into the GED tests to reflect the change toward content standards at the state and national levels. As a high school diploma remained the main requirement for many entry-level jobs, the prerequisite for employment advancement and the prerequisite for postsecondary education, a panel of core academic experts determined the changes to align with secondary content (American Council on Education).

Legislation of Adult Education

Since the Federal Adult Education Act of 1966, adult education programs have been strongly influenced by federal funding and legislative initiatives. The major goal of

this Act was to alleviate poverty through education. As a result, the federal government provided \$18,612,000 to fund adult education programs and served 37,991 adults in 1966. With the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998, federal funding increased to approximately \$375,000,000 and the number of adults served in adult education programs increased to nearly 4,500,000 (Sticht, 1998). The primary goals of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998 were to assist adults to acquire basic skills for literacy functioning, to provide adults with sufficient education to benefit from job training programs, and to enable adults to complete at least secondary level education. Not only federal funding has been provided, but state monies have supported adult education as well. In 2001, the federal funds allocated for adult education and literacy in Virginia totaled \$10,552,101 with 85% of these funds allocated to local and regional programs. The state funds allocated for adult education in Virginia totaled \$2,530,000 in 2001 (Virginia Department of Education, 2005).

Adult Education and Contemporary Society

The nature of society and the economy have a strong influence on adult education. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999) demographics, the global economy and technology are the three dimensions that are shaping the nature of adult learning in American society. There are more adults in our society than ever before and this trend is expected to continue as the population ages. In colonial times, half of the population was under the age 16, while in 1990 fewer than one out of four were under the age of 16 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992). The median age of the United States population was 34.0 years in 1994 and is projected to increase to 39.1 in 2035 (U.S. Bureau of the Census,

1995). It is projected that nearly 25% of the adults in the United States will be over 65 by the year 2080, in comparison with approximately 12% in 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Another demographic change is the cultural and ethnic diversity growth in America's population. The U.S. Census Bureau (2006) reported that about 33% of the nation's residents were part of a minority group. The Hispanic population continued to be the largest minority, at 42.7 million, and the fastest growing group. Hispanics accounted for 49% of the national population growth between July 1, 2004, and July 1, 2005. The African-American population was the second largest minority group, with 39.7 million and the Asian population was third, with 14.4 million. During the decade between 1980 and 1990, the Asian-Pacific Islander population in this county rose from 3.7 million to 7.3 million, which was an increase of almost 100% (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992). A report from the Southern Regional Education Board (2007) projects the number of Hispanic high school graduates in Virginia to rise from 5.7% in 2008 to 19.2% in 2022. This overall projected Hispanic population increase in Virginia is higher than the expected nationwide increase. As the minority population increases, the need for participation in adult education grows. There are a disproportionate percentage of minority adults among the unemployed, low income status, and less educated. These characteristics are associated with low rates of participation in adult education (Briscoe & Ross, 1989).

The changing economic structure has a direct impact on the learning needs of adults. There is widespread agreement that the United States economy is enmeshed with the world economies, which has resulted in a global economy with unprecedented rates of

change. According to Petrella (1997), this economic globalization creates a human capital deficit that is a threat to the nation's competitiveness and to individual opportunities for American citizens. In order to be competitive in the global marketplace, business and industry must reduce production costs and improve the quality of the products. The competition for highly skilled workers is particularly keen. Business and industry specifically need persons who offer innovative methods for production of new products and services (Friedman, 1999; Reich, 2000).

Due to globalization, the literacy of workers has been placed under scrutiny. Limited literacy and technological skills are frequently depicted as the primary cause of a nation's poor economic performance (Castleton, 2002). The response to literacy problems is not only crucial to the economic vitality of the nation but to the individual's fulfillment and participation in society. Beyond literacy, Reich (2000) foresees the need for workers to possess a wide range of abilities to include interpersonal and communication skills, decision making and problem solving skills, capacity for flexibility and reflection, creative thinking, conflict resolution, and management skills. It will be necessary for workers to embrace the concept of lifelong learning. At the same time, businesses will need to ensure ongoing retraining for the workforce to remain viable competitors.

The third dimension, technology, has a strong influence on nearly all aspects of society and adult learning. Advances in technology have been instrumental in the transition from the industrial age to the information society, which has eliminated and created many jobs (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). Merriam and Calfarella (1999) propose that half of the training most professionals receive will be outdated in less than 5

years after they complete their educational program. An information explosion has accompanied the advancement of computer technologies. Information handling, which includes storage, transfer, and production, is increasingly characteristic of the workplace. Although technology was expected to reduce the number of employees, it has created a need for more workers to have the ability to manipulate data and produce information and services (Rojewski, 2002). One result is the diminishing need for word processing services while the demands for office specialists or the higher skill level professionals continues to grow. Clearly, technology has contributed to the increasing need of individuals to participate in adult education.

The nature of our society, which includes demographics, the global economy, and advances in technology, are strong forces affecting adult learning. There are older adults in the population and more cultural diversity than before in the nation's history. The United States economy has emerged to a world or global economy. Technology, in conjunction with the electronic information boom, has created dramatic changes in the workplace. In order to function competitively, employers and the workforce must respond to these rapid changes and highly technical environment through a commitment to continuous learning.

Dropout and Completion Rates

Despite a greater need for education in contemporary society, the high school completion rate has remained nearly constant for approximately 18 years. The National Center for Education Statistics (2005) reported that progress had been made in increasing the high school completion rates and reducing dropout rates between 1972 and 1987.

Since 1987, the rates have been comparatively stable. The high school completion rates are determined by the National Center for Education Statistics by determining the proportion of 18- through 24-year-olds who have completed a secondary diploma or an equivalent credential, which would include a GED. In 2000, 86.5% of this group had completed high school. Between 347,000 and 544,000 10th through 12th grade students did not complete a high school program over the past decade.

As alarming as these statistics are, other studies have reported that the high school completion rate is actually lower. The Manhattan Institute used a cohort method to calculate the rates, which tracked eighth-grade enrollments and compared them with diplomas awarded 5 years later. Yet another study, sponsored by the Business Roundtable, compared the number of diplomas awarded by secondary schools to the number of 17- or 18-year-olds in the United States. The Manhattan Institute study shows a national high school completion rate of 71% in 1998 while the Business Roundtable indicates a rate of 71.3% for the same year. In contrast, the National Center for Education Statistics reported an 85.7% completion rate for 1998 (see Appendix A for table of complete rates). The discrepancies are cited as the result of the states using varied definitions and data collection standards, not counting incarcerated students and omitting transient teenagers (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; NewsLeader, 2005).

Recent reports (Schwartzbeck, 2006) indicate that an increasing number of advocates for education reform have cited high rates of dropouts as an urgent problem. According to Schwartzbeck, the Manhattan Institute and other organizations have determined graduation rates are lower than people thought with only 70% overall and as low as 50% in low-income areas. Nationally, the graduation rate was 78% for white

students, 72% for Asian students, 55% for African-American students, and 53% for Hispanic students. This may suggest a greater need for GED preparation programs with specific outreach efforts and instructional accommodations for minority populations.

Labor Market Impact

There is much confusion concerning scope and scale of the dropout problem and the connection to the graduation rates. Regardless of the method used, large numbers of students drop out of high school on an annual basis. According to Sum and Pines (1997), the labor market situation for high school dropouts is bleak. Nearly 50% of the young people ages 17 to 24 who have not graduated from high school are unemployed or hold low paying jobs. African American and Hispanic youth have more limited opportunities for employment. While the Caucasian high school dropout has an employment rate of 38.3%, the African American dropout is only 22.4%. The wage data reveal that even those who attain employment are earning low wages. Only 36.1% of the full-time employed Caucasian dropouts and only 6.8% of the African American dropouts earn above poverty line salary. The U.S. Department of Labor Statistics (2001) reported those males and females ages 25 through 34 who did not complete high school earned nearly 30% less than their peers who had high school diplomas or GED certificates. Sum and Pines (1997) found that employment and wages increase with additional educational attainment. College graduates have an 83.2% employment rate which is more than two times the full-time employment rate of high school dropouts.

According to Tyler (2001), the acquisition of a GED credential can lead to a substantial impact on earnings for certain high school dropouts. The GED provides

economic benefits to those dropouts with low skills who earn up to 25% more than dropouts without GED certificates. However, the GED holders with higher level academic skills did not have an economic benefit. Tyler suggested that the improved labor market outcomes were due to the subsequent attainment of postsecondary education and training. Individuals who obtain GED certificates have been found to have greater probabilities of pursuing postsecondary education, which leads to increased wages. Therefore, the improved economic benefits appear over time. Tyler found a slight difference in income after a year, but 5 years later the GED recipients earned about \$1,200 more on an annual basis.

More recently, the Southern Regional Education Board (2007) reported a strong correlation of increased education attainment to higher earnings in the United States. In 2003, individuals with high school diplomas or with GED credentials earned up to 25% more than those individuals without. Individuals with associates' degrees earned an average of 54% more and individuals with bachelor's degrees earned an average of 77% more than those without GED credentials or high school diplomas. This suggests that more than ever, GED credentials and further education mean better income for adults.

Participation in Adult Education

Because participation in adult GED education is mostly voluntary, the providers of these educational opportunities need to understand who is participating, why they are participating, and what leads to greater participation. Knowledge about participation is important to federal, state, and local levels of government in regard to funding provisions

and economic health. Further, this knowledge concerning participation is critical to the educators who develop and implement adult GED education programs.

According to Wilkelund (1992), research and the development of theories concerning participation in adult education has been slow, “perhaps in part due to ambiguity in the development and definition of adult education as a discipline in the country, in part due to the growing recognition of the complexities of understanding adult learning and participation” (p. 7).

To further complicate understanding, the major studies and theories concerning participation broadly define the adult population and the educational activities. Most studies have included adults who were already high school and postsecondary graduates. Johnstone and Rivera (1965) defined an adult student as anyone at or over the age of 21 who was married or the head of the household and who participated in any full-time, part-time, or self-instructed educational activity. This landmark study consisted of a national random sample of almost 12,000 households and included adults who had obtained high school diplomas and postsecondary degrees. In fact, the study found that formal education had a positive correlation with participation in adult education. The typical adult education participants were profiled as just as often either gender, usually under the age of 40, had completed high school or more, had an above average income, employed full time, and were married and white. More recent studies have supported these findings while indicating a gradual, continuous increase of participation in adult education over the past several decades (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Using broad definitions of adult education, Aslanian and Brickell (1980) reported that 49% of adults were participating in education while Kim, Hagedom, and Williamson (2004) reported that nearly 67% of the

adult population took work-related courses within the past year of a survey of over 10,000 households across the nation. This suggests that the need for adult education is becoming more important.

However, adult education programs do not seem to be reaching enough of the individuals who need it the most. Only one out of 25 adults who did not complete high school pursue further education (Courtney, 1992). According to Courtney, the gap between economic classes in the United States appears to be widening and adult education may be a contributing factor to this phenomenon. Although adult education is commonly believed to be open to everyone, the reality of participation does not support this perception.

At times it appears more to resemble a club, of moderate to high exclusivity, whose entrance is on Main Street and thus visible to all, whose doors revolve for anyone to enter, but whose rules confront everyone once inside, beckoning some to advance further while rejecting many more as unworthy. (Courtney, 1992, p. 5)

Years later, Kim et al. (2004) continued to find that education, household income and employment were consistently associated with adult education participation. Prior educational attainment and higher levels of household income were associated with overall participation in adult education. Individuals who had the greatest need of further education were the least likely participants.

Adult Learning Theories

Knowles (1970) made a clear distinction between pedagogy, education for youth, and andragogy, education for adults. He said that central assumption of andragogy was the myriad of experiences that adults brought to the educational setting. As a result, he

suggested that adults were more problem-centered than subject-oriented and needed application of knowledge in their learning experiences. As another assumption of andragogy, Knowles wrote that the adult self-concept becomes more self-directing with maturity and less of a dependent personality. This leads to adults having a self-directing role in their education, which may involve diagnosis of their own learning needs and implementing the necessary learning experiences.

In the early 1960s, Howard Y. McClusky introduced the Theory of Margin to explain the characteristics of adult learners (Main, 1979). McClusky was especially concerned about the educational needs of rural people (Neal, 2007). The fundamental basis of his theory is that adulthood involves continuous growth, change, and integration, in which there is a constant effort to seek balance between the energy amount needed and energy available for the individual to meet their life responsibilities. McClusky's concept of this balance is a ratio of the load (L) of life, which uses energy, and the power (P) to carry the load. The remaining energy after load is divided by power, is a formula ($M = L/P$), which McClusky called the margin of life (Merriam & Caffarella 1999). The formula suggests that the greater amount of power in relationship to load, the more margin or cushion the adult has available. This surplus power provides a greater ability for the adult to handle the requirements of life. The less margin the adult possesses, the lower the adult ability to deal with load sources (Main, 1979).

McClusky further indicated, as cited in Main, that both load and power were comprised of external and internal interacting factors. The external load elements involved life tasks such as socioeconomic status, family, and career. He identified internal load factors that included goals, self-concept, and personal expectations. Power

elements consisted of external resources of family support and social and economic abilities. It also included internally acquired skills such as resiliency, physical stamina, mental reasoning and social abilities (Main, 1979). Therefore, according to McClusky, adults must have some margin of power to be able to simultaneously juggle multiple responsibilities and to engage in further education (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Jarvis (1987) asserts that the adult learning process begins with life situations or, specifically, experiences. However, he wrote that some experiences are routine and do not lead to learning. In order for the experience to result in learning, the process must involve reflective action or response. Jarvis was convinced that learning experience occurs with the context of social situations:

Life may be conceptualized as an ongoing phenomenon located within a social cultural milieu which is bounded by the temporality of birth and death. Throughout life, people are moving from social situation to social situation; sometimes in a social awareness but in other occasions in a taken for granted manner. (Jarvis, 1987, p. 64)

Jarvis's model of the learning process identified nine responses to potential learning situations and arranged these responses into a hierarchy of three levels. The first level contains three responses that do not result in learning. Presumption is a mechanical response, non-consideration involves a non-response, and rejection is an actual decision not to respond. The second level contains three responses that may result in a small amount of learning. Pre-conscious response involves daily living experiences, practice response consists of new skill acquisition or training, and memorization is a response to acquiring presented information. The third level contains three responses that results in the greatest change from experiences. The contemplation response is when a person

actually thinks about the learning experience, reflective practice response involves reflection and action or problem-solving and experiential learning response contains actual experimentation on the person's environment (Jarvis, 1987).

Clearly, several theorists differentiate between pedagogy and andragogy and attempt to distinguish the characteristics of adult learning. Although there is no single theory of adult learning, several models offer valuable insight into learning characteristics of adults and possible interactive forces. These differences in the way adults learn may not only imply needed differences in instructional practices, but also illuminate possible motivators and barriers to participation in adult education.

Motivation for Adult Learning

Investigation into the reasons for participating in adult learning was initiated by Houle (1961) and was elaborated by Boshier (1971) and Boshier and Collins (1985). Houle conducted interviews of 22 adults that explored educational background, factors affecting continued learning and their views of themselves. This research identified a typology of three learning orientations of adults: goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning-oriented. According to Houle, the goal-oriented learners use education as a vehicle for achieving some other goal. The activity-oriented adults participated for the sake of the activity. The learning-oriented learners were interested in knowledge for its own sake. Decades later, Kim et al. (2004) found that nearly two-thirds of adults took work-related courses within a 12-month period. Participants in work related courses most frequently reported maintaining or improving skills and knowledge as their reason for participation.

Boshier and Collins (1985) developed the Education Participation Scale (EPS) and conducted an extensive test of Houle's typology through cluster analysis of 13,442 responses. Boshier and Collins's work supported and expanded the typology into three cluster categories. They found that Cluster I consisted of cognitive interest items which loosely matched the learning-oriented learners. Although multi-faceted, Cluster II was congruent with the activity orientation and contained items of social stimulation, social contract, and external expectations. Cluster three involved professional advancement items and resembled Houle's goal orientation (1985).

Barriers to Adult Learning

Understanding the barriers to participation in adult education may be as important as understanding the motivations. Several researchers have clustered the reasons adults did not participate into types of barriers. Johnstone and Rivera (1965) identified potential barriers then placed into an external or situational category and an internal or dispositional category. The external barriers were those beyond the individuals' control such as lack of transportation. Internal barriers reflected the individuals' feelings or attitudes, such as believing their ability levels were too low to be successful. Dispositional barriers were cited more often by older people, while younger adults and females were more deterred by situational barriers. Cross (1981) argued that a third category existed, institutional barriers, which she said were the practices and procedures that discouraged participation. In addition, some theorists imply that gender differences in learning may result in barriers within traditional educational delivery methods.

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) agreed that situational and institutional barriers played a major role in nonparticipation, but they argued that dispositional barriers were divided into psychosocial and informational obstacles. The psychosocial obstacles include beliefs, attitudes, values and perceptions about education or personal views of oneself as a learner. The informational obstacles primarily involve the lack of awareness of the available educational opportunities. Darkenwald and colleagues developed the Deterrents to Participation Scale (1982) to analyze the underlying reasons for nonparticipation. In use with the general public, the scale revealed that six factors contributed to include: lack of confidence, time constraints, lack of course relevance, low personal priority, cost issues, and personal problems including child care, family concerns, and health.

Courtney (1992) cautioned against an exclusive focus on the psychological motivators and barriers of adult learning without consideration of the social context. It is important to understand the individual's involvement with the community and society to more completely understand adult learning barriers. Other researchers have supported this more complex view that combinations of psychological and social factors had an impact on participation. Cookson (1986) proposed an interdisciplinary framework that stressed the social dimension of participation with emphasis on the impact of ascribed social positions and roles. Darkenwald and Merriam (1992) point out the strong impact of socioeconomic status on nonparticipation. They contend that encouragement and requirement for further learning are directly related to socioeconomic status.

In a study of why females without high school diplomas chose not to participate, Hall and Donaldson (as cited by Merriam 1999) found an interaction between social and

psychological factors. Pre-adult circumstances of the parents' educational attainments, early pregnancies, and economic status were found to be the most common factors. Lack of a support system was rated as a second most common factor. Thirdly, the conventional barriers such as a lack of child care, time, and information were revealed. As a fourth dynamic, Hall and Donaldson defined a phenomenon termed "lack of voice": "At the heart of nonparticipation lies a deterrent so deeply embedded in some women that no theory can fully capture its meaning. The way a woman feels about herself, her self-esteem and self confidence, and the way she can express herself are significant elements in her decision about whether to participate in adult education" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.58).

Other theorists support the notion of psychological differences between females and males and may offer advancement in the understanding of issues and, perhaps barriers, about female adult learning. Gillian (1982) asserts that women's psychological development is linked to the importance of relationships. She emphasizes her concept of voice, which "speaks of the core of self" and is a "powerful psychological instrument and channel". Gillian implies that what a person doesn't say is just as important as what a person says. The value that females place on relationships may influence their decisions concerning participation in education as well as their perceptions of achievement. Gillian states:

...men and women may perceive danger in different social situations and construe danger in different ways-men seeing danger more often in close personal affiliation than in achievement and construing danger to arise from intimacy, women perceiving danger in impersonal achievement situations and construing danger to result from competitive success. (Gillian, 1982, p. 42)

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarkle (1986) found that the intellectual development of females appears to have distinctive differences from males. They identified five ways or stages of knowing for women with the first being silence. Many women seemed to have been silenced by their own families, and later by their spouses. This resulted in women feeling they had no voice, being punished for using words, and no right to think. Blind obedience to authorities was important to avoid trouble. The second stage is received knowledge, which revealed characteristics of women having little confidence in their own opinions and having a view of learning as returning the words of authorities. In the next stage of subjective knowledge, women make a breakthrough to respecting her opinions and a sense of voice arises. Then women may progress to the stage of procedural knowledge with elements of connected knowing, separate knowing, and emergence of the critical inner voice. Finally, the constructed knowledge stage is characterized by integration of the voices and recognition that both subjectivity and objectivity are important (Belenky et al.).

Models of Participation

It is evident that the underlying motivational factors and the barriers for adult learning are numerous and complex. As a result, several models have emerged in an effort to explain and predict participation in adult education. These models, as with most of the research, broadly define adult education participants and educational activities. According to Courtney (1992), there were roughly three groups of theory models: motivational orientations, life cycle theory, and decision models.

The motivational orientations research sprang from Houle's (1961) typology of learners that was expanded by Boshier and others. According to this perspective, the individuals' personality traits and temperaments play important roles in their participation in adult education. Therefore, the motivational orientations are attempts to describe the origin of learning need with a basis in psychology, rather than factors surrounding the actual decision to participate.

The life-cycle theories are derived from several independent studies that borrow concepts from Havighurst and other prominent life-cycle theorists. The fundamental idea, consistent with the assumptions of andragogy, is that developmental changes in an individual's life create needs, particularly in transitional phases. To cope with these life changes, the desire and need to obtain new knowledge occurs. Aslanian and Brickell (1980) and others relied on the origin of learning need to explain participation and examine to a limited extent the conditions influencing such decisions.

Theorists of decision models are more interested in the conditions influencing action than the origins of learning need. These models break down the conditions into different elements that include personal and psychological components and social and sociological issues. Courtney (1992) pointed out that personality factors were not necessarily dominant elements, because social structure and environmental factors played important roles in such models. Three leading decision model theorists are those of Miller (1967), Cross (1981), and Cookson (1986).

Miller (1967) provided one of the earliest explanations of participation with an attempt to link Maslow's hierarchy of needs with Lewin's force-field theory. Drawing from Maslow, Miller hypothesized that members of lower socioeconomic classes would

participate to improve basic skills for job-related reasons. On the other hand, the higher classes would seek education to satisfy self-actualization needs. From Lewin, Miller embraced the idea that negative and positive forces affected individuals' direction and that the total effect of such forces resulted in the decision to participate. Miller emphasizes the strength of negative and positive forces regarding education for vocational competence with the lower-lower-class level. Positive forces include survival needs, changing technology, safety needs in the female culture, and governmental attempts to change opportunity. The negative forces are identified as action-excitement orientation of the male culture, hostility to education, absence of immediate job opportunities, limited access, and weak family structure.

Building on the work of Miller and others, Cross (1981) produced the Chain-of-Response-Model. She based the model on the assumption that participation in adult learning was caused by a chain of responses to psychological and environmental factors. Although Cross viewed psychological factors as being more important than environmental factors, she was the first to incorporate life transitions and events in a participation model (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The model begins with the individual's self-evaluation, and then it incorporates attitudes about education, life transitions, the importance of goals and expectations, and information. The positioning of opportunities and barriers seems to indicate that removal of barriers will result in participation in adult education; however, for many people it will make no difference. Cross wrote that this is because motivation was weak in the first place, perhaps due to a poor self-evaluation.

In contrast, Cookson's (1986) ISSTAL model places more weight on the social dimension of participation. ISSTAL stands for 'interdisciplinary, sequential specificity, time allocation, life span and is based on David Horton Smith's model of social participation. Cookson argued that social participation in education was a lifelong pattern. People who participated in their 30s were likely to participate in later years as well. The model starts with external context that involves culture, climate, and social structures. Second in order of importance is the impact of social background and social roles on participation. Cookson asserts that perceptions of early schooling experience, socioeconomic status, perception of health, life cycle position, current occupational status, and even leisure style are influential factors. At this point in the model, there are four interactive components that are intellectual capacity, personality traits, retained information, and attitudinal dispositions. The last component of the model is represented by situational variables that surround the person's immediate situation and leads to the most specific decision to participate.

Summary of Literature Review

In summary, despite an increasing need for education in contemporary society, high school dropout rates have remained almost constant in recent years. GED tests were first developed in 1942 for military personnel who had not obtained high school diplomas. These tests have evolved through several revisions to reflect the changes in secondary education. In today's society, the forces of changing demographics, the globalization of economy, and the rapid technology advances are creating a need for the workforce to have more education. Legislators and educators have responded to this

need by providing substantial funding to adult literacy and GED preparation programs. Unfortunately, the people with the greatest need for education are the most likely not to participate.

In an effort to explain and predict participation in adult education, several investigative studies have been conducted and theoretical models have been hypothesized. Houle (1961) and Boshier and Collins (1985) contended that people were motivated to participate by three orientations: goals, activities and learning. Several researchers (Cookson, 1986; Courtney, 1992; Cross, 198; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Johnstone & Riveria, 1965) have investigated barriers to adult learning and have identified external, situational, and institutional barriers as three categories of barriers. Although models of participation have been developed (Cookson, 1986; Cross, 1981; Miller, 1967) research and testing have yet to determine the value of these models. However, these models contribute to the understanding of the interaction of variables that may influence a person's decision to enter adult education.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The majority of previous studies on participation in adult education have investigated a broad range of educational activities and educational levels of participants. Very little research exists on perceptions of high school drop-outs concerning participation in adult GED preparation programs. The focus of this study was to investigate the experiences of a purposeful sample of a targeted population of individuals in Southwest Virginia who chose to participate in GED preparation programs. This study contains valuable information for educators who are supervising adult education programs in the region to meet the needs of individuals who are eligible for services. In addition, individuals who participated in the study may have attained insights that are beneficial in overcoming obstacles and barriers in completion of their educational programs.

Qualitative Methodology

This research used qualitative methodology because this approach is the most appropriate for inquiry and research questions that are exploratory and descriptive in nature. Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2000) assert that “qualitative researchers assume there are aspects of reality that cannot be quantified. More particularly, they believe it is both possible and important to discover and understand how people make sense of what happens in their lives” (p.97). Understanding the reasons high school drop-

outs participate in GED preparation programs is a complex issue with a multitude of realities, views, and experiences that cannot be discovered fully through a quantitative approach. As characteristic of qualitative studies, the majority of the research occurred in the natural setting. This enabled the researcher to connect and capture detail regarding the actual experiences of the individuals in the study. The interactive method of data collection promoted credibility and rapport with the participants (Rossman & Rallis 1998). The objective of this study was not to generalize results to a broad population, but to gain an understanding of how individuals in a particular setting construct the meaning or reality of their experiences concerning motivators and barriers to participation in adult education.

Description of Southwest Virginia

The Southwest Virginia region is situated in the far western portion of the state that is adjacent to the Tennessee border with Kentucky and West Virginia touching the northern and western areas. The Washington County Chamber of Commerce touts the area as one of the best places in America to live with offerings of an excellent climate, education, economics, health care, arts and recreation. The leisure time activities include the Mount Rogers Recreation Area, Clinch Mountain Wildlife Area, South Holston Lake, Appalachian Trail, Virginia Creeper Trail, William King Arts Center, and Barter Theatre. Although sections of the region are considered part of the Tri-Cities Metro of Bristol, Kingsport and Johnson City, the area is approximately 90% rural (Virginia Employment Commission, 2000). Historically, the region's economic base was agricultural, with tobacco as the main crop. The mining industry provided an employment base in the

northern areas of Southwest Virginia. Over the past decade, agriculture has diminished to an industry with one of the lowest rates of employment with manufacturing, wholesale and retail sales, and services emerging as industries with the highest rates of employment (Virginia Employment Commission, 2002).

Southwest Virginia has extensive opportunities for postsecondary education and training. Several community colleges are located across the region, as well as two adult skill centers. The community colleges are Virginia Highlands Community College, Wytheville Community College, Southwest Virginia Community College, and Mountain Empire Community College. Residents have access to 4-year institutions and beyond to include Emory and Henry, University of Virginia at Wise, Virginia Intermont, Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, Radford College, Virginia Tech, and East Tennessee State University. However, in order to qualify for most postsecondary institutions, an applicant must possess a high school diploma or a GED. U.S. Census Data (2000) reveals that 34.7% of the region's populations of 25 years and over are without a high school diploma. In comparison, 19.6% of the nation's populations of 25 and over are without a high school diploma.

Description of Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education Program

The Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education Program (MRRRAEP) has been providing adult education services in the region of Southwest Virginia for 14 years. The program serves seven localities and public school divisions to include the cities of Bristol and Galax and the counties of Washington, Smyth, Wythe, Bland, and Grayson. The other sections of Southwest Virginia are served by adult education programs with

missions similar to those of Mount Rogers. The regional office is staffed by four employees and it recently re-located the regional office to the Virginia Highlands Community College Campus in Abingdon. The Washington County Public School system is the fiscal agent for the program. A representative from each locality serves on the Adult Education Advisory Board, which provides administrative guidance and meets on a quarterly basis. Funding for the program is attained from federal, state and local sources.

At the present time, 38 part-time teachers provide instruction at sites throughout the region. Student enrollment numbers fluctuate on a weekly basis, with each class serving between 5 and 10 students. The program served 625 students during the 2004-05 school year. Classrooms are located in schools, libraries, churches, and community centers. The classes are provided at no cost to the participants and usually meet twice a week for 3-hour blocks of time. Although most classes close for the summer, one or two remain open in each locality during the summer months to accommodate student needs.

The educational program offers three placement options, with delivery of three levels of instruction to include the GED Fast Track, GED Preparation, and Adult Basic Education. The GED Fast Track instruction is provided to students who have high scores in reading and mathematics as indicated by the Tests for Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessment. The students in this group are targeted to prepare for the GED tests within 90 days. The GED Preparation level of instruction is provided to those students with moderate scores in reading and mathematics. Students in this category are targeted to prepare for the GED tests within 180 days. The Adult Basic Education is provided to

students who have weak reading and mathematics scores and require remedial instruction prior to GED preparation.

In recent months, a transition class was implemented and located on the Wytheville Community College campus. This class is designed to assist completers of GED programs with academic skill attainment in order for participants to smoothly transition to postsecondary education.

Sample

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study. The purposeful sampling strategy was most appropriate for this study as in-depth information was needed from individuals meeting specific criteria. Purposeful sampling is beneficial when the objective of the study is to understand, discover and gain insight into particular situations (Merriam, 1998). In this case, the purpose was to better understand adult individuals who did not complete the requirements for a high school diploma and are eligible for GED preparation services.

The sample contained 36 individuals who were either participants or former participants of the Mt. Rogers Regional Adult Education programs. The sample size was sufficient for saturation with no new patterns emerging from interviews, which are parameters suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Interviews with the study participants occurred in a time frame of approximately 6 weeks. The on site interviews were conducted on five occasions during the evening. The interviews were conducted on December 17, 2007 at Fries Middle School; January 9, 2008 at Wytheville Community

College; January 16, 2008 at Galax Middle School; January 23, 2008 at the Crossroads Institute; and January 28, 2008 at Fries Middle School.

Twenty-six of the interviews were conducted at the Mt. Rogers Adult Regional program sites. Ten of the interviews were conducted by telephone as 6 of the individuals had dropped out of the program and 4 of the individuals had successfully completed the program. Several of the potential telephone participants, who had dropped out of the GED preparation program, appeared to be Hispanic as their names seemed to be of Spanish origins. However, contact with potential Hispanic participants was not able to be established. The entire 36 study individuals seemed to be Caucasian.

The program instructors were extremely accommodating to the researcher. They indicated interest in the research and the possible benefits for adult education programs. All of the instructors seemed to have a strong student-centered approach.

The study individuals were friendly and seemed very pleased to participate in the interviews. Some of the participants asked the researcher questions concerning a variety of topics. One participant requested that the researcher examine his special education records, which he had on hand, to determine if he would qualify for accommodations on the GED test battery.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews of the 24 individuals and 2 focus groups with 6 individuals in each group. The subjects in 12 individual interviews and the 2 focus groups were current participants in GED preparation programs in the Southwest Virginia region. In addition, interviews were conducted with 6 individuals

who dropped out and six individuals who completed the programs. This study involves development of detailed descriptions, integration of multiple perspectives, and discovery of how events are interpreted. These research aims are best addressed through research interviews. Semi-structured interviews are effective when specific information is needed from all the respondents (Weiss, 1994). The interviews were guided by pre-determined questions, but the exact wording or the order of questions, were indefinite. The questions were open-ended so that many replies were possible. This allowed flexibility in responding to emergent themes and new ideas that arose from the participants during the course of the interview.

Interview Guide

The following questions served as an interview guide, but were adapted in the actual interviews to simplify terminology for participants when needed. The interview questions were pilot tested with veteran adult education instructors and select adult students to insure clarity of the content. Their recommendations concerning the phrasing and readability were used to modify the research questions.

Questions for Current Program Participants:

1. Please describe your educational experiences so far.
2. How do you feel your educational experiences have affected your life?
3. What GED programs or instruction do you know about that are available?
4. How would participating in a GED program and having a GED credential help you?

5. What things are likely to keep you from participating in GED preparation program?
6. Who or what influenced you to participate?

Questions for Program Dropouts:

1. Please describe your educational experiences so far.
2. How do you feel your educational experiences have affected your life?
3. What GED programs or instruction do you know about that are available?
4. How would participating in a GED program and having a GED credential help you?
5. What things are keeping you from participating in GED preparation program?
6. Who or what influenced you to stop attending the program?

Questions for Program Completers:

1. Please describe your educational experiences so far.
2. How do you feel your educational experiences have affected your life?
3. What GED programs or instruction do you know about that are available?
4. How did participating in a GED program and having a GED credential help you?
5. What things influenced you to enter and complete the program?

Clarification and adaptation of these questions were provided if the respondent appeared to not understand the original phrasing. Instead of asking “describe your educational experiences”, the researcher often asked “What was school like for you?” Use of unfamiliar terminology was carefully avoided in an effort not to embarrass or intimidate participants.

Data Analysis

The issue-focused analysis approach was used to analyze individual interviews and focus group interviews. This approach involved four analytical processes to include coding, sorting, local integration, and inclusive integration. The coding and sorting process linked each individual's responses to concepts and categories. This process also used cross-case analysis to find any themes that may exist across the data. This involved transcript inspection of the interviews to identify recurrent concepts and themes. The concepts were then organized and integrated into sections of information or local integration in order to increase understanding of the data. Finally, the data underwent the inclusive integration stage to place the information in a framework that led to a general conclusion. This consisted of development of a framework that was inclusive of all the analyses important to the study with logical movement from area to area.

Trustworthiness of the Data

The trustworthiness of the data was established by using four considerations recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is addressed through specific activities that promote credible findings that are derived from the data. Credibility in this study was established through persistent observations and member checks that involve assessment and interpretation of the data. Transferability, or the extent the findings may be generalized to other situations, was achieved by thick, rich description. The thick, rich

description permitted the comparisons that the research situation may match another situation. Dependability was supported through the development of an audit trail, which provided confirmation of findings. Confirmability of the study involved substantiating and corroborating the results. This was achieved by evaluation of the degree of researcher bias and check of researcher effects.

Summary

Qualitative methodology involving individual interviews and focus groups was selected in order to obtain in-depth information from the subjects that cannot be discovered through the quantitative process. The 24 individuals and the 2 focus groups were selected through purposeful sampling. The subjects were adults who are participants, completers, and dropouts of GED preparation programs in the region of Southwest Virginia. Analysis of data consisted of the issue-focused approach and involved four analytical processes to include coding, sorting, local integration, and inclusive integration. The trustworthiness of the data was established by using credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

CHAPTER 4

PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

The data that were gathered from interviews of the study participants as they relate to guiding focus questions are reflected in this chapter. The research questions addressed the perceptions of high school dropouts regarding reasons they participate in GED preparation programs and how their perceptions, feelings, experiences and attitudes have impacted decisions to access available educational programs.

Interviews of Dropouts of Adult Education Programs

Interviews were conducted by telephone with six individuals who had ceased to attend GED preparation programs. Five core categories were generated from the initial coding and sorting procedure: perceptions of school experiences, affect of educational experiences, knowledge of available adult programs, perceived advantages of GED acquisitions, and deterrents to participation. A more extensive coding process resulted in identification of 21 sub-categories (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Coding Categories: Dropouts from Adult Education Programs

- 1.0 Perceptions of School Experiences
 - 1.1 Perception of High School
 - 1.2 Reasons for Quitting
 - 1.3 Perception of Adult Education
- 2.0 Affect of Educational Experiences
 - 2.1 Quality of Life
 - 2.1.1 Difficult to Acquire Employment
 - 2.1.2 Inadequate Salary

- 2.1.3 Dependency on Others
- 2.2 Lowered Self-Esteem
 - 2.2.1 Depression
 - 2.2.2 Considered Unintelligent by Others
- 3.0 Knowledge of Available Adult Programs
 - 3.1 Limited Awareness of Opportunities
 - 3.2 Broad Awareness of Programs
- 4.0 Perceived Advantages of GED Acquisition
 - 4.1 Better Job/Increased Salary and Benefits
 - 4.2 Improve Self-Esteem
 - 4.3 Prove Others Wrong
 - 4.4 Eliminate Public Assistance
 - 4.5 Enable Participation in Post-Secondary Education
- 5.0 Deterrents to Participation
 - 5.1 Family or Medical Issues
 - 5.2 Lack of Transportation
 - 5.3 Not Motivated
 - 5.4 Lack of Time

School Experiences of Program Dropouts

There was some variability in high school participation among the study participants. One female believes she may have completed the 9th or 10th grade, one female dropped out in the 8th grade, 2 people dropped out sometime in their 11th grade year, and 2 people quit during their senior year. All of the individuals attended a GED preparation program for periods of approximately 1 month to nearly a year before quitting. Five of the 6 individuals have intentions of re-entering an adult education program after resolving various issues.

Reasons for quitting high school among the study participants varied as well. Melody's mother died when she was 8 years old. She described her high school experiences with one word: "Rough!" When asked to explain, she said that she had foster care placements in several states and "couldn't finish high school" because "everyone thought I was dumb". Zola also attended several schools and indicated that the

inconsistency in her education caused her teachers to say that she was “stupid and mentally retarded”. Two of the male subjects “had trouble with teachers” or “didn’t get along with teachers” and were expelled from high school in their senior year. Both the other female and male subject reported that they felt “out of place” or “didn’t fit in” the high school environment.

Although the individuals indicated overall negative perceptions concerning their high school experiences, they had positive comments concerning their adult education participation. Christina stated that the “teachers really care about you and want to help”. While Melody expressed pride because she had “made the GED yearbook and my counselor made copies for everyone”.

Effects of Educational Experiences

The second research question focused on the affect of the participants’ educational experiences on their lives. The responses were coded under categories of quality of life and self-esteem. The study participants related information concerning difficulty in obtaining employment, inadequate salary and dependency on others, all of which impacted their quality of life. Due to the lack of a high school diploma or GED, four of the six individuals indicated difficulty getting a job. Mark stated that “The first thing they want to know is if you have a diploma or a GED. You find out pretty quick that you’re not gonna get the job.” Four of the participants reported having employment, but those jobs were part-time positions, did not have health insurance benefits, did not have job security, or had a low hourly rate of pay. Christina related that she worked part-time at the Pizza Hut and was not assured of employment beyond a weekly schedule.

She depends on her mother to assist with transportation and she hasn't "been to the doctor in years 'cause I can't afford it." Melody doesn't have any employment and depends solely on "social services" for financial and medical assistance. As a result of current incarceration, William is not employed. He expects that he will have "a hellava time getting a job now".

Several of the participants' responses also indicated lowered self-esteem that they associated with the lack of success in school. Steven related that he "took the ASVAB so I could enlist in the military. But, I didn't go to West Virginia for the final testing because I didn't have any confidence in myself". William, who is incarcerated, indicated that his "trouble with teachers" made him "bitter" and "discouraged". Melody reports that her failures in school led to struggles with depression and severe weight gain. After passing four of the five GED subtests, she "lost 131 pounds" and is "now a size 18". Zola is convinced that she would "never be able to do math" and that's her "greatest fear".

Knowledge of Available Programs

Most of the participants, five out of six, had limited knowledge of the availability of GED preparation programs. They were aware of one or two site locations, but were unfamiliar with the optional site locations and schedules. Christina was knowledgeable about the regional GED class options and locations. Four of the participants learned of the programs through family members or friends, one learned of the programs through the Virginia Employment Commission, and one through Social Services.

Perceived Advantages

All of the participants perceived that attainment of a GED would help them either obtain employment, full-time employment, or better employment with increased salary and benefits. In addition, three of the participants mentioned that attainment of a GED would enable them to attend a community college or attain higher levels of education. Melody indicated that having a GED would help her “get away from Social Services and prove everyone wrong”. Two participants perceived a positive impact on their self-esteem with the statements that a GED would “build-up my confidence” and “help me gain confidence”.

Deterrents to Participation

Three of the participants indicated that family circumstances and issues prevented them from attending the GED preparation programs. Christina said “I had to drop-out to take care of my granddaughter. I have to take her to lots of after-school activities, you know, ball games and cheerleading.” Melody reports that “I was in and out of court trying to get my baby back from Social Services, foster care. They diagnosed me as bipolar and I had to get my medication regulated before I can go back to class”. Steven stated that “I’m just not motivated right now. I got into some trouble and that seemed to be the most pressing issue, had to deal with problems first”. William also indicated a lack of motivation. He related that “I know I can take classes in jail, but I can’t get going yet”. Zola related that her husband didn’t have a “regular job” so she had to work full-time to support the family and didn’t have time to attend the program.

Interviews of Completers of Adult Education Programs

Six individuals who had successfully completed a GED preparation program and had attained a GED credential were interviewed. Two of the individuals were interviewed in person at a “Transition Class”, which was located on a community college campus. The purpose of the “Transition Class” is to prepare adults with a GED to pass the required placement tests to enter community college programs of study. The remaining four individuals were interviewed by telephone. The initial coding and sorting process resulted in the generation of five core categories: perceptions of school experiences, affect of educational experiences, perceived advantages of GED acquisition, and motivators to participation. Twenty-two sub-categories were identified as a result of more extensive coding (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Coding Categories: Completers of Adult Education Programs

- 4.0 Perceptions of School Experiences
 - 4.1 Perception of High School
 - 4.2 Reasons for Quitting
 - 4.3 Perception of Adult Education
- 5.0 Affect of Educational Experiences
 - 5.1 Quality of Life
 - 5.1.1 Inability to Acquire Postsecondary Education
 - 5.1.1 Difficult to Acquire Employment
 - 5.1.2 Inadequate Salary and Benefits
 - 5.1.3 Dependency on Others
 - 5.2 Lowered Self-Esteem
 - 5.2.1 Involvement in Drugs
 - 5.2.2 Poor Self-Image
 - 5.2.3 Lack of Friends
- 6.0 Knowledge of Available Adult Programs
 - 6.1 Limited Awareness of Opportunities
 - 6.2 Broad Awareness of Programs
- 4.0 Perceived Advantages of GED Acquisition
 - 4.1 Enable Participation in Postsecondary Education

- 4.1 Better Job or Increased Salary and Benefits
- 4.2 Increase Self-Esteem and Confidence
- 4.3 Role Model for Others
- 4.4 Better Person
- 5.0 Motivators to Participation
 - 5.1 Desire for Better Employment
 - 5.2 Influenced by Someone
 - 5.3 Fulfill Dreams

School Experiences of Program Completers

The study participants indicated various points in their secondary experiences in which they dropped out of school. Nicole left public school in the 9th grade because “the teachers made it hard for me” and her parents’ then provided home instruction through a religious exemption. Shelia “enjoyed” high school, but “quit in the 10th grade to get married”. Jenny stated that she loved elementary school, but was “hit-on” by a female teacher in high school. Although her family physician prescribed home-bound instruction, the school system denied the request. She also stated that she “didn’t have any friends” and “stayed by myself”. Jenny then dropped out of school in her senior year. Robert reported being “kicked out of school three times” before quitting in the 10th grade. He stated that “It was all my fault. I was running with the wrong crowd and got into trouble.” In addition, his parents had dropped out of school and didn’t provide any support or encouragement. Mark only lacked two credits to graduate when he dropped out of high school. He indicated that he “hated school” and was “not the school type”. He liked “hands-on classes, like Auto Tech and gym”. Lynn perceived that “the teachers were bad”. Her parents had “dropped out of school” and didn’t provide encouragement. When asked what she meant by bad teachers, she replied “They didn’t care and wouldn’t help”.

All of the individuals expressed regret in not completing high school. Robert stated that he “sees the importance of having an education” and “a high school diploma wasn’t needed in the past, but it’s essential now”.

Although the study participants mostly related negative comments regarding their experiences in high school, they had positive views about their adult education programs. Mark stated that “the teachers really care about you” and “you start out with a clean slate”. Nicole indicated that the smaller class size enables the teachers to provide more individualized instruction.

Effects of Educational Experiences

The next research question requested the study participants to describe the effect of their education experiences on their lives. The information was coded into categories of quality of life and self-esteem. The participants’ responses indicated inability to acquire postsecondary education, difficulty in acquiring employment, inadequate salary and benefits, and dependency on others as factors that impacted their quality of life. The lack of a high school diploma caused four of the six participants to be unable to enroll in a postsecondary program. Mark stated:

“It held me back not to have a high school diploma. I want to get training in electricity and plumbing at the community college, but they wouldn’t let me without a diploma. It was one of those kick yourself in the ass kind of things.”

Five of the individuals indicated that without a high school diploma they could not obtain employment or had much difficulty in obtaining employment. Three individuals discussed insufficient employment with low hourly wages, part-time

positions, or lack of medical benefits. Nicole shared that she lived with her grandparents as she was unable to afford housing.

According to the participants' responses, the lack of a diploma and their school experiences led to lowered self-esteem. Tiffany "felt different from the other kids" and "did drugs". When asked how she felt different, she responded "I felt more mature than everyone else". She also reported that she "didn't have friends and stayed by herself", which led to poor attendance because she "didn't want to go school". Shelia stated that she "didn't have any confidence" in her academic ability. She seemed very concerned that her two children "saw me as a drop-out".

Knowledge of Available Programs

Most of the participants seemed to have an understanding of the availability of some of the adult education programs including the local site locations and schedules. Mark emphasized the advantage of GED preparation programs being provided at no cost to the students:

"In Virginia, GED classes are all free. Back in Michigan, the GED is 300 bucks. There was no way I could get it. I didn't have the extra money."

Tiffany attained her GED preparation through the school division's Individual Student Alternative Education Plan program and successfully acquired her GED credential. The program teachers informed her about the transition class at the community college.

Perceived Advantages

All of the participants indicated that the attainment of the GED credential was beneficial. Four of the six participants responded that the GED would enable them to attend a community college, a university, or post-secondary technical school. Robert plans “to take basic classes at the community college, then transfer to a mortician school.” All of the individuals discussed that having a GED helped them with employment opportunities or increased salary and benefits. Four of the participants indicated that having a GED helped “build confidence” or helped them “feel better” about themselves. Jenny stated that “It makes me happy that my children know I’m no longer a total high school dropout. This will help them stay in school, too.” Tiffany said “It helped me be a better person.” When asked what she meant by “better person”, she responded “It helps me mentally to have education and I can help others like me”.

Motivators

The study participants’ responses were coded into three sub-categories of perceptions of influences to entering and completing a GED preparation program: desire for better employment, influenced by someone, and fulfill dreams.

All of the participants indicated that they were influenced or at least partially motivated by the desire for better employment opportunities. Mark stated:

“I got a big flame under my ass when I found out about the money in electrical and plumbing. I knew I had to get more education so I could open my own electrical business.”

Tiffany related that her high school principal encouraged her to enroll in the GED preparation program that was provided through the school system. Shelia indicated that her mother influenced her decision to attain a GED:

“My mom motivated me years ago. No child in our family had ever completed high school and she wanted me to get my GED. She died, but I followed up on her wishes and got my GED.”

Interviews of Current Participants of Adult Education

The interviews of the current participants of GED preparation programs consisted of 24 study individuals. Twelve of the study participants were interviewed one-on-one at three program sites. Two of these sites were located at middle schools while the third site was at a community college off-campus facility. The remaining twelve individuals participated in 2 focus groups with 6 individuals in each group. One focus group interview took place at a middle school site, while the other group interview was conducted at a community college off-campus facility.

The initial coding and sorting process resulted in the generation of six core categories that included: perceptions of school experiences, affect of educational experiences, perceived advantages of GED acquisition, deterrents to participation and motivators to participation. Thirty-nine sub-categories were determined as a result of more extensive coding (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Coding Categories: Current Participants of Adult Education

1.0 Perceptions of School Experiences

1.1 Perception of High School

- 1.2 Reasons for Quitting
- 1.3 Perception of Adult Education
- 2.0 Affect of Educational Experiences
 - 2.1 Quality of Life
 - 2.1.1 Difficult to Acquire Employment
 - 2.1.2 Inadequate Salary and Benefits
 - 2.1.3 Menial Jobs
 - 2.1.4 Inability to Enlist in Military
 - 2.1.5 Inability to Acquire Postsecondary Education
 - 2.2 Lowered Self-Esteem
 - 2.2.1 Embarrassment
 - 2.2.2 Condescending Attitude from Others
 - 2.2.3 Lack of Respect from Children
 - 2.2.4 Discouragement to Pursue Jobs
- 3.0 Knowledge of Available Adult Programs
 - 3.1 Limited Awareness of Opportunities
 - 3.2 Adequate Awareness of Programs
- 4.0 Perceived Advantages of GED Acquisition
 - 4.1 Obtain Employment
 - 4.2 Better Job or Increased Salary and Benefits
 - 4.3 Enable to Retain Employment
 - 4.4 Personal Satisfaction
 - 4.5 Improve Academic Functioning
 - 4.6 Increase Understanding of the World
 - 4.7 Role Model for Children
 - 4.8 Enable Entrance to Military
 - 4.9 Enter Postsecondary Education
 - 4.10 Feel Better About Self
- 5.0 Deterrents to Participation
 - 5.1 Lack of Time
 - 5.2 Lack of Family Support
 - 5.3 Transportation
 - 5.4 Work Schedule
 - 5.5 Medical Issues
 - 5.6 Dislike Adult Education Teacher
- 6.0 Motivators to Participation
 - 6.1 Desire for Better Employment
 - 6.2 Required by Employer
 - 6.3 Need to Obtain Employment
 - 6.4 Encouraged by Virginia Employment Commission
 - 6.5 Prove Husband Wrong
 - 6.6 Encouragement from Others
 - 6.7. Prove to Myself or Feel Better

School Experiences of Current Participants

There was variability in high school participation among the study participants with only one individual dropping out in the 8th grade. The remaining individuals dropped out during various times in grades 9 through 12. Ellen related:

“I loved to go to school and went everyday. I had to quit in the middle of the 9th grade to help Mother. Dad had died and there was no help from welfare. I had to get a job to help.”

Five of the study participants indicated that they dropped out of high school in order to get married. Samantha related that she was 16 years old when she dropped out of school:

“I was pregnant at 15, then again at 16. While everyone else was at the prom, I was getting married.” Six of the participants ceased to attend because they had difficulties with school personnel with statements such as “I didn’t get along with the teachers” or “the teachers were mean”. Barbara indicated that she didn’t feel comfortable in school and stated:

“I finished the 9th grade, but didn’t go on to the 10th. I did real good. The reason I quit was I just couldn’t get up in front of the class. Had a fear of talking in front of the class. Looks like the teachers would have seen that and helped me.”

Brandy perceived that high school was “not good” because “the teachers and students were rude”. Jacob indicated that he had to “take care of family problems” and “school was “so boring” he would “fall asleep in class”. Several of the study participants related that high school teachers didn’t provide individual assistance in the classroom. Some of the participants perceived that the lack of individual assistance was due to the large number of students in the classroom. While others perceived that the teachers “just

didn't care" or "didn't understand learning problems". The individuals in one focus group emphasized the "problems of peer pressure", "harassment from other students", and "teachers wouldn't help and made you feel stupid" in the high school environment.

Most of the study individuals viewed participation in the GED preparation programs as positive experiences. They viewed the instructors as "willing to help" and being "flexible". Adam stated:

"GED classes are different than high school. The teacher is able to teach you what you need to work on. Now, I'm working on one thing, the writing. To focus on one thing helps. Also, the teacher explains stuff in simpler form. She doesn't use proper language and you get a different meaning out of things."

The participants in one focus group discussed atmosphere in the GED preparation program environment. The group stated that they were "treated like family", "didn't have to worry about what you're wearing", and "no one makes fun of you". However, two of the study participants perceived a GED instructor as "not wanting to help" and "just wanted us to hurry up and leave". Both individuals ceased to attend that particular GED preparation program and enrolled in another program.

Effects of Educational Experiences

The second research question targeted the affect of the participants' educational experiences on their lives. In consistency with the program dropouts and the program completers study participants, the responses were coded under categories of quality of life and self-esteem. Under the category of quality of life, the study participants related information concerning difficulty in acquiring employment, inadequate salary and benefits, menial jobs, inability to enlist in the military, and inability to acquire

postsecondary education. Peggy indicated that the lack of a high school diploma or a GED affected her life “a great deal”. She was “only able to get work in factories” and the “factories kept closing”. Peggy attributes her inability to “get out of an abusive marriage” to not completing her education and not being able to find adequate employment. Wanda stated similar circumstances:

“It is hard to get a job. Then, when I got a job, they would shut down. I worked at the sewing factory and they shut down, then worked at Dana Corporation and they shut down. The companies kept closing.”

Jacob wanted to enlist in the military in order to learn mechanic skills, but was “turned away” because he didn’t complete high school or have a GED certificate. He related that “if you ain’t got a GED, you can’t make \$6.00 an hour and it’s not enough to live”.

Several of the participants indicated that the lack of a high school diploma or a GED lowered their self-esteem. In one focus group, Daniel related that he felt “embarrassed” when seeking jobs and revealing his lack of a diploma or GED. He stated that employers “looked down on me”. The other focus group participants agreed that they too felt embarrassment and avoided providing their educational information to others. In addition, three of the individuals perceived condescending attitudes from their friends and family members. Maggie believes that her teenage children lack respect for her and fears they will not complete high school as well. Kathy and Joyce related that “it’s discouraging” to be unable to obtain employment and “you get to the point you don’t even try”.

Knowledge of Available Programs

Several of the study participants seemed to have good awareness of the GED preparation programs in their communities. Eight of the individuals and seven members of the focus groups related that they learned of the programs through family members or friends. One person “saw the phone number at social services”, three people were referred by the Virginia Employment Commission, one person “saw a newspaper ad”, one person was referred by his employer, and a homebound teacher provided the information to one individual. Two participants didn’t recall how they learned of the program and seemed to be unaware of any other program options.

Perceived Advantages

Each of the study participants related that attainment of the GED credential would be beneficial. Twenty-two out of the 24 individuals and focus group members indicated employment related advantages, such as to be able to obtain employment, to acquire a better job, to be able to retain current employment, or to be able to enter the military.

Wanda stated:

“This will help me get a better job. Right now, I work 33 hours a week at Food City, in the deli. Of course, they won’t let me work more hours cause they’d have to give benefits.”

However, two of the participants did not mention employment related benefits. One focus group member emphasized “I’m just a homemaker, so this is for person satisfaction”. The other participant stated, “I want to prove to my kids that education is important”.

Several of the participants stated more than one advantage of having a GED. They discussed improvement of academic functioning, ability to enter postsecondary programs of study, increase understanding of the world, and “to feel better about myself”.

Deterrents to Participation

Four of the study participants indicated that lack of time was an obstacle to attendance of the GED preparation program. In a focus group, Wendy and Janet discussed the family responsibilities that required much of their time. Wendy has “two kids in school” and “making sure they’ve got everything they need is my first priority”. Janet agreed and stated that “it’s harder when you have children to take care of”. While Barbara related that her husband’s illness created time issues:

“The only thing that’ll keep me away is no time. My husband has had two heart attacks and I have to stay with him a lot. If he gets worse, I might have to quit.”

Lilly indicated a lack of time due to her care giving responsibilities and “enjoying spending time” with her grandchildren.

Three of the participants perceived the lack of family support as a hindrance to attending the program and acquiring the GED credential. Peggy indicated that her husband was strongly opposed to her efforts to attain a GED. She stated that her husband “was an alcoholic”, “verbally abusive” and “said the GED wouldn’t do any good”. Johnny, a focus group participant, indicated that his parents did not complete high school and were not supportive of his efforts to acquire a GED. Jacob did not reveal any details beyond “family problems”.

Only three of the study participants indicated that their work schedules interfered with class attendance. Randall, a focus group member, discussed being the “last one hired”. His work schedule changes frequently as he is required to “fill in” for other employees. Although work schedules sometimes conflicted with class schedules, the participants liked the evening class schedule. They also emphasized the willingness of the teachers to accommodate absences by sending study materials home and providing extra assistance.

Due to surgery, one individual was unable to attend class for a few weeks. Brandy indicated that she didn’t have a driver’s license so the lack of transportation was the only obstacle to her continued attendance. One individual emphasized gasoline costs as a problem. Another indicated that she didn’t own a vehicle and had to depend on others for transportation.

The individuals, who had changed classes because they “didn’t like the teacher”, indicated that an obstacle to completion of the program would be problems with the teacher. The remaining study participants stated that they “couldn’t think of anything”, “nothing will stop me”, and “nothing will keep me from getting the GED”.

Motivators to Participation

The study participant’s responses were coded into seven sub-categories of influences to participation in GED preparation programs: desire for better employment, required by employer, need to obtain employment, encouraged by the Virginia Employment Commission, prove others wrong, encouragement from others, and prove to myself and feel better about myself.

Twenty-two of the 24 study individuals indicated employment or something related to employment as at least one of the reasons or motivators to their participation in the programs. Joyce discussed being unemployed and the need for a GED solely to obtain a job:

“I lost my job because the company laid off. I want to get a GED to get a job. Everyone wants you to have a high school diploma or a GED.”

Eve, also, was influenced to pursue a GED solely due to the lack of employment. She stated that her “husband’s business closed” then she couldn’t find a job. While Barbara views obtaining employment as less important:

“The main reason is for myself. I always wanted to finish. My husband and friends encouraged me, too. And, I can’t get another job without it.”

In one focus group, Kathy and Daniel, who are married to each other, discussed their primary motivation of “proving to people that we can make it”. They also perceived that that attaining a GED “will make us feel better about ourselves”. Kathy and Daniel emphasized that they would see job advertisements in the newspaper but “there was no use to apply” because “all required a GED”.

Wendy stated that obtaining employment was the initial influence to enter the program, but her children motivated her to continue:

“My children are proud of me for taking this step. I didn’t think they would be at first, they really didn’t say anything when I told them. Later though, they started telling people how proud they were of me.”

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Introduction

The analysis of data resulted in the emergence of five themes that were consistently recurrent from the study participants' responses. These themes are negative perceptions of early schooling experiences, detrimental impact on quality of life and self-esteem, informal awareness of available programs, employment-related motivators to participation and situational deterrents to participation.

Negative Perceptions of Early Schooling

The issues of negative early school experiences were evident across all groups of current program participants, program drop-outs, and program completers. Cookson (1986) asserts that the social dimension of participation, which includes perceptions of early schooling experience, has an impact on the decision to participate in adult education. The lack of family support and encouragement during the early school years was prevalent among the study individuals. Inconsistency and instability in the home environment with limited emphasis on educational achievement was implied by several of the participants. Many of the individuals had family situations of single parent homes, death of one or more parents, foster care placements, parental alcoholism or drug use, or parents who did not complete high school.

Another recurring perception regarding early school experiences was the lack of positive relationships with teachers or any other school personnel. Not one of the study

participants indicated a positive influence or connection with a particular teacher. Several of the individuals perceived their teachers as unwilling to provide assistance, uncaring, or unable to understand student learning problems. In contrast, the study participants viewed their GED program instructors as willing to provide individual assistance, genuinely caring, and able to differentiate instruction.

Additionally, a recurrent perception of early school experiences was poor academic performance. Many of the study participants indicated retention in at least one grade in school or having difficulty with the content or coursework.

Detrimental Impact on Quality of Life and Self-Esteem

The lack of a high school diploma or GED credential had a detrimental impact on the study participants' quality of life. The individuals had a lowered quality of life due to inadequate incomes. They often had difficulty in acquiring employment, had to settle for low paying jobs or part-time positions, and lacked medical benefits. In addition, several of the participants were unable to acquire postsecondary education or training as they did not possess the enrollment requirements. As a result of inadequate income, several individuals were unable to function independently as they depended on financial assistance from social services or family members.

The lack of successful completion of secondary education seems to have strongly contributed to lowered self-esteem among many of the participants. They expressed feeling like failures with less academic ability than other people. Several of the participants related that not completing or succeeding in school led to their lowered self-confidence. According to Cross (1981), psychological factors are more important than

environmental factors in participation of adult learning. This research seems to support her Chain of Response Model that identifies self-evaluation and attitudes about education as the initial factors in participation decisions.

Informal Awareness of Available Programs

The participants in this study had limited knowledge of the availability of GED preparation programs and other adult education opportunities. Many of the individuals were only aware of the site they were attending. However, this study revealed that nearly all the participants learned of adult education services through informal means such as word of mouth from family members or friends. Darkenwald and Merreiam (1982) argue that informational obstacles play a major role in non-participation. This study indicates a lack of information concerning adult education services in the region.

Employment Related Motivators to Participation

Overwhelming the study participants perceived that GED credential attainment would result in employment-related advantages. These perceptions of employment-related advantages influenced the study individuals to participate in GED preparation programs. Johnstone and Rivera (1965) first uncovered the strong impact of employment-related motivators. They found that 36% of respondents were participating in adult education to prepare “for a new job or occupation” and 32% were participating “for the job I held” (p. 144). Miller (1967) explains the work related motivation to participate by connection with the positive force of survival needs. Cross (1982) also

recognized the linkage between the individual's work life and his or her decision to participate in adult education. She explains this as a rational relationship:

“People who do not have good jobs are interested in further education to get better jobs, and those who have good jobs would like to advance them. Women, factory workers, and the poorly educated, for example, are more likely to be pursuing education in order to prepare for new jobs.” (p.91)

Although the study individuals' primary reasons for participation in adult education were employment-related, they indicated several secondary benefits and motivators. A prominent recurrent perception, particularly among the female participants, was the need to improve their self-esteem and feel better about themselves. They indicated that it was important to prove to others that they were able to accomplish academic success. However, the female participants seemed to have difficulty expressing their feelings concerning their lack of self-confidence and the need to “prove” themselves. This “lack of voice” dynamic as identified by Hall and Donaldson (as cited by Merriam 1999) seems to be a prevalent phenomenon among the females in the Southwest Virginia region.

Situational Deterrents to Participation

The study individuals related information concerning several situational barriers to their GED preparation program participation. Johnstone and Rivera (1965) were first to identify a category of external or situational barriers which was later supported by Cross (1982), Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), and others. These researchers agree that situational barriers play a major role in the nonparticipation in adult education.

This study revealed several situational deterrents to GED preparation program participation in the region. The most prevalent situational barrier was lack of time due primarily to family responsibilities of caring for children. Another common situational barrier was transportation related issues that included lack of drivers' license, fuel costs, and lack of a vehicle. Varied other situational deterrents were perceived to include work schedules and medical issues.

Recommendations to Improve Practice

The findings of this study suggest practical implications for public school and adult educators who strive to increase student completion of secondary education or participation in GED preparation programs.

The results of the study revealed the participants' lack of positive relationships or personal connection within the public school environment. Often the individuals lacked personal support from a parent or family member as well. This has significant meaning for the public school and adult education support structures for at-risk students. The public school systems should ensure that at-risk students have opportunities for supportive relationships within the school environment. This could be accomplished through the development and implementation of effective mentoring programs beginning in the early school years. At the secondary level, guidance counselors should be assigned to follow cohorts of students rather than to specific grade levels in an effort to establish stronger relationships. In the adult programs, the student teacher ratio should be low and

the teacher should possess nurturing and compassionate qualities in order to provide supportive relationships.

Further, the results of this study revealed that many of the participants have negative feelings concerning early school experiences. The adult GED preparation programs are typically located in the public school facilities and in traditional classroom settings. Adults may not elect to return to an environment with overwhelming connotations of failure. Interestingly, the two individuals who were participating in an alternate setting, the transition class on a community college campus, seemed to have a better self-concept than the other participants. They exhibited more confident tone of voice and body language. They also made more positive statements and seemed to have a brighter outlook on the future. Adult GED preparation programs may increase participation from selecting alternate classroom sites, such as a community college campus, to deliver instructional services.

This study also uncovered the participants' lack of formal information regarding opportunities and availability for adult education. Participants had mostly learned of the GED preparation programs by word of mouth sources or by trial and error situations in job seeking. Adult education providers may increase program participation by implementation of effective recruitment and outreach strategies. These strategies should include a multi-media approach to provide information regarding available services and benefits to participants. The Hispanic population may be better accommodated by locating of classroom sites at Spanish churches and by providing instruction in native languages. Additionally, recruitment efforts should specifically address the female

phenomenon of “lack of voice” by emphasizing a positive correlation between increased educational attainment and improved career opportunities for women.

Finally, this study revealed the overwhelming perception that attainment of the GED credential would result in employment-related advantages. These perceptions influenced the study individuals to enroll and attend GED preparation programs. In order to increase and enhance participation in adult education, comprehensive marketing strategies should be used to promote the GED benefits of higher potential wages, opportunities for higher education and training, and better employment options.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was limited in its scope. The study encompassed GED preparation programs within one region of Virginia. Within those programs, selected individuals were participants in the study. Despite these limitations, valuable information was gleaned from the study participants. The perceptions and experiences of the study individuals shed new light on issues surrounding participation in adult education.

Although the findings from this study offer fresh insights, expanded research would be beneficial in understanding the complex issues of adult decisions to participate in education. Further investigation should be conducted regarding the impact of GED preparation program site locations on participation. This study revealed negative perceptions toward early schooling experiences; however, the majority of GED preparation classrooms are located on public school sites. The study seemed to indicate a more positive attitude from individuals who attended an alternate site at a community college.

This study also lacked perspectives from minority populations of which Hispanic numbers are projected to swell in the state. Further investigation should be conducted to better understand the needs of minority individuals and to accommodate the expected enrollment increases. Particularly Hispanic individuals may need assistance with English as a second language program, state benefits, and immigration issues.

Additionally, a through examination should be conducted concerning the impact of the female phenomenon “lack of voice” on participation. This phenomenon is an interaction of social and psychological factors that involves the way females feel about themselves and their lack of confidence. Failure to understand and address this issue may have a significantly negative impact on female participation.

Finally, it appears that many of the study participants were students with special needs in possible categories of slow learners, students with disabilities or at-risk students. Investigation to ascertain the prevalence of adult students with special needs and the impact on participation is needed. Although perceptions were favorable regarding the GED preparation instructional services, further research is needed to determine the adequacy of teacher training in providing instruction to adult students with special needs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Table of High School Completion Rates

STATE	National Center for Education Statistics	Manhattan Institute Study	Business Roundtable
National Rate	85.7%	71%	71.3%
Alabama	81.6%	62%	62.8%
Alaska	93.3%	67%	65.1%
Arizona	73.5%	59%	55.8%
Arkansas	84.1%	72%	74.3%
California	82.5%	68%	68.1%
Colorado	81.6%	68%	65.1%
Connecticut	91.7%	75%	87.6%
Delaware	91.0%	73%	75.5%
District of Columbia	88.0%	59%	69.3%
Florida	84.6%	59%	63.3%
Georgia	83.5%	54%	58.5%
Hawaii	91.8%	69%	58.5%
Idaho	86.4%	78%	72.1%
Illinois	87.1%	78%	75.5%
Indiana	89.4%	74%	73.2%
Iowa	90.8%	93%	83.6%
Kansas	90.4%	76%	73.4%
Kentucky	86.2%	71%	70.0%
Louisiana	82.1%	69%	62.5%

Maine	94.5%	78%	82.6%
Maryland	87.4%	75%	81.3%
Massachusetts	90.9%	75%	81.7%
Michigan	89.2%	75%	72.9%
Minnesota	91.9%	83%	85.3%
Mississippi	82.3%	62%	60.4%
Missouri	92.6%	75%	60.4%
Montana	91.1%	83%	78.8%
Nebraska	91.3%	85%	85.9%
Nevada	77.9%	58%	64.7%
New Hampshire	85.1%	71%	84.4%
New Jersey	90.1%	75%	79.1%
New Mexico	83.0%	65%	66.9%
New York	86.3%	70%	70.5%
North Carolina	86.1%	63%	64.7%
North Dakota	94.4%	88%	85.1%
Ohio	87.7%	77%	77.0%
Oklahoma	85.7%	74%	73.8%
Oregon	82.3%	67%	64.7%
Pennsylvania	89.0%	82%	83.1%
Rhode Island	87.9%	72%	77.4%
South Carolina	85.1%	62%	60.1%
South Dakota	92.0%	80%	73.3%

Tennessee	89.0%	60%	62.5%
Texas	79.4%	67%	67.4%
Utah	90.0%	81%	75.7%
Vermont	90.8%	84%	92.1%
Virginia	87.3%	74%	72.5%
Washington	89.6%	70%	73.0%
West Virginia	90.0%	82%	80.0%
Wisconsin	90.0%	85%	80.4%
Wyoming	86.5%	81%	74.4%

Source: Moyers, 2003, p. 2.



East Tennessee State University

Office for the Protection of Human Research Subjects • Box 70565 • Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-1707 • (423) 439-6053

Fax: (423) 439-6060

**IRB APPROVAL - Initial Expedited Review
Waiver of Requirement for Written Documentation of Informed Consent**

December 17, 2007

Elizabeth Thomas
15396 Rich Valley Rd
Abingdon, VA 24210

Re: Perceptions of Adult High School Dropouts Concerning Participation in GED Preparation Programs

IRB#: c07-055d

ORSPA #: none

The following items were reviewed:

- FORM 103
- Narrative (11/20/2007)
- Letter to Participants for Survey (10/12/2007)
- Letter to Participants for Focus Group (10/31/2007)
- Permission from GED Regional Program Manager
- CV/ Resume
- Conflict of Interest Form-no potential conflict of interest identified
- Questionnaire/Survey
- Waiver of Documentation granted 10/25/2007

On November 30, 2007, a final approval was granted for a period not to exceed 12 months and will expire on 11/29/2008. Your Continuing Review is scheduled for 11/6/2008. The expedited approval of the study will be reported to the convened board on February 7, 2008.

Study has been granted a Waiver of Requirement for Written Documentation of Informed Consent by Gail Gerding, Ph.D. on October 25, 2007 under category 45 CFR 46.117(c)(2)

The following **enclosed stamped, approved Letter to Participants** has been stamped with the approval and expiration date and this document must be copied and provided to each participant prior to participant enrollment:

- Letter to Participants for Survey (**stamped approved 10/12/2007**)
- Letter to Participants for Focus Group (**stamped approved 10/31/2007**)

Federal regulations require that a copy is given to the subject at the time of consent.



Accredited Since December 2005

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others must be reported to the IRB (and VA R&D if applicable) within 10 working days.

Proposed changes in approved research can not be initiated without IRB review and approval. The only exception to this rule is that a change can be made prior to IRB approval when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the research subjects [21 CFR 56.108 (a)(4)]. In such a case, the IRB must be promptly informed of the change following it's implementation (within 10 working days) on Form 109 (www.etsu.edu/irb). The IRB will review the change to determine that it is consistent with ensuring the subject's continued welfare.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gail A. Gerding". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Gail Gerding, Ph.D., Chairperson
ETSU Campus Institutional Review Board

VITA

ELIZABETH OWENS THOMAS

- Personal Data: Date of Birth: October 1, 1956
 Place of Birth: Cleveland, Ohio
 Marital Status: Married
- Education: Public Schools, Gate City, Virginia
 University of Virginia's College at Wise, Wise, Virginia;
 Elementary Education, Concentration in
 Philosophy, Bachelor of Arts, 1987.
 East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
 Special Education, Master of Education, 1993.
 Virginia Polytechnical Institute and State University,
 Blacksburg, Virginia; Educational Leadership and
 Policies, Educational Specialist, 1998.
 East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
 Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Doctor
 of Education, 2008.
- Professional Experience: Wise County Public Schools: Special Education Teacher f
 rom 1989 to 1992.
 Wise County Public Schools: Vocational Evaluator &
 Transition Coordinator from 1992 to 1995.
 Wise County Public Schools: Regional Alternative
 Education Coordinator from 1995 to 1998.
 Wise County Public Schools: Principal from 1998 to 2000.
 Washington County Public Schools: Supervisor of Career
 & Technical Education, from 2000 to 2006.
 Grayson County Public Schools: Division Superintendent
 from 2006 to present.
- Professional Activities: Southwest Virginia Transition Center Advisory Board,
 Board Member, 1996 to 1997.
 Virginia Department of Education, Field Coordinator, 1996
 to 1998.
 Virginia Alternative Educator's Association, Vice-
 President, 1999 to 2000.
 Virginia Alternative Educator's Association, President-
 Elect, 2000 to 2001.
 Virginia Alternative Educator's Association, President,
 2001 to 2002.

Mt. Rogers Regional Adult Education Program, Board
Member, 2001 to 2006.

Highlands Tech-Prep Consortium, Board Member, 2001 to
2006.

Center for Business and Industry at Virginia Highlands
Community College, Chairperson/Board Member,
2003 to 2006.

Virginia Career and Technical Education
Administrators, Vice-President, 2004 to 2005.

Virginia Career and Technical Education
Administrators, President-Elect, 2005 to 2006.