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AN URBAN MID-WESTERN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM:
PERSPECTIVES OF STAKEHOLDERS

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University

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Approved By:

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Dr. Kathleen Crawford-McKinney

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Dr. Feleta Wilson

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my entire family (brothers; Doug and Kirby, sisters; Vivian and Monica, nephews, niece, aunts, and cousins) including my late father Marion Willis and my late nephew Joseph Griggs, who died while I was finalizing my dissertation in April 2017. I especially dedicate this Doctorate of Education Degree to my mother Estelle Benson Willis for her prayers, strength and love throughout my life. If it was not for my mother's intelligence and spirituality, I would not be the woman I am today. I am thankful to God to have her as my mother. She has taught me to be the mother I am today to my daughter Nyla Simone Willis. When I was blessed with my daughter, my mother said: "As my mother told me, Nyla will be a blessing to you, just like you were a blessing to me". I will never forget those words as a single parent of a new born baby. My mother has helped me to raise Nyla in her latter seasoned years. My mother is the babysitter, cook, financial and morale supporter as I pursued my research study for this degree. I love you Mommy and I love you family for helping me!

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I want to acknowledge my mother, Estelle Benson Willis, as I dedicate my dissertation to her. I want to acknowledge my daughter, Nyla, who has always reminded me that I will someday have Dr. in front of my name.

I ended my doctoral studies with a new chairperson, Dr. Jazlin Ebenezer, who motivated and mentored me to continue. She has always answered my pressing phone calls and emails. Her exact words to me were: "I am here to intellectually and emotionally support you during the entire process. So cheer up and keep your morale up. You need to keep forging ahead." Next, I would like to thank my committee members. Dr. Feleta Wilson, who I have known my entire life as a member of my church and sorority sister. I look to her as a role model and was delighted when she agreed to be on my committee. She always asked me at church or during sorority meetings, "where are you with your writings"? This allowed staying focused. Dr. Kathleen Crawford-McKinney, Assistant Dean of the College of Education, who has given genuine advice and direction throughout my process of earning my doctorate degree. Dr. Geralyn E. Stephens, who guided me through the doctorate classes and the early stages of my journey.

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CHAPTER 1 MID-WESTERN URBAN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research study is two-fold: (1) to narrate the realities and perspectives of adult students' learning experiences in a General Education Development (GED) preparation program in a Mid-western urban city; and (2) to document the thinking of the former director of adult education at the state level to understand the reforms of adult education program he envisioned. Data sources to achieve the first objective comprised of classroom observations, researcher's journal entries, and transcripts of individual interviews of three adult education students, one teacher, and one counselor. The data source to realize the second objective was the transcript of an interview with state adult education director at the time of this study. Through observations of the participants of this urban adult education program, the following issues are clearly in need of reform: ways to prevent high school dropouts; and a promise to school returners through adult education programs. The student-barrier realities and perspectives observed are: students' personal issues, students' attendance, students' performance on posttest, practice GED tests, and GED examinations, and teaching methods, and absence of a GED math teacher. The implications for high schools and GED adult education programs are as follows: prevention of teens dropping out of school; and a promise to school returners as adults. The study may inform educators of other adult education programs on how to identify adult education students' problems and improve their experiences in preparing for the GED examination, college and careers. The findings based on the director's thinking of what is necessary for a successful adult education program are as follows: (1) aspiring to reach the top 25 in five years; (2) overcoming adult students' financial barrier; (3) returning this Mid-Western urban city to former glory; (4) developing partnerships for contextualized workplace training; (5) characterizing integrated contextualized

adult education; (6) providing adult education-related curriculum, andragogy, and evaluation; and (7) situating professional development for adult educators. The implications of these findings point to the need for transformative leadership to deliberately and strategically focus on areas such as poverty and social issues that surround adult learners; quality administrators and teachers with relevant degrees and credentials for successful adult learning; incentives, social justice programs motivated by all stakeholders; and school-community partnerships for integrated education and career training, in order to move Michigan from the 44th to 25th ranking over a five year period.

Inspiration to Conduct Research Study

My research journey began as a new principal of an adult education program. I have been an administrator, assistant principal, of high schools but not adult education programs. When I arrived to my current school as a principal, Ken (pseudonym), a 21-year-old student, was the second student to pass the GED examination in 2013 from the Michigan urban adult education center. He moved to this Mid-western urban city two years earlier from the Southern part of the United States. Ken experienced many troubles in his young life including family problems, drug abuse, and peer pressure to earn money illegally. These adverse forces caused Ken to leave high school one infraction resulting in a short prison term during high school. After moving to this Midwestern urban city, Ken was motivated to return to school and earn his high school diploma. He tried earning a diploma at many high schools and adult education centers but failed. Ken finally enrolled in my adult education program on the west side of the city in September 2013. He received the GED certificate one month later in October 2013.

Ken proved to be a hardworking and dedicated student in his GED preparation classes and had excellent attendance. He was the first student to arrive ~~to~~ at school every day at the center. He formed a mentorship with his GED mathematics teacher. After earning his GED, Ken continued

to attend school daily to avoid trouble and work on his math skills for college admissions. His intent was to enroll in a community college in January 2014. I, as the principal, learned of the new partnership with a local Career and Technical Education (CTE) Center two miles away from the school and persuaded Ken to take advantage of the opportunity. The CTE program was held in the evening for recent adult education graduates at no cost. The program concentrated on skill trades leading to pre-apprenticeship training. Ken enrolled in the electronics program preparing for a pre-apprentice test. He often visited the adult education center to give an update on his career training and life achievements. Ken took part in the adult education 2013-2014 citywide graduation ceremony, a celebration validating Ken's transformation from dropout to a person with renewed beliefs and goals. The CTE partnership unfortunately ended in June 2014. It is unknown what happened to Ken's matriculation to postsecondary education after the CTE and adult education partnership ended.

This example of Ken's educational experiences contributes to the need for the current study to track dropouts for preparation to GED certification and career preparation and training. The research study documents and interprets a group of adult students' success or failure on GED examination and career readiness at a similar adult education center on the east campus of the city.

Political Context of the Study

Adult Learning Work Group (2008), a group of public and private adult educators, spoke of transforming adult infrastructures on learning and stated that this country was in need of a skilled workforce for adults. This group estimated that two-thirds of available jobs in America from 2008 to 2018 were projected to require at the least some postsecondary education or career training. The Adult Learning Work Group (2008) included experts from Michigan's community colleges, literacy councils, and adult education programs. The experts concluded that in Michigan, 1.7

million adults lack the expertise, knowledge, and credentials needed to fulfill the expected job market. To rebuild this state economically and to foster a competitive edge, expanding access to postsecondary education and career training for adults is important and needed (Gall, 2014).

Under the American Graduation Initiative (AGI), President Barack Obama called for an increase in two-year college graduates, including former GED graduates, in the United States of America. This is a goal to have more graduates here than in any other country by 2020 (The White House, 2009). Solberg, Castine, and Brown (2014) announced that President Barack Obama on July 22, 2014 signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), formally known as the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), to help adults gain employment, education, and training to succeed in the work world. This act was the first legislative reform in 15 years of the public workforce system due to the support of the 11th Congress with a majority passing it.

Rockefeller (2012) states the WIA-funded workforce programs remains a viable solution to rebuilding the nation's economy. His plan does not support reducing WIA funds because it increases the labor force. The WIA of 1998 (Public Law 105-220) is the driving force policy in the United States for workforce development. It is a legislation intended to improve employment training and vocation rehabilitation programs. There are "One-Stop Centers" in the country to provide these services locally by the state. The goal of the federal grant is to increase employment and career advancement for adults (Hobbie & Barnow, 2011).

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 succeeded the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 and amended the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), the Wagner-Peyser Act (WPA), and the Rehabilitation Act (RA) of 1973. The WIOA was effective on July 1, 2015. The U.S. Department of Labor will guide centers about using the grant with a timeline for carrying out changes and proposed regulations, reflecting transforming

WIA to WIOA. The WIA of 1998 operated until 2015 (Solberg et al., 2014).

Need for the Study

Few studies have followed dropouts enrolled in a preparation class in Michigan for the General Education Development (GED) examination along with the daily classroom engagement. Rossi (2014) explored that GED graduates often struggle or fail to make a successful transition to postsecondary environments. The GED Testing Service (2012) shows if GED recipients enroll in postsecondary education, many drop out after the first semester. Garvey (2011) explains that GED programs should help students not only to pass the GED but also to prepare them for careers and postsecondary education. According to Boylan and Renzulli (2014), little research is focused on adults returning to school and on their GED curriculum. After reviewing studies on classroom learning of elementary and secondary students, adult education teachers are forced to use the findings and implications in adult education contexts. Coffey and Smith (2011) suggest research on practices and opportunities to improve both the adult education system and adult students' performance. Observing the phenomenon of adult education, McKay (2013) recommends future research with repeated visits to GED classrooms to study adult education curriculum, teaching, students' awareness, and the goals of adult students after successfully passing the GED examination and entering college or a career.

The current research is a response to McKay's (2013) call for a study to tell the realities and perspectives of learning in adult education GED classes that has been rarely explored. In line with the call by existing studies noted above in this section, this research study explores the realities and perspectives of adult students enrolled in an adult education program. In the current study, the researcher intends to follow adult students attending GED classes and observe their education and learning. Documenting students' classroom experiences and accounting for what helped or

hindered them to transform and change to be successful in the GED program is important for planning future GED programs. In other words, the study provides the perspectives of the school staff, students, and state director.

Overview of Significance of Study

Results of this study are from the perspectives of students, staff, and the state director of adult education that can inform adult education teachers how to prepare future GED adult students. This study can provide adult education curriculum developers and other stakeholders' data on guiding adult students into careers of their choice. The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. What are the realities and perspectives of students' learning and development in an urban adult education program?

2. What leadership thinking prevails as a Mid-western state adult education director contemplates with the researcher the 13-Point Plan that he developed to transform adult students completing the high school equivalency?

Overview of Methodology

Study Design

This study uses a qualitative approach (Cresell, 2014) to document the experiences of adult education students in a GED preparation program, including the barriers they faced as well as the state director's thinking on adult education.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted in an adult education center where participants are preparing to take the computerized 2014 version of the GED examination.

Overview of Study

Chapter one identifies the need for the study. That is, to document the realities and perspectives of adult students' learning in an adult education program that has been rarely explored. Chapter two is a literature review of the empirical studies and theoretical frameworks that guide the research study. Chapter three (Article 1) documents, narrates, and interprets the realities and perspectives of adult students' learning in a General Education Development program over a 12-week period. Chapter four investigates the Michigan adult education director's leadership thinking for the improvement of the economically stressed and striving urban city in improving adult education programs in the state. Chapter five concludes the dissertation with a summary of research findings and implications.

Description of Terms

Adult Education is a program for adults who have dropped out of school during their formative years.

Career Readiness is the achievement and demonstration of college and career readiness standard or competencies that prepare students for a successful transition into the workplace (naceweb.org).

GED/General Education Development is a second opportunity for people who did not graduate from high school but want a certificate equivalent to the traditional high school diploma.The examination is a four-part standardized assessment in English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies. As of 2014, the GED examination is the sixth series since the implementation in 1942 and it is a computerized based examination (gedtestingservice.com).

High School Equivalency is comparable to achieving a *high school* diploma. It is the demonstration of proving the same skills and knowledge as a *high school* graduate by taking the GED to obtain employment or continue education in postsecondary schools (gedtestingservice.com).

Practice, Pretest and Posttest is a preliminary test administered to determine a student's baseline knowledge, which denotes achievement gains in the core academic areas or preparedness for an educational experience or course of study (merriam-webster.com).

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW FOR A PROPOSED STUDY

Introduction

In preparation for a proposed study, long before this dissertation was written, an in-depth literature review was undertaken. Thus, this review of literature on adult education is very loosely put together based on two decades of empirical studies and relevant theoretical frameworks useful to the study at hand. The proposed study was concerned with adult education students pursing GED certification and career credentials. The purpose of this literature review is twofold: (1) to summarize two decades of research on adult education programs; and (2) to discuss the lenses that might be useful to situate adult education research. The current study used relevant parts of this literature reviews in writing the two articles in Chapters three and four, respectively.

Major Empirical Studies Pertaining to Adult Education Programs

The past research studies reviewed are grouped into seven sections regarding adult education programs: (1) Return on Investment, (2) Adult Education Needs, (3) Causes for Dropping out of School, (4) Adult Career Skill Needs, (5) Adult Motivators to Return to School

(6) Barriers in Adult Education Programs, and (7) Recommendations for Adult Education Program Improvements

Return on Investment

McLendon, Jones, and Rosin (2011) show that investments in adult education and career training programs will save the government costs in the areas of public healthcare, financial assistance and incarceration. These authors also point out that there is a need to educate adults rather than incarcerate them because the cost is more to incarcerate than to educate. Therefore the government should develop more adult education centers than prisons. The same authors argue that currently each high school dropout costs the nation's economy approximately $260,000 during

their work lifetime compared to a working high school graduate in public financial assistance or incarceration.

McLendon, Jones, and Rosin (2011) found in some of the nation's largest metropolitan cities, economies would benefit in investment in adult education programs, one being that of this Mid-Western state. The authors' calculations were based on earnings, home and vehicle sales, economy, jobs and tax income. They found overall cost of adult education is determined by the notion if 50 percent of high school dropouts from the year 2008 had graduated and contributed to the economy, the government costs would have been less. They also believe that those 50 percent of dropouts should now enroll in adult education programs to recover and recapture some of the governmental funds used since 2008. They also added a prediction of adults returning to adult education programs with their children taking pride in education, stating better educated parents nurture better education for their children. Therefore, their children would value education and are less likely to end up in poverty or prison costing the government additional funds.

Adult Education Needs

Recent statistics show nearly 40 million adults in the United States, aged 18 and older, need a high school diploma or equivalent credential (Martin & Broadus, 2013). In a Mid-Western state McLendon, Jones, and Rosin (2011) report that one in five (20%) of the residents need a high school diploma or GED and it ranks 39 out of 50 states where adults possess college degrees. There is a need for some adults in this Mid-Western state to improve their education. When a major car manufacturer recruited for a new plant in this Mid-Western state, they decided not build their plant there citing low literacy skills from the applicants. This manufacturer built their plant outside the country. This example alone shows the need to produce a population of educated and skilled adults with high literacy skills for projected occupations this country and state, especially This urban city.

In this urban city, more than 25 percent of adults (≈216,000) need a high school diploma or GED (Local Area Unemployment Statistics [LAUS], Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). This is half the city's current adult population of half a million. Martin and Broadus (2013) state more than half of African American teens in Illinois, Ohio, Mid-Western state, New York, and Pennsylvania do not graduate from high school. African-American students in these states are ten times more likely to attend a public or charter high school with high dropout rates and low achievement standardized test scores (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Not completing high school results in many people becoming unemployed, underemployed, and or receiving public assistance (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006; Toledo, 2010).

Boylan and Renzulli (2014) state it is not uncommon for the unemployed dropouts to enroll in adult education programs across the nation preparing them for the General Education Development (GED) examination and other high school equivalency tests. According to Heckman and LaFontaine (2008), the rate of dropouts returning to school for a GED has increased dramatically to nearly 50 percent. While the rate of dropouts returning to school to earn a GED has grown, the high school dropout rate continues to increase, resulting in the need for more adult education programs across the nation. Adult education programs provide an opportunity for dropouts to have a second chance to earn a credential equivalent to a high school diploma. GED programs prepare adult students to take the GED examination measuring high school level academic skills for vocational or college readiness leading to suitable careers (Rose, 2013).

Causes for Dropping out of School

Bridgeland, DiIulio and Morison (2006) refer to the increased dropout rate as a silent epidemic in education. The rate of students dropping out of high school varies. Davis (2012) portrays the GED students' needs, experiences, and perceptions of why they dropped out of school in a poetic voice. According to Davis, adult students are embarrassed to admit they dropped out of school because of perceptions from others considering them neither equal nor successful. He states most people leave high school because they experienced major life issues unrelated to academics. Koenig (2011) and McKay (2013) assessed the reasons why students enrolled in GED programs dropped out or removed from high school include: bullying, criminal and gang activity, illegal substance and alcohol or drug abuse and imprisonment. Reasons found for dropping out of school also include personal or family member illness, poor home life, financial hardship or poverty, lack of parental involvement, lack of school guidance and support. Other reasons were homelessness, pregnancy, need to work, low achievement, learning and mental disabilities, boredom or negative classroom experiences, poor attendance, disciplinary expulsion, illiteracy, lack of confidence, and peer pressure.

Adult Career Skill Needs

According to the Adult Learning Work Group - ALWG (2008), many adults in this MidWestern state without a high school diploma or GED lack basic workforce readiness skills needed to acquire self and family sustaining jobs. ALWG states many workers in this Mid-Western state are unprepared and there is a need for transition and changes in adult learning to meet the new workforce demands. ALWG reports adults this Mid-Western urban city live in a different economy and circumstances when adult education programs were first implemented. The 20th Century GED adult education programs were to give a high school credential to those who join the

military before graduating from high school due to serving in the military and fighting in the country's wars. In the 21st Century, ALWG (2008) recommends adult education programs and labor organizations work together to create solutions and career-related curriculum, stressing this partnership should not be an option. If not, all people in This Mid-Western state are negatively affected because the proposal is vital to the economic growth of the state and prosperity for employers and workers.

With technology advancements, no longer can dropouts depend on factory or manufacturing jobs as self-sustaining employment in this era as their parents and grandparents did in the past. There is a demand for employees to learn academic skills with computer, reading and numeracy skills beyond the middle school level for long-term self-sustainable employment (Autrey, 1999).

McLendon, Jones, and Rosin (2011) state that 14.7 percent of the unemployed in the nation lack a high school diploma or equivalency compared to 8.3 percent unemployed with a diploma or GED and some postsecondary training and 4.9 percent unemployed with a college degree. The more education a person has, the less likely they are to be unemployed or underemployed.

Adult Motivators to Return to School

Boylan and Renzulli (2014) explain there is little research centered on adults returning to school or on the high school equivalency curriculum maintaining their motivation. Because adult dropouts are motivated for various reasons and are enrolled in a GED program, there is a need to document their daily classroom engagement as the curriculum is uncovered in preparing for the GED examination. Coffey and Smith (2011) suggest research conducted on practices and opportunities to improve both the adult education system and adult students' performance objectives.

Beder and Valentine (1990) explain various motivators of why adults return to formal education by enrolling in adult basic and general education programs. They are for selfimprovement; family and children's needs; need of a social outlet; wanting to improve reading, writing, and math skills; become better citizens and community workers; get a job; earn respect; have more income; continue education in college or postsecondary training; and get through the mandate of others such as the court system. According to Bauman and Ryan (2001), economic rewards are the most motivating factor for people to earn a GED certificate. They can earn higher salaries than a high school dropout in the same age group, which may be slightly less than $300 when compared to someone who holds a high school diploma. Earning higher salaries remain the main goal today with people who have more education and credentials.

Comings and Cuban (2007) reiterate unlike children who partake in schooling because of legal mandates with demands of strong social and cultural forces, adults return to school for self or economic reasons. Thomas (2008) reported the primary motivation for adults to pursue a GED was for better employment. The motivations for returning to school to earn a GED certificate recently are personal goal-oriented, work-related to meet clear professional objectives, activityoriented for social needs; and learning-oriented for self-improvement to increase educational functioning levels (McKay, 2013). The most common motivator is work-related (Davis, 2012, Gall, 2014; McKay, 2013). Earning a GED is about earning the credential and personal redemption to show families and associates they have transformed, matured, and become more responsible and ready for work (McKay, 2013).

Barriers in Adult Education Programs

Adult education programs are faced to teach under-skilled and under-educated adults to meet the academic expectations of becoming college and career ready, a process shown to be

challenging (Coffey & Smith, 2011). Thomas (2008) explains if adult students did not complete the GED program it was because they lacked positive relationships or connections with school tracing back to early childhood development and early learning experiences. Coffey and Smith (2011) state because average adult students have been away from formal education nearly seven years or more, they may need remedial or adult basic education (ABE) before placement in GED classes which are at a high school level. Coffey and Smith (2011) also explain convenience and program location are issues for some adults because most adult education classes are held in the evening, which is not an ideal time for parents of school-aged children or younger. Koenig (2011) explains transportation may be challenging for adult students who do not have a car. Another challenge was the lack of childcare at home or at the school. The most challenging was balancing school and work or school and family. There were also language barriers for non-English speaking students. Coffey and Smith (2011) suggest wrap-around support services such as child care, English as Second Language (ESL) classes and job training for sustainable employment to decrease the challenges of GED students.

Another challenge is financial obligations to pay for the program then taking and retaking (if needed) the GED examination. The cost of GED programs varies. Some public and non-profit organizations offer free adult education programs and payment for the GED examination. Most GED adult education programs do not pay for the GED examination which costs $150 for a total of four subtests. Each retest averages $10 for non-passing scores (GED Testing Service, 2013). Taking the GED examination could cost over $400 which many adult students cannot afford. These challenges cause adult students to drop out of the GED programs. Most of all, no one can deny the challenges of learning subject matter for someone who has been out of school for years. How students are prepared for the GED might also be challenging.

Recommendations for Adult Education Program Improvements

Concerning the improvements of adult education and learning environments, McKay (2013) states many adult education teachers depend on the findings and implications of a plethora of investigating studies on elementary and secondary classrooms. There is a need for current research with repeated visits to adult education classrooms to examine the curriculum and teaching along with adult students' perspectives for adult educators. Related to issues surrounding curriculum and teaching, most recently, the question has been: What is causing low passing rates since the 2014 GED examination? Few adults pass the GED examination after multiple attempts, which end their formal education (Gall, 2014). The Free Press (2015) noted from the GED Testing Service only 90,000 people passed the GED examination in 2014 nationwide, lower from 540,535 passing in 2013 and 401,388 passing in 2012. In This Mid-Western state, 1,472 passed the GED in 2014 compared to 13,651 in 2013 and 10,290 in 2012. GED Testing Services (2013) reported more than 848,000 adults in the world took at least one part of the GED sub parts and 743,000 took all parts of the examination in 2013. Of the 743,000 who completed the entire GED exam, 75% passed. The number of adults passing the GED in the United States and other parts of the world drastically decreased in 2014 by 467,250 (The Free Press, 2015) with the new computerbased version. The reasons for the failure and how GED curriculum is prepared need to be researched.

Status of Adult Education Research

This first review of literature shows the support needed for current research on adult education programs in this urban Mid-Western city. Years of research on adult education shows the need for further research in the following areas: reducing governmental cost for the unemployed and under-employed (McLendon, Jones, and Rosin, 2011); preparing qualified adults for better jobs (ALWG, 2008); eliminating students' barriers (Coffey and Smith, 2011); preparing

adults for the GED examination to increase the passing rate (Rose, 2013);and decreasing the unemployment rate (Heckman and LaFontaine, 2008).

There have been past researches on learning why students dropped out of school (Davis, 2012; Koenig, 2011; McKay, 2013) and what motivated them to return to school as adults (Beder and Valentine, 1990; Bauman and Ryan, 2001; Thomas, 2008). There are also legitimate reasons as to why it is needed to tap into adults' perceptions of their learning to explore whether subject matter and related issues pose difficulties of not passing the GED examination (Coffey and Smith (2011)). Song and Hsu (2008) state the GED examination measuring high school level core content and skills is regarded as a second chance instrument for adults who did not complete high school, therefore, the GED passing rate should only improve and not decline.

Preparation for the GED examination has been studied and there is a need to improve GED passing scores by studying and observing the classroom interactions developing the GED core content areas (McKay, 2013). Tracking adults' learning in their classes, studying their GED examination success rate, and explanations of why students were successful or not successful are important pieces of the study at hand. This stems from the lack of success rates and results in prior research.

As in McLendon, Jones, and Rosin (2011), the investment in adult education and career training saves the government costs in the area of public healthcare, financial assistance and incarceration. Prior literature reports many adults in the city, state and country are without a high school diploma and the need for adult education programs are in demand. Boylan and Renzulli (2014) and Coffey and Smith (2011) tell that little research centers on adults returning to school especially with documentation in a narrative form. Coffey and Smith (2011) inform adult education programs are now faced to teach under-skilled and under-educated adults for college and career

readiness. As in the current research, it was the aim to prepare the participants for both upon earning a GED certificate.

A Survey of Empirical Studies on High School Dropouts for Relevancy

There are prior research case studies on dropouts returning to school as an adult. Chronologically, the studies are Purser (1994), Igang (2001), Thomas (2008), Toledo (2010), Schulz and Rubel (2011),Solomon (2013) and McKay (2013).

Purser (1994)

Purser (1994) examined students in Encouraging More Education to Reach Graduation and Employment (EMERGE) program. EMERGE obtained adult students' points of view of their academic and career skills with the changes in academic and career growth they experienced during the program. EMERGE goals were to prepare unemployed adult students, receiving federal assistance, for the GED examination as well as college and career skills. The program is housed at a community college. The students did not hold a high school diploma or GED but had the same rights and privileges as the other community college students on campus. EMERGE students were enrolled in pre-college classes to meet the program's goals. At the beginning of the program, there were 58 students enrolled who were scheduled for five classes, four days a week with college instructors. Only 38 students agreed to take part in the research study. EMERGE lost some students over a year because they dropped out for personal reasons. Only 14 participants remained at the end of the study.

The objectives of two of the five classes offered were career and personal development. Students were placed in classes based on their academic functioning grade level from a pretest. The three tiers of placement were upper high school, lower high school and middle school or lower.

The qualitative methods used for data collection were three interviews at the beginning, middle and end of the study along with classroom observations.

At the beginning of EMERGE, all students admitted needed instruction in core content academics and career training. Most of the 14 participants were qualified at the end of the program to take the GED examination and 12 passed. After a series of the third interview, the students who remained stated they have noticeably transformed by improving their core academic and career skills. The majority of them perceived the most important classes of EMERGE were the two in career and personal development skills. Purser (1994) suggests further research on similar programs. The current study will answer the call to get adult students' points of view of their academic and career skills after experiencing a semester at the adult education GED.

Igang (2001)

Igang (2001) explored the stories of young urban parents who returned to school at an urban college grant-funded adult education career program to earn their GED and alternative career training to improve their socioeconomic status. The mission of the urban college is to help two generations, the young parents and their children. The urban college had roughly 25 teenage mothers and fathers enrolled in the program who wanted to pursue a career in construction during an 18-week timeframe. The program also offered services such as career counseling, case management counseling and job placement with follow-ups. The study participants were 16 students of the 25 enrolled. Most of the students did not have a GED and were unemployed. The construction program created a social experience to allow the researcher to see how the program participants functioned in various groups.

The qualitative study included interviews to explain the motivating forces of personal, social, and economical causes behind the many reported statistics of American students dropping

out of high school due to pregnancy. The study was a response to a call for research to understand the perceptions of students who dropped out of school due to pregnancy. The participants were of African American, Caucasian, West Indian and Hispanic ethnical backgrounds. Most of the students lived with their parents or in a group home. In the interviews, open-ended questions were posed to students and selected staff at the urban college appointed to determine their insights and perceptions of formal elementary to current school experiences.

Igang (2001) dedicated a chapter to each of the participants showing their answers in three parts: (a) introduction of the student, (b) their life story, and (c) a common theme analysis checked and validated by a support group. The interviews were recorded in field logs and by an audio tape recorder. The author used an interview method to document and narrates students' stories and voices. Witnessing the foregoing method, the researcher admitted that it is a powerful approach the author learned from Ely et al. (1997). Ely et al. describe the art of narratives as a voyage in which the researcher must go to give meaning as part of the educational process. According to Ely et al. (1997), "this meaning creates a version of reality which ultimately informs the uniqueness of the research story" (Irgang, 2001).

The initial interview revealed how the resilient young parents wanted an education, equality and respect just as their peers who graduated from high school on time. The researcher reported students at the urban college gained entry because they aspired for job development and were eager to further their academic education. After many interviews, the researcher identified common themes which he coined as "metathemes." Metathemes are defined as "overarching binding themes characterizing particular experiences reflected in metaphorical statement or titles" (Irgang, 2001). The metathemes include (a) Betwixt and Between: Saying Farewell to Childhood and Inventing Adult Selfhood, (b) Relationships are Hard, (c) My Patterns Keep Repeating, (d) Living

Between Two Different Worlds, and (e) I Am Doing It For My Child. The staff's perceptions of the student participants' metathemes include (a) Transition: Saying Farewell to Childhood, (b) Public and Price Way of Being, and (c) It All Comes Down to Child Care.

In each story, students cited neglected duties and responsibilities of school's guidance and counseling programs at the high school level as the reason for their dropout. The researcher thus advocates most schools systems should reform their guidance and counseling system. The researcher argued communities serving to integrate young students into society must be formed in high schools. Schools must become models with caring adults helping adolescents progress socially through the many transitional stages and suggests society should develop strong community and education interventions to build language as a source of power.

Thomas (2008)

Thomas (2008) stated the perceptions of adult high school dropouts taking part in a GED program. The GED program was voluntary and the purpose was to understand the participants' insights and reasons about their motivations and difficulties in the program. Most students enrolled and attended for employment opportunities. The study offered adult education leaders suggestions to overcome obstacles in their adult education programs. The qualitative methodology included a data collection through open-ended telephone interviews with students who left the program and those who remained during the same school year. The students described and compared their educational experiences, past and present, explaining how the learning experiences influenced their lives. Students were asked, "What ways did the GED program help you as a student?" For those who left the GED program, the author asked, "What caused you to stop?" The findings suggest most participants who lacked positive relationships or connections with school traced back to their early childhood development, learning and awareness because these students were labeled

"at-risk" in the 1980's (Gardner, Larsen, Baker & Campbell, 1983).

Because of their negative feelings on early school experiences, the present traditional classroom environment allowed for continued failure. Thomas (2008) offers two recommendations to reduce student failure in adult education programs, using alternate classrooms sites, such as college campuses or online courses to deliver instructional services to adult students; and adult education centers marketing services stressing the relationship to employment and career training as this current research will.

Toledo Study (2010)

Toledo (2010) characterized the relationship between an adult education reading literacy program and a career technical training situated in a school-to-work program by exploring if an increase of adult literacy rates changes student participation in the program positively. Accordingly, there are various types of adult education programs (ABE, GED, ESL, Career Training) and 3% of adults are most likely to enroll in GED program leading to the work-related career training program. The study's purpose was to explore the relationship among basic reading literacy skills in a contextualized career technical education and adult basic education partnership to promote life-long learning such as getting and keeping a job.

Toledo (2010) used a mixed methodology to (a) quantitatively analyze if pre and posttest's reading scores influence career training; and (b) qualitatively analyze to explore the specific characteristics in a contextualized and socialized setting for educational and career technical training. The author found most participants raised their reading scores on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) posttest and there were students who were motivated in learning contextualized career practices.

In preparing adult students for career training, Toledo (2010) stated adult teachers of ABE and GED programs should practice teaching methods emphasizing learning in a contextualized and hands-on approach. Using this approach to teach basic core subjects such as mathematics, reading and writing is beneficial and can be used within the context of learning job competencies. Toledo found adult students taking part in an educational literacy program and career training program improved their TABE reading posttest scores. The study also found a connection between increased literacy and job success. Toledo called to increase reading skills and motivation as well as a knowledge of mathematics to succeed in a career-related training. The author also called for future research to explore the school-to-work programs where students use their reading skills once they are actively engaged in their career choice.

Schulz and Rubel (2011)

Schulz (2006) used a phenomenological inquiry to explore the experiences and perceptions of males who did not earn a high school diploma because of feeling alienated from the public school system. Solomon (2006) and Schulz and Rubel (2011) sampled males with behavioral problems or a criminal history. The participants' feelings of alienation were drawn from interviews by the researcher. The outcome from the in-depth interviews explains the phenomenon of five males from the Pacific Northwest area of the United States between the ages of 16 to19 years old. Over six weeks, each participant was interviewed three times and they expressed thoughts on their personal learning experiences from kindergarten through high school until the time they dropped out for various reasons. The alienation phenomenon in the study tells the story of the participants' level of academic and social disengagement, particularly failure in school.

The purpose of research of Schulz and Rubel (2011) was to discover the specific points of view from the participants on feelings of alienation from school. The findings of their experiences

offered common themes: peer pressure and needing to be part of a group for acceptance even if there are negative consequences, failure to trust in public education systems as well as the staff, and fear in failing by disappointing parents. The research found because of alienation in school, participants had behavioral problems and were unable to keep up with academic rigor leading to quitting or expulsion from school.

McKay (2013)

McKay (2013) focused on dropouts, now adults, who could not return to high school because of overage restrictions and enrolling in a program preparing for the GED examination and career readiness. McKay found the adults realized they could no longer continue their professional and personal lives without the high school equivalency credential. The author's research detailed the process adult students prepared for the GED examination. Their life stories, aspirations and goals were the qualitative data. McKay accounted for an official second chance offered domestically to people who did not finish high school because of immaturity, hardships and other reasons. To help adult students learn and become independent thinkers, McKay stated one must understand the reason why students drop out and their motivations to return to school. The author's purpose was to provide adults in the same situation ways to continue, if they wish to explore the process.

McKay (2013) used the andragogy theory to teach adults. By using andragogy with observation, interviewing and auto-ethnography (learning along with the students), the author reported the students' reasons for dropping out of high school, their reasons for returning to school for a GED certificate, and their goals and motivations to continue the GED program. One finding was adult students are committed to their educational goals, while balancing school with work and family responsibilities. This undertaking took commitment, determination, and willpower to finish

the process. The author also found many students wanted to continue their education in a college or a postsecondary school after earning a GED.

McKay (2013) stated many adult educators rely on the findings of a plethora of investigating research students using elementary and secondary classrooms. The current study will be a guide for adult educators on classroom instruction pros and cons. It is a known fact from the literature review that the GED passing rate has declined since the GED 2014 computer-based examination. After multiple testing attempts some adults fail the examination (Gall, 2014; The Free Press, 2015). This research student will use as the basic learning what adult education students are studying during their GED examination preparation that explains why students were successful or not on the examination.

Solomon (2013)

Solomon (2013) conducted a study to identify and described the experiences of African American men who did not earn a GED while imprisoned. Solomon explored the experiences of each participant by gaining insight of what prevented them from completing the program while they were imprisoned and what they are currently experiencing because they lacked GED credentials. Solomon sampled ten African American ex-offender males between the ages of 18 and 62 years old from a Southern region of the United States. The objective was also to understand the lived experience of ex-offenders as they reestablished themselves in society without an education or job training.

The researcher used detailed interviews of probing questions to explore the participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences of returning back to society without a GED. The research was conducted because there is minimal information on what prevented inmates from completing the

GED program helping them to transition into the work world once they were released. Solomon found many ex-offenders relapsed into criminal activity because of difficulties living in hard times without a GED and other activities leading some back to prison. All participants expressed they could not get a job because of their criminal record and not having a GED certificate. The challenges they faced when searching for a job once released into society were harsh. GED correctional educational programs are important for inmates to gain skills needed to reintegrate back into the society by improving their opportunities to gain employment after release. There are some inmates who had barriers and did not finish the GED program in prison because of disciplinary issues, no study time, GED examination scheduling conflicts and transferring from one prison to another.

<div align="center">

Summary of Case Studies

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The case studies included in this literature review influenced the current research because of the use of qualitative methodologies to obtain, examine and offer testimonies of adults who dropped out of high school who have or have not earned their GED credential while enrolled in (GED) preparation programs. The current study sampled adult males and females who dropped out of high school for various reasons. Their opinions and testimonies are the data source, rather than statistics representing these subjects. Using qualitative research shows why adult students left high school, returned to adult education, and their goals in their own words. All case studies agreed that adult education students understood after dropping out of high school they needed a GED certificate to improve their lifestyle for self-fulfillment or to get better jobs for economic payoffs with the potential to alleviate poverty through education.

McKay (2013) is the blueprint for my research study because it focuses on dropouts, now adults enrolled in a program preparing for the GED examination. The students in McKay (2013)

realized they could not survive without the GED. The students' life stories, aspirations and goals were the qualitative data. The literacy of students in McKay's study is parallel to this research with the accounts for an official second chance offered to those who did not finish high school because of immaturity, hardships and other reasons. However, McKay (2013) used the andragogy theory to teach adults.

Andragogy is the leading adult learning theory (McKay, 2013). Andragogy is the art and science of learning for adults and pedagogy is the art and science of learning for children (Thomas, 2008). Knowles (1978) states andragogy starts when a person reaches adulthood, not just in age, but psychologically, maturely, legally, and socially. McKay (2013) states adults and children are cognitively different, so the way they are taught should be different. The teaching style and the approach to lessons should not be the same as teaching children. However, the current study uses the transformative learning theory as one of its frameworks instead of andragogy because the andragogy theory is broad and similar to the pedagogy theory used in a kindergarten through twelfth grade educational setting (Taylor, 2008). According to Taylor (2008), "the transformative learning theory has replaced the andragogy theory as the leading educational philosophy for adult education, offering teaching practices embedded in observations sustained by investigational, intuitive research studies" (p. 13).

The research methodology in this study and theoretical frameworks are different from McKay (2013) who took the role of an enrolled adult education student and used the auto ethnography theory. McKay wanted to learn what it meant to be an adult education student in the GED process by personally observing the climate and culture of the classroom experience and taking the GED examination. This investigation explored the GED process from the perspective of an educational leader to improve the current program. The current study differs from Thomas

(2008) because Thomas used the framework of andragogy, a methodological approach to teach adults emphasizing experiential techniques and practical application.

The essential elements from the aforesaid studies provided the current study to focus on the link from GED classes to career training. Purser (1994) shed light on the importance of career and personal development; Igang (2001) advised schools systems to reform their guidance and counseling system for career readiness; Toledo (2010) promoted literacy for career advances; and McKay (2013) moved GED students from career-concepts to postsecondary education. Purser (1994), Igang (2001), Thomas (2008), Toledo (2010), Schulz and Rubel (2011) McKay (2013) and Solomon (2013) all studied adult education students progress in adult education programs, some to be proven success. Purser (2014) was the most successful with the majority of the students staying in the program and passing the GED examination.

<div align="center">**A Survey of Theoretical Frameworks for Relevancy**</div>

The theoretical frameworks guiding this research study on adult education and learning are, transformative learning theory, situated learning theory and transformative leadership model. These theoretical frameworks have been used in prior research studies in the field of education as included in the literature review below.

Transformative Learning Theory

Malkki (2010) critically analyzed the transformative learning theory and states it offers one of the most sophisticated ideas of reflection with a larger form of a theory for adult learning. The author expresses no other theory offered for interpreting and analyzing reflection in learning and awareness for adult education other than transformative learning theory. Transformative learning theory is psychologically rooted in the different ways adults learn and currently a theory in progress (Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012). This theory of learning states one must know the meaning and

awareness of their own learning and experiences to make interpretations and perspectives for personal growth rather than rely on the beliefs and understating of others (Mezirow, 2006). It is the "what, when, who, why, where and how" question factor.

This is true in the 21st century because transformative learning theory promotes a deep understanding of developing independent adult thinkers (Mezirow, 2006). The transformative learning theory helps to realize learning by identifying factors hindering or helping the learning and awareness process (Mezirow, 2006) as in this research while preparing for the GED and career readiness program. Mezirow (1997) states transformative learning outcomes result from understanding, through insightful conversations. The unfamiliar adult experiences, values, feelings, beliefs, situations, activities could influence and transfer learning. These experiences shape expectations, perceptions, cognitions and feelings (Mezirow, 1997).

Belzer (2004) summarizes the transformative learning theory by establishing prior learning and educational history influencing adult approaches to learning, understanding and capacity of building new knowledge about how the experiences are transformed. This was discussed after studying a GED program for women where the staff made it a norm to "do school differently" because of the adult students' negative experiences in educational settings. The female students who took part in Belzer's (2004) study valued this new approach to learning where the teacher was a facilitator and they were comfortable in the learning environment. It was not what they remembered as "normal school", transforming their past bad experiences to comfortable new learning experiences of expectations. These expectations were expressed through students' responses to the various effects of the GED program (the way teacher treated them and the relevant lessons) aligned with their personal educational goals. The students experienced "fitting in" not like misfits as they did in the past. A sense of pride helped shape and transform new knowledge.

Belzer (2004) recommends future research to identify what a transformative learning GED classroom looks like. The frame of reference of the transformative learning theory includes cognitive and emotional components in two dimensions: *habits of mind* and *points of view* (Mezirow, 1997). Habits of mind are broad and abstract habitual ways of doing, thinking, and feeling shaped on religious, cultural, social, educational, economical and psychological opinions and perceptions. Points of view are subjective ways of reflecting, acting and processing based on personal `experiences, opinions and assumptions. This communicative leaning theory has theorists who disagree with the qualitative assessment based on their belief student achievement is only evident in instrumental assessments (pretests and posttests, practice GED tests and national GED examinations). It is critical for adult education studies and researchers using the transformative learning theory to collect evidence data and document everything since it cannot be tested like instrumental or quantitative learning theories. Communication is needed to confirm reasons that one understands or arrives at judgment in this social process for meaning.

Transformative learning involves four stages: elaborate on an existing point of view, establish a new point of view, transform a point of view in a different situation, and transform habits of mind by becoming critically aware and reflective of preconceived notion of the way we see others and situations that are outside of their norm. The approach needs information incorporated by the learner into a developed form of reference to understand the experiences. In learning and awareness; adult teachers must ensure students are motivated to become independent thinkers, foster reflective thoughts, and promote inquiry learning. This can be taught using metaphors, case studies, real-life scenarios, graphic organizers, role playing, grouping, and journal writing. For a classroom to become conducive to transformative learning and teaching techniques, teachers must become facilitators encouraging students to be reflective and independent thinkers.

Mezirow (1997) states a key competency employers seek in an employee is independent thinking in making moral and responsible decisions. It is important adult students in the current study identify the four stages of transformative learning in themselves. The job of adult teachers, in Mezirow's opinion, is to practice the transformative learning theory by helping adult students meet their educational and career goals and become socially independent and responsible thinkers. Transformative learning promotes deep understanding which develops independent thinking. According to Mezirow (2006), transformative learning theory also helps to understand the learning situation by identifying factors of the process. The complete process of awareness is known as a frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997). Adult students' experiences of activities and knowledge define and change their lives. These experiences shape expectations, perceptions, cognition and feelings (Mezirow, 1997). This is when experiences transform to frame of references as selfreflective. The awareness is regarded as levels of reflectivity, becoming aware of feelings about the way individuals perceive, think or act (Mezirow, 1981). Communication is needed to validate why and how one understands or arrives at judgment in this process to make meaning.

Dirkx (1998) states transformative learning theory contributes to three different lenses: Daloz's (1999) development approach discusses the journey of adult learning, making sense of life's changes, discussion of real life, observing, transforming, forms of truth and reality, personal growth, and mainly mentoring. Freire's (1972) emancipatory approach is an act of transferring knowledge to gain a verbal formal expression of a commonplace in describing facts to seek a deeper meaning. Boyd's (1989) extra-rational approach involves the way adults learn based on subjective emotional factors of personal feelings and perceptions. Many researchers and scholars have used Mezirow's rational transformative learning theory in their studies (as cited in Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012).

Situated Learning Theory

Situated learning is a social learning theory suggesting people learn by observing and interacting in social settings (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These authors state knowledge is grounded in the actions of daily situations and is the result of a social process encompassing ways of thinking, perceiving and interaction. Situated learning can be achieved through complex social physical environments made up of actions and situations and the result of a social process about ways of thinking and perceiving. According to these theorists, there are two components in which the situated learning theory of socialization is gained: legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) and communities of practice (CoP).

According to Lave and Wenger (1991) LPP is "Students enter a community at the periphery and move closer over time to full and legitimate participation as they gain knowledge by learning the community's customs and rituals adopting a view of themselves as members of the community" (pp. 265-266). It is in a sense a professional learning community. Legitimate means belonging to particular community, peripheral means multiple ways of thinking and doing from the outside looking in, and participation means to partner with individuals within the community of learning by adopting a common agenda. The components of "legitimate peripheral participation" are interdependent and work as a unit. LPP is considered a situated activity when the learner as a "new comer" learns from an "old-timer" while taking part in a community of practice including learning as a (social) mode of knowledge development.

LPP model has four components: *practice* - learning by doing, *community* - learning as belonging, *identity* - learning as becoming, and *meaning* - learning as experience for the future. Learning is common to all components. The four components of LPP:

1. **Practice** - Trade or Profession

2. **Community** – Context or Environment

3. **Identity** – Promotion of Levels

4. **Meaning** – Significance Experiences

Learning can be transposed with any of the four components and keeps a functional circular model, because the elements are interconnected despite placement of experience. Community of Practice (CoP), anchored in the situated learning theory, is a process of social learning when people who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended time. The participants share ideas and strategies, decide solutions, and build innovations from within. In this social process, each individual is an active participant in the social environment of the learning community and the development. CoPs are comprised of three components: *domain*, *community* and *practice*.

The *domain* in a community of practice is more than a club or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest, for example the school where students matriculating in the adult education and career training program. Membership suggests a commitment to the domain, and a shared competence distinguishing members from other people. A gang may develop ways of dealing with their domain: surviving on the street and keeping an identity. They value their collective competence and learn from each other, even though few people outside the group may value or even recognize their expertise.

The *community* as in classes and courses to prepare for careers pursues interest in their domain, and members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other and share information. An example in this case is the adult education GED preparation program. They build relationships allowing them to learn from each other. Having the same job or the same title does not make a community unless members interact and learn together. The claims processors of a

large insurance company or high school students may have much in common, but unless they interact and learn together, they do not form a community of practice. Members of a community of practice do not necessarily work together regularly. The impressionists, for instance, used to meet in cafes and studios to discuss the style of painting they were inventing together. These interactions were important in making them a community of practice even though they often painted alone.

Summary

The review of literature provides a foundation of information from publications leading to my research on the subject. The review of literature established areas of need to reform adult education or for continuality whether the past research studies were successful or not. I built a case to show the need for current research in adult education in this Mid-Western state, specifically this city. From the review, it was learned: there is a return on investment to place funds in adult education (McLendon, Jones, and Rosin, 2011). The need for adult education programs are many and statistics provide a student population (Martin & Broadus, 2013;McLendon, Jones, and Rosin, 2011; ALWG, 2008) with motivations of returning to school (Boylan and Renzulli, 2014; Heckman and LaFontaine, 2008; Beder and Valentine, 1990).Boylan and Renzulli (2014) recommend research centered on adults returning to school and curriculum maintaining students' motivation. Past research also provides barriers adult education students face (Coffey and Smith, 2011; Thomas, 2008) causing consequences of completing the program.

The prior research case studies, Purser (1994), Igang (2001), Thomas (2008), Toledo (2010), Schulz and Rubel (2011), Solomon (2013), and McKay (2013) were reviewed and provided a guide for the current research at hand, McKay (2013) being the one case study most

influential on this research study because of the common features and students' stories, aspirations and goals as qualitative data.

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CHAPTER 3 (ARTICLE ONE) REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN AN URBAN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to narrate the realities, and render staff and students' perspectives, of students' learning and development in an urban adult education program. The experiences of adult students who took part in the study to prepare for the General Education Development (GED) over a 12-week period are documented. Qualitative data sources are as follows: GED classroom observations; students' status and performance on assessments preparing for the GED examination, college and careers; transcripts of individual interviews of three adult students, a teacher, and a counselor; and the researcher's journal entries of the interactions and personal thoughts of students' learning. The themes generated from the data are as follows: Adult education learners' flashbacks and futures; staff perceptions about student motivation and sustainability; and Constraints to completing the Adult Education Program. The study implies the need for prevention of high school dropouts and a promise to school returners.

Key Words: Adult Education; High School Dropout; GED; Learning Experience; Returners
Introduction

Introduction

The dropout rates for American public schools have increased over the decades (Angus and Hughes, 2017). Reasons found for dropping out of school include personal or family member illness, poor home life, financial hardship or poverty, lack of parental involvement, lack of school guidance and support, according to Koenig (2011) and McKay (2013). Between the ages of 16 to19 years, in the Pacific Northwest areas of the United States, the male participants' level of academic and social disengagement, particularly failure in school, was because of alienation in school, behavioral problems or a criminal history, and not being able to keep up with academic rigor which led to quitting or expulsion from school. Teen urban parents of multiple racial backgrounds have dropped out of school is due to pregnancy (Schulz and Rubel, 2011).

Fortunately, there are more than 4,000 adult education programs in the United States that provide opportunities for high school dropouts to earn a credential equivalent to a high school diploma, and to gain career readiness knowledge and skills for job opportunities in order to become economically independent (Rose, 2013). Realizing they could no longer continue their professional and personal lives without the high school equivalency credential (McKay, 2013), dropouts enroll in adult education programs to prepare for the General Education Development (GED) examination and careers (Boylan and Renzulli, 2014). In fact, the rate of dropouts returning to school for a GED has increased dramatically to nearly 50% (Heckman and LaFontaine, 2008). Dropouts are motivated to return to school for self-improvement in reading, writing, and math skills; family and children's needs; a social outlet; becoming better citizens and community workers; getting a job; earning respect; having more income; continuing education in college or postsecondary training; and satisfying the mandate of authorities such as the court system (Beder and Valentine, 1990). According to Bauman and Ryan (2001), the top motivations for returning to

school are for economic rewards, and Thomas (2008) reports, for better employment. Earning a GED is also about earning the credential for personal redemption to show their families and associates they have transformed, matured, and become more responsible, and prepared for professional work. However, Boylan and Renzulli (2014) point out that little research has centered on the process of adults returning to school. These authors recommend that the GED preparation process be also studied in efforts to encourage adults to return to school for economic and noneconomic outcomes.

Although the retuning rate is higher for a number of reasons, the passing rate is lower. Few adults pass the GED examination even after multiple attempts, and this ends their formal education (Gall, 2014). Because of their negative feelings on early school experiences, the present traditional classroom environment allowed for continued failure (Thomas, 2008). However, Toledo (2010) found most participants raised their reading scores on a posttest, and there were students who were motivated to learn in contextualized career practices using a hands-on approach (Toledo (2010). Using this approach to teach basic core subjects such as mathematics, reading and writing, according to Toledo, is beneficial and can be used within the context of learning job competencies. Based on his research, Toledo called for future research to explore the school-to-work programs where students use their reading skills once they are actively engaged in their career choice. Adults' perceptions of their learning whether subject matter or related issues pose difficulties for not passing the GED examination is a site for research according to Coffey and Smith (2011). These authors have suggested that research on practices and opportunities to improve both the adult education system and adult learners' performance objectives is needed to increase the passing rate. These types of research calls for research with repeated visits to actual GED preparation classrooms to study the adult education curriculum and teaching and document the aspirations of

the adults entering college or a career after taking the GED examination (McKay, 2013). Tracking adults' learning in their classes, studying their GED examination success rate, and explaining why students were successful or not successful are research needs. In other words, McKay's research details the process of adult students preparing for the GED examination to provide other adults in the same situation ways to continue their education, if they wish to explore the process. The results were positive--adult students were committed to their educational goals, while balancing school with work and family responsibilities. McKay also found many students wanted to continue their education in a college or a postsecondary school after earning a GED. This research undertaking took commitment, determination, and willpower to finish the process.

In line with the recommendations of Coffey and Smith (2011) to determine whether core subject matter and related issues pose difficulties of not passing the GED examination and increasing the passing rate, as well as of McKay (2013) to study the adult education curriculum, teaching, and awareness, to track adults' learning in their classes, to measure their GED examination success rate, and explain why students were successful or not successful, the study at hand aspired to make sense of Mid-western urban city GED program. Qualitative methods such as observations and interviews were used to gather the realities and perspectives of the students and staff about the adult education program. Thus, the following research question frames this study:

What are the realities and perspectives of students' learning and development in an urban adult education program?

Significance of the Study

This research study on the education process of adult learners preparing for the GED is significant for the following reasons:

The results of this study on the education process of adult learners preparing for the pretest to GED examination illustrate student growth and the timeframe of readiness to take the GED examination. The study provides research data and evidence that can be used to improve the existing urban adult education GED program; and inform other adult education programs how the GED program can help adult students to pass the GED examination. This research study makes suggestions to improve adult education teaching and learning based on the examination of one GED preparation program in an urban city adult education program in a Mid-western state**.**

Methodology

Study Design

A qualitative approach is used in this study (Cresswell, 2014).

Context of the Study

This study was conducted at an urban city adult education program in a Mid-western state where participants prepare to take the computerized 2014 version of the GED examination. There was a staff of three teachers; one was a GED teacher. Among the three teachers, there was not a single teacher who was state certified to prepare adult students to take the GED examinations because there is no such certification. However, most of the adult education teachers in the school have experience in teaching adult students.

Adult Education

Adult education, in this context, is teaching high school curriculum for teens to adults. Adult education is also remedial education which is coined Adult Basic Education (ABE), with content at the primary school level. Adult education teachers must understand the adult students' abilities, social maturity level, educational functioning levels (EFLs), and academic deficiencies

to teach what is needed to pass the GED examination. EFL is grade level according to pre- and post-testing for placement.

GED Classes in an Urban Adult Education Program

Full time evening students were enrolled in two classes. The subjects taught were English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, social studies and science. Classes were held Monday through Thursday from 4:00 P.M to 7:00 P.M, with a 10 minute break.

The General Assessment of Instructional Needs (GAIN) posttest is given after every 60 hours (five weeks for the evening program) of instruction in a semester to show the EFL growth and students' academic achievement. If the EFL is 8 or higher (8th Grade), students are given a GED practice test. If he or she passes a practice test with a score of 145 or higher, the student is given a waiver to the GED Testing Center to take the 2014 computerized GED examination at no cost. The cost is $150 to take all parts of the GED examination. If students fail any one of the four parts of the GED examination, the adult education center will pay another $10 for each part to retake up to two retakes in one school year. The center will pay up to $400 for each adult education student to take the GED examination.

GED Testing Center

There are off-site Pearson Vue Certified GED Testing Centers where students are sent to take the GED examination. The adult education center in this research study has an offsite GED testing center centrally located in this urban city. During data collection, the district's GED testing center was closed and in the process of moving which caused the participants to take the exam at other locations in the city and state. GED testing centers staff are trained to register, administer and proctor the four sections of the 2014 computerized version of the GED examination. At the districts' GED Testing center, there were twenty computer stations. Other testing centers are

physically arranged the same way. Students are urged to take one test per day. If all the tests are taken in one day, a timeframe of seven hours in one day is not recommended. Test results are immediately sent to the student by email from the GED Testing Service. Students leave the GED Testing Center with a printout showing if they passed or failed, which is later confirmed by GED Testing Services.

Student Participants

The students in this research study have not been in school for years after dropping out of high school. In this research, the adult education refers to adults returning to school who have dropped out of school during their adolescent years and who did not earn their high school diploma. The adults are not enrolled in any training programs after they have earned their high school diploma. Six adults agreed to participate in this research study, and three were being followed over the course because the other three participants stopped coming to the program immediately after their enrollment, attendance and testing. The other three participants gradually stopped attending the program. All participants were African Americans, in their thirties and forties of age. They were enrolled during the 2016 -2017 school year. Pseudonyms were given to protect the participants' identity. At the beginning of data collection, 14 students (ABE and GED) were enrolled in the program. The students enrolled in the GED courses were the target population. They have EFL scores, 8 or higher, on the entry pretest (GAIN). There were a total of seven students enrolled in the GED evening program.

Staff Participants

The GED Teacher, Jim, has been employed at the adult education school for seven years. At the time of this study, he was teaching English, science and social studies in the evening

program. He teaches only two nights a week, Mondays and Tuesdays. Jim is certified by the state to teach environmental studies and vocational classes in automobile technology and mechanics.

He has a bachelor degree in education and a master degree in business administration.

Nancy has also been an entrepreneur, and vocational teacher and worked in the business industry prior to her career in adult education. She is certified by the state to teach social sciences and vocational family and consumer sciences. She is new to adult education as a lead teacher and counselor. During the research, she completed one full year at the center in December 2016.

The researcher has been employed with this school district for 25 years as a student teacher, substitute teacher, contract classroom teacher, career and technical education and social studies curriculum leader, assistant principal, acting principal and now principal of an adult education center (not the context of the research study) for almost five years.

Data Collection

Data were collected over twelve weeks when students attended a GED preparation class to fulfil the required 60 instructional hours and take the posttest, practice test and GED examination. To address the research question; , classroom observations, interviews with students and staff, scores from pretests, posttests, practice test, career concept and qualities, researcher's notes, and GED examination scores were used.

Classroom Observations

Each class was of one hour and thirty minutes' duration and the second GED class was observed at least twice a week during the four days of class. The semester included three days off in November for Thanksgiving break and two weeks in December and January for Christmas break. There was one day in December when the school closed due to snow storm. The data

collection started on October 3, 2016 and the last day was January 12, 2017 due to the closing of the evening program.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with students and staff. To protect the identity of each participant, a pseudonym is given.

Students

Three participants were followed through and individually interviewed. The students were asked in the interview the following questions:

What is your current age?

What is your educational experiences before enrolling in the GED classes?

Why did you drop out of high school?

What motivated you to return to school?

What do you think of the adult education center GED program in preparing

you to pass the GED examination?

Students were interviewed separately in an empty classroom without an audience. The interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed as verbatim.

GED Teacher and Counselor

The purpose of the interviews were to explore how the GED teacher and the counselor perceived the experience of teaching adult students and their learning.

Researcher's Journal

Reflection journals offer an "open and honest" narrative outlook (Creswell, 2014). Interactions and thoughts of the observations and personal thoughts of student learning were

journaled. Instruction and outcomes of the daily lessons were observed and entries were organized by dates and times. First impressions, opinions and personal feelings of students' development were written.

The observations started the second week of classes for the adult education evening GED program. Day classes started September 6, 2016 and the evening started on October 3, 2016. The evening program was approved by the district on Tuesday, September 27, 2016. The program's time is from 4:00 P.M. to 7:00 P.M. The second class that started at 5:30 P.M. and ended at 7:00 P.M was observed. The time coincided with the researcher's personal work schedule.

Assessments

Adult education students in the GED program of this research study were given three different assessments: GAIN–pretests and posttests, Person Vue GED Ready practice tests, and GED examination in the following sequence:

The English pretest was given during registration for placement in ABE or GED classes based on the Educational Functioning Lever (grade level). Those who scored in the 8th grade level or higher were placed in GED classes, the focus of this study. After 60 hours of instruction (five to six weeks of good attendance) in English and social studies classes, students were administered the first posttest in English, hoping to increase the EFL level. If a student scored higher than their pretest with an 8th grade/ EFL or higher, a practice test in English and/or Social Studies was administered. When students pass a GED practice test with a score of 145 to 200, a GED test in one or both subjects were administered to the student at no charge to them. In the event the students did not pass the actual GED component, another 60 hours of instruction was recommended. Then another posttest was administered with the same expectation for practice and GED testing given. The process was the same for the math pretest. The math pretest and posttest were administered

to measure students' academic growth for the GED practice and actual GED testing in math and science. The 60 hours of instruction were expected in the students' math and science classes before post testing. The same scores of 145 or higher was the requirement to take practice and GED examination. If not, students were expected to attend classes another 60 hours for another posttest in math. It is to be noted that math pre/posttests were used for math and science GED testing and English pre/posttests scores were used for English and social studies. There was a specific GED practice and GED examination test for each of the four subjects. This sequence was ongoing until the end of the school year or once a student had passed all four parts of the GED examination would be a successful complete of the program.

General Assessment of Instructional Needs (GAIN)

The computer-based Wonderlic GAIN pretest and posttest instrument is a multiple choice instrument with four possible responses. There are two forms of the test, "A" and "B" measuring student literacy in English and numeracy. The English literacy part of the GAIN instrument consists of 80 multiple choice questions. The mathematics part of the GAIN instrument consists of 75 multiple choice questions. The testing duration for each part of the test is roughly one hour.

GED Practice Test

The GED Testing Service with Pearson Vue launched the new GED examination in January 2014. The GED serves as a vehicle for future post-secondary education, training and better paying jobs equal to a high school diploma. The four parts of the GED are: English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies. There are many practice tests available for students. In this study, Pearson Vue GED Practice Test was the practice instrument given at the Mid-western urban adult education center. The computer based practice test is similar to the actual GED examination. The test combines multiple choice questions with four answer options, short answers,

extended responses, fill in the blank, drop down embedded in passages, and technology-enhanced items. The practice test is similar to GED examination with less question and time permitted.

The official GED examination used in most states consists of four sections

1. Mathematical Reasoning – (45 minutes given)

2. (a) Reasoning through Language Arts – Part 1 - (47 minutes given)

   (b) Essay - Part 2 (45 minutes given)

3. Social Studies – (45 minutes given)

4. Science – (45 minutes given)

The practice test is scored by Pearson Vue with the same rubrics of the 2014 GED Examination.

GED students passing the GED practice test with a score of 145 to 200 were sent to a GED Testing Center to take the 2014 GED examination.

General Education Development (GED) Examination

The latest release (sixth edition) of the GED examination in 2014 by GED Testing Services and Pearson Vue (GED Testing Service Reports, 2012) is compared to a high school curriculum at the eleventh and twelfth grade level in core content areas and is aligned with the National Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Initiated by the American Council on Education (ACE) in 1942, the GED examination was created in 1943 for servicemen who joined the armed forces for World War II to earn the credentials to enter college because they joined the military before graduating from high school (Messerschmidt, 2014). New York in 1947 was the first state to allow high school dropouts to take the examination (Holt, 2014). Civilian GED examiners in 1959 were greater than the amount of veterans (Heckman, Humphries, and Mader, 2010). The GED is available in most states and includes French and Spanish versions. According to Heckman,

Humphries, and Mader (2010), 12% (over 500,000 dropouts) passed the GED in America in 2008. The new GED examination by Pearson Vue and the GED Testing Service changed in 2014 from the last revision in 2002, twelve years ago. The GED examination is an online computerized exam measuring college and career readiness through proficiency in four subject areas: mathematics, reasoning through language arts, social studies, and science. The examination consists of four sections:

1. Mathematical Reasoning – (34 questions and 105 minutes given):

    a. Quantitative Problem Solving – 45% of the test

    b. Algebraic Problem Solving – 55% of the test

2. Reasoning through Language Arts - (49 questions and 150 minutes given):

    a. Reading Comprehension and Informational – 75% of the test

    b. Literature and Writing/Edition – 25% of the test

3. Social Studies – (34 questions and 90 minutes given):

    a. United States History – 20% of the test

    b. Civics and Government – 50% of the test

    c. Economics – 15% of the test

    d. Geography and the world – 15% of the test

4. Science – (30 questions and 90 minutes given):

    a. Life Sciences – 40% of the test

    b. Earth and Space Science – 20% of the test

    c. Physical Science - 40% of the test

All four sections of the GED examination have multiple choice responses from a choice of four answers ranging from: drop-down selection, fill in the blank, drag and drop, short answers and extended responses/essays.

The total time allotted for all four sections of the GED examination is seven hours and fifteen minutes. It is recommended the student takes the examination over two to four days. Students can take the sections not passed two more times within one year.

The GED examination is scored by Pearson Vue and results are sent to student by email within three hours of taking. To pass the GED 2014, students must score 580 or above, a minimal of 145 per section. Students earn college and career readiness endorsement with a score of 170 in each section or above, total score of 620 or above. College credits may be given to students who score at 175 or higher.

Pre-Post Career Concept and Quality Test

 A test was administered to the adult students on career concepts and qualities at the beginning of the study. The same test was to be given as a posttest at the end of the study or when a student earned their GED certificate. As the researcher, I created the test based on College and Career Readiness Standards and Skills CCRSS). The test is composed of short answers and is expected to indicate students' growth as they learn career concepts and qualities during the adult education GED preparations classes. Table 1.0 gives the timeline of data collection for this article as addressed above.

Data Collection Timeline Table 1.0

Sl. #	Data	Week
1.	Recruiting, Obtaining Sample Population, Securing Consent Forms	1 - 3
2.	Pretest (GAIN)	2
3.	Posttest (GAIN)	N/A
4.	GED Practice Test	6-12
5.	GED Exam	10-12 for one student
6.	Career Concepts and Qualities Pretest	2
7.	Interview of Student Participants	7
8.	Interview of GED Teachers and Counselor	10
9.	GED Classroom Observation	1 – 12
10.	Researcher's Notes	1 – 12

Data Analysis and Representation

Data from two sources consisted of verbatim transcripts of open-ended interviews and journal entries of classroom observations. The content analysis of individual interviews and journal entries was performed by grouping descriptive words of the participants and the researcher, respectively, that shared a commonality, using a "comparison and matching approach" (Renner & Taylor-Powell, 2003, p. 4-8). This analytical process consisted of reading multiple times the students' experiences and staff's perceptions of students' experiences of learning contained in the transcripts, developing descriptive categories, and labeling the categories. The common categories characterized the realities and perspectives of student learning. Data were represented by each descriptive category and supported with the most fitting interview excerpts, journal entries, and students' test scores.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Study

The validity is based on critical meaning gained by the way an adult learner exchanged thoughts and ideas through their verbal communication. The same general questions were posed to the participants in the interviews to establish credibility.   All audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and returned to each participant (students, teacher, and counselor) for member checking (Creswell, 2014) to validate the accuracy of his/her perception of learning for career readiness. To establish conformability, the research claims were supported and substantiated with evidence of the findings. To establish dependability or reliability, two external researchers/chairperson Dr. Christopher Rodgers and an aspiring doctorate student who is also my adult education school counselor were used to audit or evaluate the accuracy of the findings and interpretations of data. The study was generalized to other similar conditions and contexts of adult education thus satisfying the issue of transferability.

Apart from the interview data source, classroom observations were recorded. Notes were jotted along with my thoughts in a journal during the semester to write how students were engaged in the learning experiences. Notes were hand-written and due to the teachers' union, no other form but the district rubric form could be used for teacher's or classroom observations. I could not use the district's form because I was not the GED teacher or counselor's immediate supervisor. Tape and video recorders were not permissible to use during classroom observations per the school district's approval to conduct research.

The data sources were triangulated leading to a single notion of a phenomenon such as the study of the adult education program. Kelly (2017) states triangulation is a good research practice to use for validity of research findings. Using interviews, classroom observations and my personal notes as a method to collect data allowed for triangulation and evaluation. As a result of this

research, it is obvious that qualitative research emphasizes description of the participants'

understanding.

Validity principles of Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to above are sufficient to show

reliability because according to these authors reliability and validity in qualitative research are

congruent. The validity of the study is grounded in the principle of reliability and trust between

the participants and the researcher.

Results

The research question is answered using the following themes generated from the data:

Adult education learners' flashbacks and futures; Staff perceptions of student motivation and

sustainability; and Constraints to completing the adult education program.

Adult Education Learners' Flashbacks and Futures

During student orientation days, I intently listened to the conversations between the

students and Nancy, the guidance counselor. Students admitted to reasons why they dropped out

of high school. Thus, I write the following thought in my journal:

> *During an orientation with the students, they discussed why they dropped out of high school and are returning to school as an adult. Some of the students admitted that they dropped out of school because of the lack of motivation. The street life was more important to them when they were in high school. They did not have support systems at home or school to continue their education. (Journal Entry 1, October 4, 2016)*

I noted two reasons why students dropped out of school: the lack of motivation; and the

importance of street life vis-à-vis the school. My immediate supposition was that the students did

not have home or school support to continue with their education in school.

After the student orientations in the first few weeks of classes, I met with six adult education

students who agreed to participate in my research study. I was able to interview three of the

students because of their class attendance to learn of specific reasons why they dropped out of

school. I begin with **Jane**.

1.0 R: Tell me about your educational experiences before enrolling in the GED classes.
1.1 Jane: I was an A and B student. I could have been an A student. I only fail because
                I was not there. I went to a couple of high schools in this city." 1.2 R: Why did
                you drop out of high school?
1.3 Jane: The Streets
1.4 R: What do you mean by the streets?
 1.5 Jane: Life, Life. Just hanging out in the streets. Thinking that it was important at the time.
                Fast Life, Fast Money, Fast People! I thought that was it. You get tired after hanging
                out and not go to school tomorrow. Tomorrow becomes the next day. Then the next
                day. Skipping a lot"

                                                              (Interview with Jane, November 14, 2016)

    Jane stated that she was an A and B student (1.1). She did not fail and pointed out that she

could have been an A student (1.1). Her failure in school was because she was absent a lot. Jane

also made it a point to inform me that she attended two schools in the city (1.1). Knowing that she

dropped out of school, I asked her for the reason (1.2). Jane quickly responded, "The streets" (1.3).

Jane describes her street life: aimlessly hanging out in the streets, "Fast Life, Fast Money, and Fast

People," her thinking was confined to the streets and did not know beyond that (1.5). At the end of

the day, Jane was "tired after hanging out" and not going to school the following day (1.5). Many

tomorrows passed by skipping school (1.5).

    I continue my conversation with **Jane**, eager to know why she returned.

1.6 R: What motivated you to return to school?
 1.7 Jane: I started last year in 2014, I think. I was 41, I think. It's been a year or so to me.
1.8 R: Why?
1.9 Jane: Because I need it.
1.10 R: You need what?
 1.11 Jane: I need my diploma. You just can't go any further. So many things I want to do to
                help other people, and children. So, how can I preach to them and I don't have it?
                Just because I know it, I got to still be an example. Because I will tell my story one
                day. That way I can be an encouragement to someone who is thinking about going
                back to school but feel that they are too old. Out of everything I been going through,

I can't get the science. I cannot grasp it. I am so hard on myself. That will probably be the last test I take. But, I took the reading GED test downtown and I missed it by I think I missed it by 9 points.

When they dropped the score down. I missed it by 4 points.

<div align="right">(Interview with Jane November 14, 2016)</div>

I was eager to know what motivated Jane to return to school (1.6). Jane was 41 years old when she returned to school in 2014 (1.7). Jane realized that she needed the "it" (1.9), meaning the "diploma" (1.11). Without a diploma, Jane knew that she cannot go any further and her concern was that she had many things to do: to help other people and children (1.11). Jane wondered how she can preach when she herself did not have the diploma. To Jane, knowing alone is not sufficient, rather she needs to be an example (1.11). Her story should encourage others like her to go back to school and age should not be a factor (1.11). I have observed Jane a couple of times in class and lives to her spirit--she is very friendly and helpful to new adult students in the program.

She contemplated with me about two subject areas, science and reading (1.11). She found science difficult and seemed happy that it is her last test and pleased to get it over with. Concerning the reading GED test, Jane mentioned the points she had lost (1.11). Jane appeared upset and was hard on herself because of science being difficult and not passing practice reading GED test because of losing a few points.

Like Jane, **Alice** also explained why she dropped out of high school:

2.0 R: Tell me about your educational experiences before enrolling in the GED classes. What year did you complete in high school?
2.1:Alice: The eleventh or the twelfth. I know I needed a couple of points to graduate on time and ended up getting kicked out of school.
2.2 R: Was it behavior you got kick out?
2.3 Alice   Yes, I was younger then.

<div align="right">(Interview with Alice, November 14, 2016)</div>

Alice was not sure of the year she completed the 11th or 12th grade but she needed more points to graduate on time from high school and by then she was kicked out of school (2.1). Alice agreed

that it was because of her behavior and that she was young and did not know any better. My

conversation with **Alice** continues:

2.4 R: What motivated you to return to school?

2.5 Alice   To tell you the truth, my sisters and brothers did everything I asked them to do. They went to high school and college. So, now they want me to finish. So, that is why I came back… for them. They all finish high school, got married and have children. They went to college and all.

2.6 R: Are you the oldest?

2.7   Alice Yes, so now it's my turn. I can't keep preaching to my cousins and not doing the same thing. So, I told them let me go back to school and let you see how it is done.

2.8 R: What do you think of the adult education center GED program in preparing you to pass the GED examination?

2.9   Alice I like it here. My teachers take time and actually show me. They take time and show me where I messed up and what to do. That is why I keep coming.

                                                            (Interview with Alice, November 14, 2016)

Alice stated that her siblings listened to everything she expected them to do, including

going to high school and college (2.5). Alice recognized that she ought to listen to them, and for

her siblings' sake she is back in school. Alice reiterated about the accomplishments of her siblings,

adding they are also married and have children besides finishing high school and college (2.5).

Now, as the oldest, it was her turn to go to school. This time, instead of preaching, Alice wanted

to go back to school and show her cousins how it can be done (2.7). Alice was back in school and

she liked it because her teacher took the time to show her where she "messed up" and what she

needed to do, a reason why she keeps coming back to school

(2.9).

        I talked with **Paul** next and he related his story for dropping out of high school:

3.0 R: Tell me about your educational high school experiences before enrolling in the GED classes. What year were you suppose to graduate from high school?

3.1 Paul: In 1996, I dropped out before my senior year because I guess I did not take school seriously enough. I was into to many other things."

3.2 R: Why did you drop out of high school?

3.3 Paul: I got kicked out of school, suspended. I actually went to alternative education then. It was in the city and they closed the school down. So, I lost focus right there. I got a job, so it was really like, hum….

<div align="right">(Interview with Paul, November 16, 2016)</div>

Paul dropped out of school in 1996, before he made it to his senior year because he did not take school seriously and many things occupied his mind (3.1). I missed an opportunity to ask Paul to elaborate on the many other things he was involved with. One can only assume that he was kicked out and was suspended from school because he was a troubled student. He enrolled himself in the city's alternative school, but the school shut down (3.3). After the alternative school closed, Paul lost focus and started working (3.3).

3.4 R: What motivated you to return to school?
3.5 Paul: Well my daughter first of all. How can I tell her something and I "ain't" doing it. So, that was one of my reasons.
3.6 R: How old is your daughter?
3.7 Paul: She is 20, my only child. I have to set an example, practice what I'm preaching.

<div align="right">(Interview with Paul, November 16, 2016)</div>

Like Alice, Paul also wanted to set an example. Alice, an example to her siblings, and Paul to his only daughter who is 20 years old (3.7). Paul pointed out how he can tell his daughter something when he himself was not doing it. He quotes the famous statement: Practice what you preach. His motivation was to demonstrate to his daughter that it is not too late to return to school and successfully earn a diploma (3.7) or GED.   Paul stated to me during off-recording that he is constantly telling his daughter to go back to school, so he must do the same.

Conversations with Jane, Alice, and Paul revealed reasons why they dropped out of school and why they were motivated to return. Why they dropped out of school included: hanging out in the streets and skipping school, suspensions and expulsions shows they had behavior problems that had nothing to do with academics and that is why I feel support was needed at home or at the

school. Now, they all were motivated to return to school, initiated by family members as home support.

After assessing students' career readiness skills, I wanted to know if students had future aspirations after earning their GED. I began my conversation with **Jane**.

4.0 R: Do you plan to attend college?

4.1 Jane: I don't know. I said I was but, yeah. Because psychology is something that I get. But the mind intrigues me. It fascinates me. It makes me want more. So, I want to do child psychology. So, yes college is in the plan. I just don't know where yet. The Lord will tell me because He is the one who told me to come back here. So, I'm learning to do what I can and not what I should be doing.
Because when I don't meet that criteria that I put myself up to, I disappoint myself. I don't like that. I just don't like that, to put a timeline on myself when I have not been in school for over 20 something years. So you know, you just can't keep that stuff in your mind if you ain't used it in 20 years?

(Interview with Jane, November 14, 2016)

Jane had aspirations to attend college majoring in child psychology after earning a GED. She was a woman of great faith in Jesus (4.1). Jane had aspirations of becoming a child psychologist (4.1) for the field fascinated her. She had returned to school 20 years later with an ambition in mind, but she did not want to set timelines because if she does not achieve, it sets her up for disappointment (4.1).

Alice also had an outlook on her future.

5.0 R: Do you plan on attending college once you get your GED?

5.1 Alice: Yes

5.2 R: Do you know what major and college?

5.3 Alice: No, I did want to own a day care center but I changed my mind because kids are something else these days. I changed my mind. Yes, by the time I get done, I would have figured it out by then.

(Interview with Alice, November 14, 2016)

Alice wanted to take her time in school and not rush. Once she earns her GED, Alice would

think about the next steps in her education career (5.3). At one point, she wanted to open a day care

center (5.3). Alice has not made plans for the future once she earns her GED

(5.3). **Paul** had future career plans and he wanted to continue his education.

6.0 R:　　　　Do you plan on attending college once you get your GED?
6.1 Paul:　　　That's what I planned on, taking on something that's a challenge really. Because these dead end jobs, I really want a job that will pay me enough money because I like a lot of things. Minimum wage is not going to do it. So, you have to have some type of education or background to get the job. And they are firing people who don't have the education and training.

<div align="right">(Interview with Paul, November 16, 2016)</div>

After earning his GED, Paul wishes to enroll in a postsecondary program to learn a trade so

he can increase in weekly income and have job security (6.1).

Staff Perceptions of Student Motivation and Sustainability

I had the opportunity to speak with **Jim**, the GED teacher, who was tasked to teach the GED

students, the core high school content to pass the GED examination.

7.0 R:　　　What are the things you perceive the students had in mind when they came to the GED program?
7.1 Jim:　　They will not have the opportunity of getting into higher levels of learning. By coming to school and getting their GED will be a way for them to remove themselves out of their low social-economic levels or environment.
7.2 R:　　　So, in your opinion, students come thinking that they can get their GED without putting in the work or time?
7.3 Jim:　　Exactly, it should be the opposite. That is one of the barriers they put up for themselves- attendance. They don't understand that not attending class will allow them to not cover the material that is on the GED.

<div align="right">(Interview with Jim, February 3, 2017)</div>

Jim pointed out that school will provide students the opportunity to go for higher learning;

and by attending school and earning a GED will be a way out of low social and economic status

(7.1). Although insinuated by me (7.2), Jim agreed that his GED students believed that they can

earn their GED without working hard and their thinking should be reverse. Not understanding that

poor attendance prevents them from covering material to pass the GED is an issue (7.3).

      I also had the privilege of speaking with **Nancy**, the counselor.

8:0 R: What are qualitatively differing perceptions of adult students as they take part in the urban adult education program preparing for the GED examination?

8.1 Nancy: My qualitative perceptions of urban adult students are that they have already made a life choice when they come in to register. Their income and job availability will influence participation in the program

8.2 R: What type of life situations and activities did you encounter with this group that stopped them from attending classes?

8.3 Nancy: Most of them had jobs. It may not be that they are at work but they are tired from working and cannot come to school and function well. Family, some had children and had to see about a babysitter. Their children may have homework and they had to help them."

8.4 R: Did the school have a childcare room or center?

8.5 Nancy: No, and I think it would truly make a positive difference in attendance in not only the evening program but the day."

8.6 R: What are adult students' achievements from the pretest to GED examination   as they learn the GED core subject areas in an adult education program?   What explanations may be given to their success or failure?

8.7 Nancy: It is often difficult for students to remain interested and committed to completing the GED program. Vocational training, job training and educational opportunities must be offered and reviewed with each student. Student achievements from the pretest to the GED examination indicate students are learning the required concepts to pass the tests. Success or failure often depends on consistent attendance, assignment completion, connections between classwork and achievement, interactions and participation in the classroom, positive relationships with staff, support and direction related to future choices, immediate attention to various personal and life barriers and personal self-views and family or staff support. Nancy perceived her urban students have made a decision when they come to register in adult education classes. Students' decision, according to Nancy, was influenced by the income and the availability of jobs (8.1). Nancy feared that some students stopped coming to school because their work at regular jobs tires them to attend classes and function adequately (8.3). Some have a need for childcare or help children with homework (8.3). The school did not have childcare area and if they did,

      Nancy believed students' attendance would improve (8.5). Number 8.7 points

to Nancy's perceptions about the students and the program. She pointed out that it was very difficult for adults to remain interested to complete the GED. She believed students should be made aware of the available training and educational opportunities when they complete their GED. Nancy found her students' struggles were related to not completing classroom assignment, relationships with the staff, no support at home and lack of focus to their future careers and academic goals. She believed that GED test results indicate that students are studying. Nancy noted also that the interactions and relationships among students and staff were not effective for student success. Furthermore, she felt that students did not have a positive view of themselves and needed attention and support services that she nor the school were able to provide such as a life coach or social worker.

Constraints to Completing the Adult Education Program

During the 12-week of my research journey, I found issues that prevented adult education students to continue with the program. Although some were more personal and others were program dependent, the reasons were interconnected. The barriers were: student poor attendance; lack of sixty-hour instruction for the GED between the pre-post practice tests; teaching methods; and the lack of standards-based college and career readiness curriculum.

Student Attendance

Poor students' attendance continued to be a concern where there were days when no students were in the school as stated in Journal Entries 1 and 2 on two different dates:

There were no GED students in attendance. I went to meet with the principal again to express my concern. He was also concerned about the low enrollment and no attendance. (Journal Entry 1, October 13, 2016)
I reported at 5:45 P.M. There were no GED students in attendance. (Journal Entry 2,

October 14, 2016)

My distress about the GED students' attendance was ongoing and once again resurfaced as I took the matter to the evening principal. My thoughts were those students who worked or have

other obligations during the day will not be able to prepare for the GED in the evening. Note what Jim states about the students' attendance issue (see Journal Entry 3):

> *The teacher mentioned he made phone calls to all students the previous week. They told him that they would return that week. I went to the other teacher's classroom. She stated that she thought the GED students were not coming because they did not have a teacher on Wednesdays and Thursdays. (Journal Entry 3, October 24, 2016)*

Jim called to check on his students and asked why they stopped attending classes. As he reported to me, some students told him that they would return the following week. After talking to him about his phone conversation with students, I went to visit another classroom. On this particular day, the ABE teacher first informed me that the GED students were not attending school because they did not have teachers on some nights, and on a daily basis their second period did not have a GED teacher, only a substitute teacher.

There were days when I called the school and learned that the poor attendance pattern worsen, I would call the school and learn that no students reported as indicated in Journal Entries 4 and 5:

> *I called the school and the secretary informed me that none of the GED students were in class. (Journal Entry 4, October 26, 2016).*
> *I called the school at 4:00 P.M. and there were no GED students in attendance. (Journal Entry 5, October 31, 2016).*

By this time, students were not reporting. It was my belief as well as that of the other staff, students were not attending because Jim only worked two days a week and the GED students did not have an assigned second period nor assigned GED teacher the other two days. This is what the ABE teacher and Jim forewarned me and I observed it for myself. Once again, I took the matter to the evening principal as indicated in Journal Entry 6.

> *The GED students were told by the evening administrator to report to the math substitute during second period daily and both periods on Wednesday and Thursday by issuing a schedule to the GED students. Alice is the only student who adjusted to the new schedule,*

attending the substitute's math class the most. I spoke to the GED teacher regarding students' attendance and their contact number so I can call them regarding their poor attendance. The teacher later emailed me their contact numbers. (Journal Entry 6, November 1, 2016)

After our conversation, the principal implemented an alternative schedule for GED students that was distributed to staff and students. Alice readily adjusted to the new schedule and thus I was able to observe her progress. I had a telephone conversation with Jim about students' attendance and asked for their contacts so I could call and motivate them to continue the program. I called the students and did not get any answers from them. I left messages for the students and followed-up with the school the next day to see if any students attended as a result of my phone calls as indicated in Journal Entry 7.

I called the school at 4:35 P.M. to check if there are GED students in attendance. The answer was, "no". I let the secretary know that I would call back later that evening. When I called again at 5:15 P.M., still no students reported. I was transferred to the ABE teacher who told me that on Wednesdays and Thursdays the GED students do not report because Jim does not work on those days. The GED students told the ABE teacher that they did not like the arrangement of them reporting to the same class as the ABE students. (Journal Entry 7, November 2, 2016)

The next day, there were no GED students in attendance after I called the school twice. I asked to speak to the ABE teacher. She shared her thoughts once again of why the GED students may have stopped attending. The ABE teacher reiterated that since Jim only worked two nights, the GED students did not like the new arrangement to attend classes with the ABE students. Later that month, the evening principal took the issue of the GED students' poor attendance upon himself again according to Journal Entry 8.

None of the GED participants reported which resulted in the evening principal sending an email to the central office director. (Journal Entry 8, November 30, 2016)

The action of the evening principal at this point was to email the central office director of adult education outlining the GED program issues which were no assigned GED teacher two days

and no assigned second period GED teacher every day resulting poor to no attendance from the GED students. He shared the email with me as he typed. The email was a request to hire another evening GED teacher and an interested teacher was identified from his day program. The director replied via email that there were no funds to hire another GED teacher.

As I have indicated before, there were many dates when the GED students were not in attendance. Journal Entry 9 shows another time when GED students were absent from school towards the end of the program closing:

> *Students were to return from holiday break. When I called the school at 4:15 P.M., the GED teacher stated that there were no GED students in attendance. He also informed me that there was a rumor going around about the closing of the program. I asked if he could call me once a participant reports. No call back. (Journal Entry 9, January 9, 2016)*

 No students reported on the first day of school after a two weeks of vacation for Christmas and the New Year. Jim was to call me back if any students reported, and there was no call back. He also told me that there is a rumor going around that the evening program was closing and it was the last week of classes. This rumor turned out to be true, some of the staff members knew before the holiday break but there was not official notification from central office to staff and students. Poor to no students' attendance may have been the reason for student test results, which were not promising.

Sixty-Hour Instruction for the GED between the Pre-post and Practice Tests

During the program, students were to increase their Education Functioning Level (EFL), also referred to as the grade level. Students were required to have 60 hours of instruction between pre and posttests. So I ask **Nancy**, the counselor, how the school prepares students for the GED tests.

9.0 R: Can you elaborate on the community resources to help prepare students for the GED? Was it online?

9.1 Nancy: Of course the GED practice test, I always talk about that with the students. I have them go on MyGED.com sometimes to review the GED examination tips. I would give their teachers scores so that they can review and supplement the information. The scores will tell what questions they missed and how to study for the same type of question in the books that we have to reference. I also give teachers and students the scores which gives the same information and references what type of skills they need to work on in class.

(Interview with Nancy, February 9, 2017)

Nancy discussed with me how she let students know in advance that they must pass a practice GED test before taking the actual GED test in the subject (6.1). If they do not pass the practice test, Nancy shares the scores with the students indicating what questions are needed to study. Nancy also gives Jim the same information to help him prepare lessons for students to improve (6.1).

Nancy interview continued. She provided ways the students are to be monitored for students' academic growth:

9.2 R: When you say consistent follow-up and monitor progress, what do you use to monitor students' progress?

9.3 Nancy: The GAIN pretest and posttest. I try to make sure the student takes the posttest every three weeks of good attendance.

9.4 R: Did any of your students in this group (GED) take the posttest? The GED teacher said no posttest due to poor attendance.

9.5: Nancy: I will have to research posttest scores and give them to you later.

9.6 R: What types of materials and instructional artifacts did you use to prepare students for the GED?

9.7 Nancy: I did not use any materials and instructional artifacts. I did not work with any academic aspects with the students. I did provide the GED books for home study.

(Interview with Nancy, February 9, 2017)

Nancy monitored student academic growth by administering GAIN pre-test and thereafter post-tests after every three weeks of the instructional hours (9.3). Unfortunately, posttests were not given by the teacher to this group (9.5) because of poor attendance (9.4).

Students lacked the 60-instructional hour requirement.   Later in the interview Nancy admitted that she did not instruct students (9.7) but, provided students with take home GED books and access to the MyGED.Com, which is a GED practice website (9.7).

Jane has not taken any parts of the GED this school year and this is her second year in adult education program during the current school year. I am curious how **Jane** gets ready for her GED practice testing:

10.0 R   Did you give yourself a timeline to get your GED?

10.1 Jane: I did in the beginning and disappointed myself. So now I don't have one because I disappointed myself by not moving as far as I thought I should. So, now I am just going pace by pace. I don't still want to be… You know, by the summertime I want to have taken all four tests. So, I do want to be in that ram and I know I can do it. I just have to be consistent.

                                        (Interview with Jane, November 14, 2016)

Responding to my question concerning timeline to get the GED (10.0), Jane stated (10.1) that she "did in the beginning" and was disappointed. Because of the earlier disappointment in not reaching her accomplishment, Jane did not set a timeline. Jane wanted to go one pace at a time. But she still wanted to do all four tests before the time expires in the summer. Jane is confident that she can do it if she is consistent. I am aware because Jane did not meet the GED deadline, she was only able to take the older version of the GED.

I observed **Alice** to be the most committed student in the adult education program. So I am curious to know her status.

11.0 R: Did you give yourself a timeline?

11.1 Alice: No

11.2 R: Have you passed any parts of the GED exam?

11.3 Alice: No

                               (Interview with Alice, November 14, 2016) Alice had not established a timeline to earn the GED (11.1). I am aware that Alice passed some of the practice GED tests, but not the actual GED examination (11.3).

Alice was observed the most in the classrooms because she had the best attendance of all students, although it was not satisfactory. Journal Entry 10 pertains to Alice's GED status.

> *Alice reported around 4:30 P.M. to take a practice GED ELA test. She did not pass with a score of 141. (Journal Entry 10, November 22, 2016)*

My comment above attests to Alice taking a GED practice test. As Alice attendance improved, Jim, the GED teacher, gave her a practice GED test in English even though she did not have 60 hours of instruction. According to my observation of Alice, she had good English skills with a high pretest score and was working diligently in class on English curriculum. Alice, however, did not pass the practice test with a score of 145 or higher. She did not let this failure discourage her and continued to report to class. Note Journal Entry 11 for her reward.

> Alice reported and she was taking the GED Science practice test. She did not pass with a score of 142. After the practice test, the teacher and student worked on pages from the Kaplan book recommend with her test results to strengthen her skills. (Journal Entry 11, November 28, 2016)

Alice was attending school regularly, so Jim allowed her to take another practice test. This time she took the science portion. She did not pass because her score was below 145, three points from passing. The results also pointed to her weaknesses based on the questions she missed. Jim gave Alice some work out of the textbook to help her strengthen those weaker areas. Therefore, when she took the science practice test again, there will be an improvement and hopefully she would pass. I observed Alice in class (see Journal Entry 12):

> *I went to another classroom and observed Alice in math class with the substitute math teacher. She informed me that she had a free voucher to take the GED practice science test the following week and was excited. She was working on her math skills for that GED test, "cost and percentages and down payments." She already took the GED practice social studies test and did not pass. She was also working on that subject with the GED teacher. I asked her if she took the GED practice test in English, she said "no". I asked her if she felt comfortable in taking it the next day since her pretest to the program in English was considered high (8), she said "yes." She stated she did not have an assigned*

GED English teacher to give her the test. I arranged with the teacher for her to take the practice test on December 6, 2016 with her GED teacher. The GED teacher sent me the answers to the interview by email later that evening.

(Journal Entry 14, December 5, 2016)

During my observation of her in math class, Alice was excited to tell me that she already passed the GED science practice test and was waiting to take the GED science test. Prior to this, she had taken the social studies GED test and failed. Alice was ready to take the English GED practice test. On this day, I observed her working with the ABE math substitute teacher. I asked Jim if he could waive the attendance criteria and give all the GED students an English GED practice test since their pretest English scores were all at high school level, placing them in GED preparation classes. If they passed the practice test with a 145 or higher they will receive a voucher to take the English GED examination at a testing center at no cost. He agreed and an announcement was made to the students. Those who were not in attendance were called by Jim. Journal Entry 13 shows that the GED practice test was administered the next day.

I *was informed that Alice earned a 153 on the GED practice English test. She is ready to go take the GED exam in English and a free voucher was given to her. (Journal Entry 13, December 6, 2016)*

Alice passed the GED practice test in English and received a voucher to take the GED English test within two weeks. She was the only student who reported to take the English practice test. **Nancy** also spoke of the students preparing to take the GED in an interview.

Now I want to focus on Paul's status in the preparation for the GED as recorded in Journal Entry 14.

At 5:45 P.M., the GED teacher called me to inform me one participant, Paul, arrived late. The participant has passed all parts of the GED examination but math. So, there was no need to give him the GED practice test in ELA. He did not feel comfortable taking the GED Practice test in math. The participant studied math with the ABE students in the substitute's classroom for the remainder of the evening. (Journal Entry 14, November 21, 2016)

Jim informed me that Paul passed his GED examinations except math and he is not feeling comfortable in taking it, however, he was only one test away to earn his GED. On a side note, Paul was the closest to pass all parts of the GED with the following scores: English: 145, Social Studies: 145, Science: 147, Math: TBD. He took the math examination three times last school year (the maximum attempts) and failed each time. Because of my pressing conversation with him to take the test (**see below**), Paul even went to the ABE classroom to learn from a substitute, something he normally did not do. Jim shared with me that Paul is afraid to fail the math GED and I observed the fear on Paul's face after the practice test date was discussed with him. The next time I only observed Paul as Journal Entry 15 tells:

The participant worked on Grad Point to strengthen his math skills. (Journal Entry 18, November 28, 2016)

Paul worked independently on the computer using an online tutor to improve his math skills based on his prior GED math tests results from the-previous year. The online tool sets students curriculum after they take a pretest with the computer program. The math assignments were based on his math weaknesses. After he finished his lessons for the day on the computer, Jim gave him the workbook as recorded in Journal Entry 16.

One participant reported to the GED class around 5:00 P.M. He was given the assignment to continue math from yesterday's assignment/ pages in the Kaplan book to prepare for the GED practice math test. The math problems were advanced algebra and trigonometry. The teacher reviewed the problems with him and they worked until 6:30 P.M. . (Journal Entry 16, November 29, 2016)

Paul worked out of a Kaplan book with Jim. Jim was not assigned to teach math but is working with Paul since he shows up for his class and does not stay for the second period from 5:30 P.M. to 7:00 P.M. Paul maybe more comfortable working with Jim because he was his teacher last school year and they had a good relationship. Paul worked a job during the day and attended

the program in the evenings. Jim gave Paul an assignment to complete in the textbook that would help him prepare for the practice GED math test. Paul finally agreed to take the practice test the following week before the holiday break. Paul followed through with completing advance math problems. A couple weeks later, Paul took the practice math test as recorded in Journal Entry 17.

> *Paul came on Thursday, December 15, 2016 to take the practice GED test in math and passed with a score of 149. He was the closest to pass the GED examination because he had passed three parts already. I asked the GED teacher if he could call him to come in the next day or that week to register to take the GED math examination over the Christmas Break. The teacher agreed to call him. He is the only hope to have one out of the three participants to pass the GED. (Journal Entry 17, December 19, 2016)*

Paul took the practice math test fearing the worse, but he passed. It is unfortunate that when he took the actual math GED examination, he failed. Paul has not been back to school since failing. This is unfortunate because Paul has two more opportunities to retake math. As far as students passing the GED, **Nancy** refers to Paul:

12.0 R: Did you have any students that passed the GED in the evening program? Did everyone who passed the practice GED pass that part of the GED?

12.1   Nancy: No, Paul did not do well on the GED math test?. I believe he scored 137.

12.2 R: I am aware of that. I also called him on the day of his testing. It was 3:00 P.M. and his report time to take the test was 3:30 P.M. He wasn't going but, I motivated him to go take the test. He told me that he was not ready, but went. I feel bad that he did not pass.

12.3 Nancy: He knows that he has more times to take the test.

12.4 R: I called him the next day once I checked his score with the GED teacher. I called him to see if he planned to take it again and attend day classes. He said not at this time and that he would attend another school.

12.5 Nancy: He went through the other three parts so fast and now he is just stuck on math. I think after many failures and many challenges, he can't get past this. I think he feels he has to start all over in a new program with a new instructor. I was talking to him about going to college.

12.6 R: I talked to him the day of the test and the day after. I have not been able to reach him thereafter to see if he was going to enroll in the day program or another program. He was thinking another program but not any time soon.

12.7 Nancy: Which means he has probably given up.

(Interview with Nancy, February 9, 2017)

Nancy was hopeful that Paul would pass the GED, but he scored 137, below a 145

(12.1). I knew already that Paul did not pass because I checked with the teacher and called Paul

(12.2). I urged Paul to take the Math GED exam when he did not think he was ready

(12.2). Nancy assured me that he has more opportunities to take the test (12.3). The next day, I

called Paul again (12.4) and he did not answer or return my call. Number 12.5 reveals Nancy's

concern for Paul. She highlighted that Paul went through the other parts of the GED quickly and

he was unable to pass the math even after taking it a few times. So Nancy assumed that Paul's

feeling was that he has to start all over again with a new program, with a new instructor. Nancy

even talks to Paul about going to college. I was also trying to get hold of Paul the third time after

talking to him two times (12.6). Nancy felt Paul not communicating with me is a sign he has given

up with GED testing (12.7). I felt a little guilty after learning Paul did not pass the math GED

because I convinced him to take the test a few hours before it was administered (12.2). My push

was in an effort to have at least one GED graduate in the research study.

Methods of Teaching

I observed the GED class during the second period of the evening program and noticed all

instruction was individualized based on the students' core academic needs to pass the GED

examination. There were no lesson plans submitted to the evening administration to share with

me so that I may observe the class properly. The teacher would teach to the core academic needs

of the students. The GED teacher's plans were based on pretest and GED practice tests. He wanted

at least one GED graduated from the evening program. Some of the participants needed to pass

all parts of the GED examination while one only needed to pass the math part. The teaching

practices embedded in the classroom observations were aligned with individualized instruction in

a small class size of five (at the maximum) or less. During classroom instruction, students worked on the computers or out of a workbook independently with teacher guidance.

Jim and the newly assigned evening principal were not on the same page of how to teach the adult students. The new principal did not have prior experience in adult education. There were no curriculum, staff meetings or professional developments for the evening staff during the 12 weeks of my journey. The GED teacher understood his students' strengths and weaknesses. The students were also aware of their strengths and weaknesses and often would give examples such as, "I am not that good in math" (Alice). Once this awareness was expressed by students in various ways, the GED teacher was able to focus on individualized strategies and practices to improve their academic skills.

During classroom instruction, I observed that students worked independently from a workbook, on computers, or one-on-one with the GED teacher, when they were in attendance. During observations, I recorded in my journal students working using these instructional methods: Journal Entry 18 is my observation of classroom instruction:

> *I reported to the GED class. There were four new GED students in attendance. I observed the class as they worked on algebra problems. Two worked independently on computers and the other two worked with the teacher. (Journal Entry 18, October 11, 2016)*

On this occasion, two students were working on the computers using Grad point and they were very quiet. I asked Alice, "What you are working on?" She replied, "English". Jim added that Alice did very well on her English pretest. I asked Alice if she was ready to take the English practice test and she said yes. Jim noted our conversation and added that she needed 60 hours of instruction to take a posttest, then she would take the practice GED in English. On another occasion, Journal Entry 19 shows evidence of another teaching method.

I arrived at the school at 5:30 P.M. and observed two GED students working independently on the computers. (Journal Entry 19, November 1, 2016)

When I observed students working on the computers, I was concerned to know what

Jim thought of his classroom instruction in preparing students for the GED examination.

13.0 R:　　　　　How do you think your instruction and guidance counseling prepared adult

　　　　　　　　students to pass the GED?

13.1 Jim:　　　The instruction is geared for the core subject matter required to pass the GED. Well, my approach is to take and go through the curriculum of the Kaplan book. Once the Kaplan book is completed, I test their knowledge with a practice GED test to see where they stand at that level.

13.2 R:　　　　What are some examples of instructions and lessons in the Kaplan book? Was it all four content area?

13.3 Jim:　　　Yes, mine are specifically science and social studies.

13.4 R:　　　　Someone else taught math and English?

13.5 Jim:　　　Correct

13.6 R:　　　　What types of materials and instructional artifacts did you use to prepare students for the GED?

13.7 Jim:　　　Kaplan GED book, Steck-Vaughn book, handouts, and Grad point.

13.8 R:　　　　Can you please elaborate on the handouts and Grad point?

13.9 Jim:　　　Grad point is basically used to allow the students to work on their own in all subjects. Grad point is used to either catch-up or go ahead and find additional information that they need to study, or having problems with, or if they missed a class or so. Handouts would be anything particular that I would give them for additional explanation for a concept that is difficult for them to understand. One of the things I used from Steck-Vaughn was the workbooks that we have on the computer. We would go through and answer particular questions in science workbook that allow the students to have a repetitive nature of the questions they would see on the GED test.

(February 3, 2017)

Jim focused on classroom instruction to pass the GED (13.1). He taught the GED by using

the books and handouts, working until completion (13.1, 13.7). Once the students completed a book,

Jim administered a practice GED test to assess their knowledge (13.1). Most of the time, Jim only

geared classroom instruction on science and social studies (13.3). Other teaching material used by

Jim for GED instruction was an online tutor program called Grad point (1.39).

Lack of College and Career Readiness Standards.

I asked **Jim** during the interview about his instruction in helping the students learn career

readiness skills.

14.0 R: How do you think your instruction prepared adult students for careers?
14.1 Jim: It allows the students to prepare for a better job once they obtain their GED.
14.2 R: Can you discuss what type of curriculum and instruction that you gave to prepare
               students for better jobs? What did you do to help them for better careers?
14.3 Jim: I used critical thinking skills, group thinking and group management to work with
               others.
14.4 R: What are the examples of each?
14.5 Jim: Critical thinking would be going through and analyzing a particular problem
               that they were working on and using critical thinking steps to solve it. Group
               discussions and group work are important because it is part of the workplace
               now for the majority of companies that are out there. An example of that would
               be cooperative learning, working together for the better of the group. Putting
               the stronger people with the least strong so that they can help each other
               understand the concepts.

                                                      (February 3, 2017)

Jim thought of the adult education program as a place for his students to prepare for better

jobs once they obtain their GED (14.1). That he did not follow a career curriculum and only

focused on the GED examination instruction. He uses critical thinking skills and group discussions

(14.3, 14.5). During my research journey, I did not observe group discussions geared towards career

planning nor did I see any group activities in his class as indicated in the interview passage above.

Journal Entry 20 is when I had an opportunity to discuss with Jim a pretest/posttest I created

that will assess students' career readiness.

> *I reported to the GED classroom and there were no students present. I asked the*
> *teacher, "where are your students?' He stated, "I wonder where they are?" I gave*
> *him six copies of the Career Readiness Concepts and Qualities Pre/Posttest and*
> *asked if he would administer the test to his evening GED students on Tuesday. He*
> *agreed to give all of his students the pretest. I stated I would pick up the test on*
> *Tuesday, October 11, 2016. (Journal Entry 20, October 10, 2016)*

I discussed the career readiness concepts and qualities pre/posttest with Jim after a classroom observation, he agreed to administer it to his students. Journal Entry 2 1 indicates the students taking the career pretest.

At 5:45 P.M., I reported to the GED prep class. There were four GED students in attendance. The teacher also returned the Career Readiness and Qualities Pretests that he administered to the students earlier in the day. (Journal Entry 21, October 11, 2016)

I reported the following day and the students took the career readiness concepts and qualities pretest. Not all participants were available to take the pretest, only four out of six were assessed. The highest scores results was 67%, none passed using a grading scale of 0% to 100%. This suggests that CCRS should have been a major topic during class time. The pretest results presented a dire need for the students to learn CCRS. None of the participants that took the career concepts and qualities pretest were ready or available to take it again as a posttest due to poor attendance and the absence of CCRS instruction. All instruction, assignments and computer lessons were geared toward passing the GED. If the pretest had been an entry level job placement test, I hypothesize the students would not be called for the job. The results of the career pretest are: Sam- answered 7.5 out of 12 questions correctly and earned a score of 63%, Paul - answered 7 out of 12 questions correctly and earned a score of

59%, Mary - answered 5.5 out of 12 questions correctly and earned a score of 46%, Alice - answered 8 out of 12 questions correctly and earned a score of 67%, Jane and Joy did not take the pretest.

Nancy was dedicated to the job and had thoughts of her guidance as support to the students in helping the students with career decisions. Consider the interview with **Nancy** as she speaks of career readiness for evening students:

15.0 R:	How do you think your instruction and guidance counseling prepared adult students for careers?
15.1	Nancy: My guidance counseling prepared adult students for careers in several ways. I use discussions, comparisons and review of various personal skills and aspirations.
15.2 R:	What discussions did you have with your students on career development? Please elaborate on your discussions.
15.3	Nancy: I always asked the question, what did you want to be when you grow up? We would talk about what they want to be and their pursuit along with the needed skills abilities. We would discuss how they relate to that career and is it realistic. I have students say, I want to be a nurse. Then I asked, how are your math skills? They may say, I am not so good in math. We would talk about foundations you need to have in order to reach and be successful in careers and jobs.
15.4 R:	Did you have any partnerships with employers or career training agencies to help student obtain or maintain jobs during the evening program?
15.5 Nancy:	Well, the same ones we have during the day.
15.6 R:	Did they ever come in the evening?
15.7 Nancy:	No, they did not. But, I made referrals that students would have to find a way to c come back during the day.

(Interview with Nancy, February 9, 2017)

Nancy thought of her guidance to students as a wraparound service that prepared students for the GED and careers (15.1) even if they did not know what pathway to take. I observed a wraparound service during the first days of observations when Nancy conducted orientations. Students were asked questions regarding their future (15.3). During an orientation with the students, Nancy discussed why students dropped out of high school and are returning to school as an adult. During another orientation with Nancy, I heard students discuss why they dropped out of school and were looking forward to earn their GED. This group were low level adult basic education (ABE) students. During the day program, Nancy has assistance with career development, but not during the evening program. She invited the evening students to come during the day and gave them referrals.

Discussion

This study has raised several issues and the discussion focuses on three important areas. They are as follows: Adult education, another opportunity; Consequences of students' attendance; and GED requirements and empathy.

Adult Education, another Opportunity

Conversations with the three students in this study clearly reveals the reasons why they dropped out of high school. Jane, a smart student, who was getting "As and Bs" skipped school often enough to eventually join "the street" that gave her quick, short-lived pleasure. Alice, who was "kicked out" of school because of bad behavior, claimed that at the young age she did not know any better. Paul reasoned that he dropped out of school because "many things" occupied his mind that he did not take school seriously. These reasons are only a few among many other wrongs that have forced students out of high school according to the general data in Gall's (2014) and McKay's (2013) research study.

The interesting point is even students who earn good grades drop out of school. For instance, some honor roll and active students in McKay's study, like Jane who got As and Bs, dropped out of high school to enjoy the pleasures of street life. Presumably, there was no family support to steer the students through the rocky period of teen turmoil. It is inferred from the study at hand and McKay's findings that good grades are not the determining factor to remain in school. Obviously, the evil street life is a stronger force than school life to distract young minds from their studies. Resorting to street life, bad behavior, or other interests do not seem to pertain to students' racial and cultural identities because the majority of the twelve participants in McKay's Los Angles study were Latinos and the current Urban city adult education program study African Americans, respectively, and yet they seem to have similar propensities.

Although students drop out of high school, they return to school through adult education program for various reasons. Jane sought to reach out to people like her and was fully aware that without the diploma she will not be able to follow her desire. Alice went back to school for her siblings' sake and to show her relatives that "it" (the diploma) can be earned. Like Alice, an example to her siblings, Paul was for his only 20 year old daughter. As evidence reveals, all three adults returned to school so that their lives can impact others or family members, who are in the similar predicament.

A career plan is another reason why adult students in this study returned to school. Jane wanted to major in child psychology after earning a GED because the study of mind fascinates her, although she did not want to set any goal because not reaching it will only be a big disappointment. Alice had in mind opening a day care center, but she did not want to think about her career plan until she completed her GED. Paul was after a trade, which he thought would increase his weekly income and provide job security.   Like Paul points out that he will have increased income and job security, Jim, the GED teacher, and Nancy, the counselor, both concurred that completing the GED and launching onto careers will provide sustainable living and financial security. This piece of evidence corroborates with the finding of Gall (2014), a GED teacher, who stated that most of her students wanted to earn their GED for better jobs.

The study at hand is also supported by McKay's (2013) study that captured the students' future aspirations when adults return to school to earn a GED and wish to continue their postsecondary education in a college or at a trade school. A majority of McKay's participating students desired to do postsecondary education and one student opted for career obtainment. There was one particular student in his study, who was goal orientated and close to achieving the GED just as Paul. In both studies, students felt that the GED will prepare them to lead a better life and

enable them to meet personal and career goals. The study at hand, in line with McKay's study, adds to the literature on the adult students' future aspirations so as to understand their goals in life and why a GED is so vital to achieving the goals. Knowing students' career goals alone is not important, but does the GED programs also provide adequate education to achieve them?

The Federal Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (2014) states that adult education providers must teach career skills. Adult education teachers are required to include College and Career Readiness Standard (CCRS) (McLendon, Jones, and Rosin, 2011) as a student outcome in their lesson plans. The staff in the current study indicated that a goal was to prepare for better jobs after the students obtained their GED and, therefore, a career curriculum was normally used to guide teaching. The GED teacher, Jim, claimed to use critical thinking skills and group discussions. These essential elements of teaching that gear towards career planning were not evident and the primary instructional focus was the preparation for the GED examination. The scores that students obtained in the area of careers would not have allowed job placement. Clearly, the CCRS was neglected.

Consequences of Students' Attendance

Students' attendance was a perennial problem in this study, and reasons for this, according to the ABE teacher, were that the school had no teachers to teach every evening of the week for Jim, the GED teacher taught only two days a week, and there was no GED math teacher and it was taught regularly by a non-certified substitute. Additional reason was that some students could not adjust to the alternative schedule given by administration that may have helped the students to prepare for the GED. Students did not appreciate the new arrangement because they had to attend classes with the adult basic education (ABE) remedial students, who were taught low-level math instead of a higher level math in preparation for the

GED. Because of lack of funds, the administration could not hire another teacher. Poor to no students' attendance, regardless who to blame and where the problem might lie, may have been the reason for students not to pursue with the program or pass the GED examination.

With respect to GED students' attendance, although perfect attendance is not a requirement of enrollment into the GED program, the school district admonishes that students attend classes regularly. While Jim pointed to the aspect of poor attendance that keeps them from successfully completing their program, Nancy painted a comprehensive picture why students are not able to complete their GED program. The causes were both personal and programmatic. Some examples Nancy gave were low self-esteem, no job training or placement, no childcare at the school, no connections to the world of work, and the lack of positive relationships among staff and students. As in the current research, students' poor attendance was not the main barrier in adult students completing the GED in Gall's research, employment and family obligations were the underlying issues.

Rejnö, Nordin, Forsgren, Sundell, and Rudolfsson (2017), upon studying the impact of attendance on passing or failing a major exam in a nursing program, found attendance along with class participation were directly linked with the student passing the exam. Their students who attended school 75% of the time had an almost three times higher chance of passing the exam than those attending less than 25% of class time. The authors associated the increase of the percentage score on the nursing exam by 13 percent with increased attendance. Their study concluded that a regular attendance was equivalent to passing the exam with a higher score. Thus, Rejnö et al. (2017) recommended staff to motivate students to attend classes daily so that it would contribute to an increased number of students passing an exam. Rejnö et al.'s findings and recommendations apply to adult education students and potentially contribute to an

increased graduation rate for GED completers because students have the opportunity to learn the content knowledge for passing the exam.

GED Requirements and Empathy

Pretests and posttests are tools to measure students' learning, and the results have statistical relevance (Delucchi, 2014). These measurement tools also apply to the GED students in adult education programs. The GED students obtain academic training in all core subject areas and associated practice tests as interventions between the pretests and posttests. The criteria for administering a post-test in a particular subject area are 60-hours of instruction and 20 to 30 days of attendance between the pretests and posttests. Instruction in students' problem core subject areas is to improve their Educational Functioning Level (grade level). This means students must pass a GED practice test with a score of 145 or higher before taking the actual GED exam in a subject area according to Nancy, the counselor. If a passing score on the practice GED is not achieved, the student studies the recommendations given by the practice test score sheet before taking the same test again.

Person Vue, the creator of the GED, states that passing the GED practice test is an indication that the students will pass the GED exam in the same subject and if students are sent to the GED testing center without passing the practice test or scoring at a 9th grade level on the posttest, the student will fail in the GED exam. However, after examining the students' scores from the same GED pretest, practice test and the posttest, Colon (2017) found the required scores on both the practice and posttest are not good predictors of students passing the GED examination. As in the case of Paul in the current research study, although he eventually passed the GED practice test in math after attempting it for three times, he did not pass the GED math exam. Similarly, Alice passed the GED practice test in English but did

not pass the actual GED exam in English. What this suggests is that students passing the practice test and the posttest is not a good predictor of success in the GED exam.

Whatever the case might be when a school goes beyond justice and shows mercy, the students might have a tendency to attend school and to study. For instance, the teacher did not administer the GAIN posttests to any of the students because they did not meet the 60-hour instruction requirement between the pretests and posttests because of poor attendance. Because the researcher persuaded to waive the attendance criterion, Alice was able to report to the English GED preparation class and pass the English GED practice test and was subsequently granted the voucher to take the GED English test. What this scenario suggests is regardless of the school's attendance policy for administering the GED practice test, students should be given an opportunity to take the test so that they do not lose self-confidence.

Similar to the current research that revealed that Jane's struggle in science and Paul's in math, Gall's GED students struggled in the core subject areas. In comparison to Gall's study that raised the issue that GED students lack self-confidence, the current study revealed that Paul's confidence lowered while taking the math GED exam and not passing, Jane's confidence lowered in taking all parts of the practice GED and not passing, and Alice's confidence lowered by not passing some practice GED tests as well as the GED examination. When adult students attempted to take GED, it is only human nature failing a number of times make them lose their confidence as Nancy and Jim pointed out about Paul's situation in not passing the math exam even after several trials and coming fairly close to the passing grade. After weeks of the program, one of Gall's students decided math was too frustrating for him, so he left the program which is very similar to Paul. Gall's student left and studied math just as

Paul mentioned he would do without enrolling in the day program as suggested. The only difference, unlike Paul, Gall's student earned his GED within weeks.

Implication

This study has implications for the high schools and GED adult education programs. They are as follows: prevention of high school dropouts; and promise to school returners. The study aspires to inform educators of other adult education programs on how to identify and improve adult education students' experiences of preparing for the GED examination, college and careers.

Prevention of High School Dropouts

This study has pointed out that students resorting to street life, bad behavior, or other interests caused them to stop high school. The study also revealed that race or culture was not partial to students dropping out of school. While the students of this study blame themselves for dropping out of school, Koenig's (2011) study participants pointed to external aspects such as motivation to stay in school; disconnection to teachers and school; the sort of curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment. These aspects may have underpinned the route to street life, bad behavior, and interest in other matters of life. Despite dropout prevention through legislation proposals to balance and decrease the dropout rate, the problem of high school dropouts still remains. Angus and Hughes (2017) report that high school dropout rates have increased in the last 10 years. The education proposals by Koenig (2011) must be revisited to redesign and reform high schools to sustain students' interest in school. The National Governors Association in collaboration with the U.S. Congress must recommend the government, like it did in 2010, to financially support state improvements in school programs through federal grants. This suggestion will ensure each state implements various programs that will help to advance and expand high school curricula such as: college programs through dual enrollment; offering a variety of classes that students will have an

interest in that is related to their career goals. The grants could also help states pay for high school students to earn college credits towards a degree and included in this recommendation is high schools partnering with business to provide mentoring, shadowing and internship opportunities. These redesign and reform suggestions are is in line with Angus and Hughes (2017) to promote mentorships in high school climate that will positively influence students' academic achievement and high school completion. The recommendations also support guidance and counseling services for high school students to plan their future in college and career opportunities. Other programs mentioned are: Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and vocational certification STEM and foreign language programs and online courses. If not, high school could lose their accreditation for their high dropout rate. It is also essential that parents and guardians endorse and promote their children to take part in the programs funded by the federal grants by ensuring their child is in school daily.

The research participants in the current study, may not have had family and school support to steer them through the rocky period of teen turmoil while in high school. If organizations match mentors with high school students for support as Angus and Hughes (2017) suggest, they may not fail. All high schools should create career pathway partnerships or mentor guidance programs to motivate teens to graduate from high school just as Angus and Hughes (2017) and Koenig (2011) have recommended.

Quality teachers and teaching are important in any culture and assuming the Blacks and Latinos cannot be taught through methods such as problem solving, project-based, and problembased learning, are an injustice. This is intellectual discrimination and these racial groups respond very well to sophisticated methods according to McWhirter et al.(2017); NSD Griffin et al.(2017) and McWhirter, Garcia, and Bines (2017) evaluated two schools with the majority and

found Latino students education discrimination and other barriers as the bases for high school students dropping out. Likewise, Griffin, Cooper, Metzger, Golden, and White (2017) point out that negative racial climate and lower expectations of African American students' academic achievement is a major cause for an increase in high dropout rate in the race. Specifically, African American students have lower reading, mathematics and science scores compared to the majority racial groups and they are also over-represented in special education programs because of behavior disciplinary records and they are accounted for too many suspensions. Thus, teachers and school administration must be knowledgeable of the discriminatory frequencies and discourage the acts by fellow students and teachers. Providing professional development on discrimination interventions focusing on resolving spoken and unspoken acts to reduce the achievement gap for racial and ethnic minority students is important. By doing so, the dropout rate for minorities may be reduced and there could be an abolition on prejudice and injustice in schools based on students' race.

Promise to Returners

In this study, the GED adult education program could have met the needs of Jane, Alice, and Paul so that their lives can impact family members and others, who are in the similar predicament by addressing their barriers early in their enrollment. This could be accomplished by an intense orientation that is more than one hour at the beginning of enrollment. Weekly orientation for returners should be carried out in order to discuss the past negative school experiences and confront barriers in a setting where solutions are given and evaluated with check points. Once the three students are provided with ways to deal with their mental and emotional challenges, the focus on learning towards accomplishing goals could have been the

focus. A counseling program could have helped Jane to return to school for the GED preparation.

Mentoring adult students with former adult education graduates is another suggested method to keep current students focused on their goals. This could have benefited Paul and Alice to pass the GED. When they see the success of other adults with the same background and interests, the finish line would be more visible and capable of reaching with support.

According to the Federal Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (2014), College and Career Readiness Standard (CCRS) should be included in lesson plans. If a career curriculum or partnership with local businesses was available to help prepare adult students for careers, Jane, Alice and Paul would have sensed the relationship between the GED and their future. It is suggested that adult education teachers use CCRS daily in lesson activities for workplace soft skills for Malin, Bragg, and Hackmann (2017) state CCRS are driving force to improve the preparation of high school students to transition to college and employment and should be used in adult education programs. Keeping students' interest and relation to their futures will sustain students to finish their goal of completing the program by earning their GED certificate. The students in the current study were not engaged in contextualized workplace training to improve their career skills of interest. It is important to have counseling services for constructing career pathways through student awareness and the foundation they require for careers. It is equally important for the adult education program to partner with employers, and career training agencies, and engage in apprenticeship programs. The academic work received in the adult education program and practicum must go hand in hand. Integration of apprenticeship in class instruction might be useful.

Furthermore, from the results in this research study, suggestions are drawn to advocate the need for a more intensified curriculum and the use of strategies to reach adult education students. Engaging adult students in a social setting where they can interact while learning and motivating each other is beneficial. Learning by observing and interacting in social settings as advocated by Lave and Wenger(1991) is important so that knowledge is grounded in the actions of daily situations. The GED students should have a math teacher teaching them every day because math is the most difficult part of the GED examination. Relaxing the attendance criteria for students so that they can skip the posttest to take a GED practice test is recommended for other GED programs. At times, the practice test should come before the posttest to keep students coming to school to work on the areas for growth to pass the GED. It is only human nature to lose self-confidence after failing courses and tests over and over. Too many tests can bring students' morale down.

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CHAPTER 4 (ARTICLE TWO) Completing High School Equivalency: Transformative Leadership Thinking

Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the Mid-Western state adult education director's leadership thinking for the improvement of the economically stressed and striving urban city. Transformative leadership frameworks underpin the director's leadership thinking on the 13-Point Plan that he developed for adult education reform. The director's leadership thinking was probed during a three and half hour-conversational interview. The conversations were audiorecorded and transcribed ad verbatim. Descriptive categories of the director's thinking were developed and interpreted in seven ways: aspiring to reach top 25 in five years; overcoming adult student's financial barrier; returning this Mid-Western urban city to former glory; developing partnerships for contextualized workplace training; characterizing integrated contextualized adult education; providing adult education-related curriculum, andragogy, and evaluation; and situating professional development for adult educators. The limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are outlined.

Key Words: Adult Education (AE), General Education Development (GED), High School Equivalency (HSE); Transformative Leadership (TL)

Introduction

In 2013, more than 848,000 adults in the nation took at least one part of the GED and 743,000 took all parts of the exam (Testing Services, 2013). Of the 743,000 who completed the entire GED exam, 75% passed. The number of adults passing the GED in the United States and other participating countries drastically decreased in 2014 by 467,250 due to the new computer based examination. The Free Press (2015) noted from the GED Testing Service that 90,000 people passed the GED examination in 2014 nationwide, lower from 540,535 passing in 2013 and 401,388 passing in 2012. In Mid-Western state, 1,472 passed the GED in 2014 compared to 13,651 in 2013 and 10,290 in 2012 due to the new 2014 edition of the GED.

The most recent statistics show nearly 40 million adults in the United States, aged 18 and older, do not have a high school diploma or equivalent credential (Martin & Broadus, 2013). 14.7 percent of the unemployed in the nation lack a high school diploma or equivalency compared to 8.3 percent unemployed with a diploma or GED and some postsecondary training, and 4.9 percent unemployed with a college degree (McLendon, Jones, &Rosin, 2011). Not completing high school equivalency makes many people becoming unemployed, underemployed, and/ or receiving public assistance (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006; Toledo, 2010).

There are several reasons why the adult students are not successful in completing the high school equivalency. The reasons include lack of positive relationships or connections as well as early childhood development and early learning experiences (Thomas, 2008). According to McKay (2013), students leave high school because they experience major life issues unrelated to academics. These include bullying, criminal and gang activity, illegal substance/alcohol or drug abuse and imprisonment, personal or family member illness, poor home life, financial hardship or poverty, lack of parental involvement, and lack of school guidance and support. Other issues are

homelessness, unexpected pregnancy, need to work, low achievement, learning and mental disabilities, boredom or negative classroom experiences, poor attendance, disciplinary expulsion, illiteracy, lack of confidence, and peer pressure.

The average adult education students have been away from formal education for nearly seven years or more, and may need remedial adult basic education (ABE) before placement in GED classes (Coffey & Smith, 2011). These authors explain convenience and program location are also issues for some adults because most adult education classes are held in the evening, which is not an ideal time for parents of school-aged children or younger. Additional challenges are limited transportation, the lack of childcare at home or at school, the balancing of school and work or school and family, and language barriers for non-English speaking students (Koenig, 2011). To overcome some of these barriers, Coffey and Smith (2011) suggest support services such as childcare, English as Second Language (ESL) classes and job training for sustainable employment. Financial obligations to pay for the program and then taking, and if needed, retaking the GED examination, poses a challenge (Coffey & Smith, 2011). However, the financial pressure is somewhat reduced because some public and non-profit organizations offer free adult education programs and payment for the GED examination.

Yet, another reason for adult students not completing the high school equivalency is the learner, learning, and learning environments. For instance, many teachers rely on the findings and implications of studies on elementary and secondary classrooms and applying them to adult learning (McKay, 3013; Nelson, Demers & Christ, 2014). Although adult students are attempting to complete their high school equivalency, they require different approach to teaching and learning.

It is not uncommon for school dropouts to enroll in adult education programs across the nation preparing them for the General Education Development (GED) examination and other high

school equivalency tests (Boylan & Renzulli, 2014). According to Heckman and LaFontaine (2008), the rate of dropouts returning to school for a GED has increased dramatically to nearly 50 percent. While the rate of dropouts returning to school to earn a GED has grown, the high school dropout rate continues to increase, resulting in the need for more adult education programs. Adult education programs provide an opportunity for dropouts to have a second chance to earn a credential equivalent to a high school diploma.

While there are many challenges encountering adult students completing the high school equivalency, various motivations play a part in them returning to formal education. Beder and Valentine (1990) explain they are for self-improvement; family and children's needs; need of a social outlet; wanting to improve reading, writing, and math skills; become better citizens and community workers; get a job; earn respect; have more income; continue education in college or postsecondary training; and through the mandate of others such as the court system. Bauman and Ryan (2001) expand on one major aspect Bede and Valentine (1990) has referred to, and that is, economic rewards motivate most people to earn a GED certificate. With the credential, there are higher earnings than for a high school dropout in the same age group, which may be slightly less than $300 when compared to someone who holds a high school diploma. Comings and Cuban (2007) reiterate, unlike children who take part in schooling because of legal mandates with demands of strong social and cultural forces, adults return to school for self or economic reasons. Thomas (2008) reports the primary motivation for adults to pursue a GED was for better employment.

McKay (2013) points to additional motivators: the enthusiasm for returning to school to earn a GED certificate recently are personal goal-oriented, work-related to meet clear professional objectives, activity-oriented for social needs; and learning-oriented for self-improvement to

increase educational functioning levels. Earning a GED is about earning the credential and personal redemption showing families and associates they have transformed, matured, and become more responsible and are prepared for work. The most common motivator is work related. McLendon, Jones, and Rosin (2011) show that investment in adult education and career training save the government costs in the area of public healthcare, financial assistance and incarceration. These authors cite each high school dropout cost the nation's economy approximately $260,000 during their work lifetime compared to a high school graduate. To calculate how each economy would benefit in investment in adult education, the aforementioned researchers referred to a 2010 report published by Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE), which examined the effects of adult education achievements in some of the nation's largest metropolitan areas, one being Mid-Western state. What they found based on earnings, home and vehicle sales, economy, jobs and tax income and overall cost of adult education was if 50 percent of high school dropouts from the year 2008 had graduated, they would have contributed to the economy and reduced government costs. Adult education programs must attract the same dropouts to recover and recapture some of the losses in the economy.

Problem Statement

Adult Learning Work Group - ALWG (2008) has pointed out 692,000 adults in This MidWestern state do not have a GED or high school diploma. Currently, this Mid-Western state's adult education schools and providers overall output is statistically ranked in the bottom half pertaining to students' growth in scores and achieved performance objectives, making it a crisis for reform. McLendon, Jones, and Rosin (2011) report that one in five (20%) of the Mid-Western state's residents do not have a high school diploma or GED and the adult education program ranks

39 (now 44) out of 50 states. More than 25 percent of adults in this Mid-Western urban city, (~216,000) do not have a high school diploma (Local Area Unemployment Statistics [LAUS], Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). This is half the city's current adult population. Few adults pass the GED examination after multiple attempts, which end their formal education (Gall, 2014). This low literacy became obvious when a major car manufacturer attempted to recruit employees in order to build a new plant in This Mid-Western state. Thus, the company decided to build the plant in another state based on the low scores on the entry examination. This example shows the urgent need to produce a population of educated and skilled adults for projected occupations in this Mid-Western state.

Many Mid-Western state's workers are unprepared and there is a need for transition and change in adult learning to meet the new workforce demands (ALWG, 2008). ALWG also reports Mid-Western state's adults lived in a different economy and circumstances when adult education programs were first implemented. The 20th century GED adult education or a high school credential was provided to those who joined the military before graduation due to war. Today's adult teachers must create new solutions and curricula helping adult students prepare and thrive in the 21st century workforce. ALWG recommends adult education providers and labor organizations work together to create solutions and career-related curriculum, stressing this partnership should not be an option. If not, all people in this Mid-Western state are negatively affected because the proposed recommendations are vital to the economic growth of the state and prosperity for employers and workers.

With technology advancements, no longer can dropouts depend on factory or manufacturing self-sustaining employment in this era like their parents and grandparents. There is a demand for employees to learn academic skills with computer, reading and numeracy skills

beyond the middle school level for long-term self-sustainable employment (Autrey, 1999). Thus, there is an urgent need for these adults to return to school to get their high school equivalency credential while learning employability skills to help themselves become economically independent. GED providers prepare adult students to take the GED examination measuring high school level academic skills for vocational or college readiness leading to suitable careers (Rose, 2013). The assumption is that after obtaining self-sustaining careers through adult education programs, these adults will be productive citizens; paying taxes and building communities.

Based on data, current resources, policies and procedures in Mid-Western state adult education programs, the Adult Learning Work Group – ALWG (2008) determined that transformation is needed to meet the employment demands of today's and tomorrow's occupations. The recommendations from ALWG (2008) are mandated by the federal government in the Workforce Innovative Opportunity Act (2016), allowing funds for unskilled and unemployed adults in the country to enroll in adult education schools to acquire job skills, learn high school level core subjects, obtain or maintain jobs, and continue their education in college if they chose. The Mid-Western Workforce Agency (MWA) and adult education provided in this Mid-Western state can form partnerships to establish jobs for the students.

By improved lifestyles and finances, ALWG (2008) guarantees a return on investment for the state and country for covering the cost of adults entering adult education programs. The return will be the number of high school equivalency graduates as well as improvement in the workforce and a thriving economy. The investment is worth the results because in the long run, billions of dollars would be saved if any of these students, later graduates, were relying on financial assistance and health care coverage for them as well as their dependents. Once employed, the adults would

pay taxes, become engaged in civic responsibilities and involved in their children's education as a priority.

The Mid-Western Department of Adult Education has established standards for adult education and career success under a 13-Point Plan, which calls for reform, formation, and fortitude to help adult students in the state obtain a high school equivalency certification or high school diploma and attain significant career or postsecondary education. These initiatives are guided by the existing conditions of high school dropouts in the state with low-waged or no employment. The mission is to allow these adults to obtain better careers or jobs for an improved lifestyle for self and family meeting financial obligations and upgrading socioeconomic status.

The adult education literature seems to contain statistics on the number of students who passed the GED or have high school equivalency and how many are employed (Martin & Broadus, 2013; McLendon, Jones, & Rosin, 2011; Testing Services, 2013). These reports are factual than analytical. Studies include the reasons why adult students are unsuccessful in completing the high school equivalency (Coffey & Smith, 2011; Koenig, 2011; McKay, 2013; Nelson et al., 2014; Thomas, 2008). Studies also point to the motivating factors why high school dropouts enroll in adult education program (Bauman & Ryan, 2001; Beder & Valentine, 1990; Boylan &Renzulli, 2014; Comings & Cuban, 2007; Heckman & LaFontaine, 2008; McKay, 2013; Thomas, 2008). There is also a study on how investment on adult education saves money for the government (McLendon, Jones, & Rosin, 2011). However, there is limited research centered on the reform plan to improve adult education programs to address adults returning to school according to Boylan and Renzulli (2014). Coffey and Smith (2011) suggest research must be conducted on practices and opportunities to improve the adult education system.

Thus, this study speaks to the necessity of the current and future adult education programs in this Mid-Western state in rethinking how they aspire to educate adult students. The main focus

of the study is to represent the thinking Mid-Western state adult education director displays about the 13-Point Plan he developed to transform adult education in the state. The research question posed for this study is as follows:

1. What leadership thinking prevails as the Mid-Western state adult education director contemplates with the researcher the 13-Point Plan that he developed to transform adult students completing the high school equivalency?

This question is guided by transformative leadership theory which he studied and researched in his doctorate program.

Transformative Leadership

Four transformative leadership theoretical frameworks were critically analyzed: Shields (2014), Caldwell, Dixon, Floyd, Chaudoin, Post, and Cheokas (2012), Van Oord (2013), and Wilson (2016). The last two transformative leadership frameworks best fit the focus of the study at hand.

Shields is an activist of unbiased schools led by educational leaders who influence reform and social justice. Shields states educational leaders today must have knowledge and understanding of diverse students in order to be change agents to improve culture and climate. To become the transformative leaders, all school staff must embrace the challenges that come with diversity in student population. This transformative leadership framework heavily focuses on students that precludes its use in this article that focuses on the director's leadership thinking.

Caldwell, Dixon, Floyd, Chaudoin, Post, and Cheokas (2012) model transformative leadership as ethical leadership that integrates ethically-based features of six other well-known leadership views (Cathy, 2007) and combines norms and elements of each of those six perspectives. The six perspectives incorporate an obligation to ethical duties, standards, and

outcomes that are key essentials. These ethical duties facilitate the management of change, increasing improved outcomes to benefit all stakeholders and society. Transformative leadership principles of power and responsibilities of leaders is demonstrating by commitment to the benefit of all stakeholders and by seeking long-term improvements. Such a framework is geared towards the organization leadership in the business world that relates to organization leader-employee.

Van Oord (2013) argues that educational leadership styles will vary but should focus on the importance of transformative leadership that can be referred to as a critical collaborative process that contributes to school organizational decision-making and improvements. According to the author, transformative leadership involves a five-step process: (1) Assessment of current practice; when the leaders assess and acknowledge the program(s) or issue(s) of the organization. (2) Discussion on how to improve; bring all stakeholders to the table to introduce the program(s) or issue(s) of the organization and together brainstorm and find resolution. (3) Development of a plan of action; Identify the steps to take resolution with a timeline and assign accountability and responsibility for various actions. (4) Further discussion with all stakeholders; meet frequently with all stakeholders to ensure the plan addresses the needs. (5) The decision-making process for change; implementing the plan for change to solve. This five-step process may provide a framework to foster collaboration and inclusive action needed for transformation. This will not only allow organizations to change, but the process will allow all stakeholders in the educational process use transformative leadership, a benefit to the adult education reform at large.

Wilson (2016) advocates transformative leadership in schools that is highly impacted by poverty in urban communities. Critical care in transformative leadership has benefits. The benefits are satisfaction in knowing that the organization's needs are addressed and improvements are made for the maintenance of all parties involved. Paying close attention and addressing all elements of

the organization for its success is very rewarding. Yet, the endurance of the leadership style includes implementation that displays values, personalities, and behaviors related to compassion, encouragement, support and continuous upkeep. Leadership is sometimes taking risks for the sake of effectively serving students and improving schools.

Wilson's (2016) data dialogues are from the in-depth interview of a self-proclaimed transformative African-American principal who implemented transformative leadership that helped improve the academic performance of a school highly impacted by poverty. The article accounts for the principal's practice via a reflective narrative. In the conversation with the principal, Wilson stated that transformative leadership means, "Putting my needs to the side, changing my school culture, increasing my knowledge of teachers and understanding how that affects their teaching" (p.570). During the beginning of the school year the principal modeled being transparent about who she is and this transparency is linked to her being open about coming from a poverty-affected background that is not unlike her students. The principal who practices transformative leadership was approached on how her childhood informs her leadership. She responded, "My background makes all the difference in the world! I have walked in their (the students) shoes! I've done better and my life has improved." The staff and students are so much more comfortable with the principal once they have heard her story. The principal's story speaks to the significance of school administrators' better understanding of the reality of poverty and other repressive situations so they can better prepare students to achieve and succeed.

The notion of Van Oord's (2013) critical collaborative process that contributes to school organizational decision-making and improvements is essential to the study at hand. Also relevant is the five-step process that stresses admitting to the crises of existing state; using significant others to make decisions on how to improve the situation; executing a plan of action; discussing

reflectively on the action plan; and implementing the plan to bring change. Wilson's (2016) study relates to the current research on improving adult education in a low ranking state and an urban poverty-stricken city where many adults are uneducated without a skill for employment. Findings from Wilson's study also indicate the value of clearly infusing theories of critical care into transformative leadership frameworks and practice. The study calls for additional research in the area of transformative leadership to promote collaborative decision-making to implement change and to deal with students of poverty with critical care. The study at hand responds to recognize the call for transformative leadership in reforming adult education in this Mid-Western state.

Methodology

Study Design

This is a case study using a qualitative approach (Cresswell, 2013) based on an in-depth conversational interview with one participant.

Context of the Study

Adult Education served in this Mid-Western urban city is the context of this research study.

State Adult Education Program

Adult Education provides an opportunity for adults to complete high-school equivalency or high school diploma, to acquire job skills, and to become better English speakers. The curriculum and instruction meets the academic needs of adult students. Pre- and post-tests identify existing educational functioning levels to decide on appropriate classroom instruction and provide performance level improvements. The GED is an examination that equates with high school academic performance for diploma equivalency (WDA website, 2017).

The Mission of Workforce Development Agency in a Mid-Western state

The mission of Workforce Development Agency (WDA) is to establish partnerships with adult education schools and employers to provide a demand-driven talent system of employees that supports business growth and a diverse skilled workforce.

Description of Participant

Sean Lively was the director of this Mid-Western state's adult education program and career success during the research study. At the time of this study, he has held the position of state director for almost one year. He is a state certified teacher and worked as a principal of an adult education program in the suburbs of this Mid-Western state.

Lively has bachelors and master's degrees in education. He is currently enrolled in the doctorate program in Education Leadership at Wayne State University in this Mid-Western urban city, He had the opportunity to attend other universities in this state for his doctorate, but these offers were declined because his mission is to give back to the community in this Mid-Western urban city, specifically the east side of the city where he was born and raised. He spent the majority of his youth and adult life in this urban Mid-Western city, so he knows the city's issues and needs firsthand. This is important to him as he sees the need for reform when driving to the university for classes. Lively often attends the professional games and support the businesses in this urban city.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

The three and half-hour in-depth interview with Lively was conducted on a Friday afternoon in February 2017. The structure of the interview was exploratory based on the director's vision detailed in the13-Point Plan, a reform document to transform Mid-Western state's Adult

Education programs. Probing questions were asked to support his claims with evidence and examples.

The interview statements/questions were as follows: What is the purpose of the adult education "Promise Scholarship" you plan to implement? Elaborate on your statement from a prior conversation, "It cost more to incarcerate an adult to educate an adult." Detail how investing in adult education can have a Return on Investment (ROI). How can the Mid-Western state become one of the top 25 states for adult education programs in five years? What are steps to improve adult education in the state? What are your plans to improve the partnership with the Mid-Western state Works Association? What is Integrated Education Training (IET) and please give an example of IET? What are the plans to improve curriculum and instruction in adult education? What are transition work groups? Describe the career pathways implementation in adult education and will there be funding available for implementation? Expound on the expansion of the Mid-Western state Adult Education Training Conference (MAETC) as a staff professional development. Has Mid-Western state adopted the High School Equivalent Test (HiSET) and Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) as high school equivalency examinations? What is the state's overall focus to improve students' performance? The primary sources of data were the director's responses to probing questions during the interview questions based on prior conversations and documents he provided in advance.

Prior to the interview, the following official guiding documents were reviewed. The documents are as follows: (1) Graduates to Community College Program, (2) Return on Investment of Adult Education, (3) Transforming Mid-Western state's Adult Learning Infrastructure, and (4) State of Adult Education in the Mid-Western state's address.

The in-depth conversational interview was audio-recorded and transcribed ad verbatim. The responses obtained for each question and reference made to the 13-Point Plan were taken together and categories of description were constructed.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher is poised to collect data for this study. She has been employed with this Mid-Western urban city's school district for 25 years as a student teacher, substitute teacher, contract business and social studies classroom teacher, career and technical education curriculum leader, assistant principal, acting principal and now principal at an adult education center for five years. There was a relationship of trust between the director and the researcher, which allowed for freedom of expression and sharing during the interview and communications thereafter. She had an invested interest in the reform to improve adult education program as principal and now transformative leader. As a human instrument, she brings validity to this study. To further validate this study, "member check" (Padgett , 2016) was performed.

To check the reliability of the study, two other experts in the field of adult education were independently asked to ensure the consistency between data and interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Lively thinks about this Mid-Western urban city and the inequitable involved with race, sex, and economic status. He ponders, "What is going on?" In light of inequalities, he contemplates on his own identity.

> *I was an economically disadvantaged person. Just because I am white, 6.5" and*
>
> *look like Tom Brady, does not mean that I had a silver spoon in my mouth growing*
>
> *up. (Said with a humorous tone) My parents were divorced and I grew up in a*
>
> *very bad environment. I had nothing. I remember in my 7ᵗʰ grade year, I only had*

one pair of jeans in the 1990's and they were purple. I had purple jeans, it was

cool back then to wear them. I wore them every day. Thank God they were in style

due to the artist Prince. I had a designer purple sweatshirt to go with them. I also

had a flattop hair style. So, it was purple jeans and it was a purple designer

sweatshirt every day. My teachers took me under their wings because they knew

something was wrong because of me wearing the same purple outfit every day. My

teachers and coaches cared for me very much and they became my second family.

My best friends' families became my families. He gives this account of his

childhood to prove he was once economically disadvantaged.

Lively testifies,

I was disadvantaged. I am no longer because I went to school, I worked hard and

got multiple degrees. I knew education was my way out. I think my personal story,

not bragging, is that I got out of something bad that could have been very

destructive on my life. My family member sold drugs – 'weed'. My cousin got shot

in this Mid-Western urban city by helping one of his friend sell "weed". He

almost died.

Lively points out that the types of barriers mentioned above can stop students from attending school. He insists that we must create reform to help them get an education. Thus, he wishes to bring together so many agencies in to help this Mid-Western urban city's disadvantaged adult learners. Lively' leadership thinking on how the poverty of this Mid-Western urban city impacts is similar to his own adulthood experience and the advocacy of Wilson's (2016) transformative leadership in schools that is highly impacted by poverty in urban communities. As well, Lively brings his own background to bear upon his leadership thinking, which is similar to

the principal in Wilson's study who modeled being transparent about who she is. The principal's transparency is linked to her being open about coming from a poverty-affected background that is not unlike her students. The principal's story speaks about the significance of school administrators' better understanding of the reality of poverty and other repressive situations so they can better prepare students to achieve and succeed.

For the improvement of the Mid-Western state Adult Education, Lively has developed a 13-Point Plan (Lively, 2017) adopting the reforms and successes of adult education in the top 25 states of the nation. This section will highlight Lively's transformative leadership thinking underpinning the "13-Point Plan" in order to transform the Mid-Western state Adult Education Program. Lively's leadership thinking based on the 13-Points Plan for completing high school equivalency or diploma is grouped into seven categories. They are as follows: (1) aspiring to reach top 25 in five years; (2) overcoming adult student's financial barrier; (3) returning this MidWestern urban city to former glory; (4) developing partnerships for contextualized workplace training; (5) characterizing integrated contextualized adult education; (6) providing adult education-related curriculum, andragogy, and evaluation; and (7) situating professional development for adult educators.

Aspiring to Reach Top 25 in Five Years

Lively refers to the current deplorable status that the Mid-Western state occupies--the 44th rank in the country in adult basic education based on low scores and in not meeting performance measures. In this light, he refers to State Superintendent of Education Winston's vision to be among top ten ranks in ten years. With this lead from Winston, Lively adjusted his goal for adult education to be among top 25 in five years. So, his motto is, "Top 25 in 5". "Winston is promoting top 10 in 10 for K- 12 and I am promoting top 25 in 5". He pleads, "it is absolutely

unacceptable for Mid-Western state to continue to be 44th in the country." He knows that if they improve their rank and status in adult basic education, they will more financially be able to support their programs overall. He states, "In order to do that, they have to improve scores and performance measures." Going with the visionary theme, "Top 25 in 5 years", Lively states that the adult education department is overcoming adult students' financial barriers, returning this MidWestern urban city to former glory in varying ways; and partnerships and collaborations that will create contextualized, integrated programs. Planning to improve curriculum, teaching and learning methods and student assessments; to provide professional learning and development; and to evaluate performance of the director, principals, teachers and students are some plans.

Overcoming Adult Students' Financial Barriers

Lively expresses that this Mid-Western urban city is a geographic area that they want to help the most because it is the most needed area in the state of Mid-Western state. He desires to duplicate the high school this Mid-Western urban city Promise scholarship, similar to the Lansing Promise and Kalamazoo Promise, for the this Mid-Western urban city Adult Education Program. He points out that with thethis Mid-Western urban city Promise scholarship for adult education students, his division is attempting to remove the financial barrier that stops the adults from attending school.

Lively argues that the Mid-Western urban city Promise will provide an incentive when adult students enter adult education and are successful within a six-month to a five-year period. Further, he states that adult education students will know that the next step of their education is to receive a free associate degree at the local community college as long as they are in this MidWestern urban city adult education students. Students can enroll in local the community college, and find financial aid through that college because a Free Application for Federal Student

Aid (FASFA) will be filled out for the this Mid-Western urban city Promise. The process is similar to the high school program. Lively suggests that students will know that they get their two-year degree paid for and have connections to a training, internship or apprenticeship programs that will eventually lead to a job.

Lively not only oversees adult education, but also oversees high school equivalency and its relationship to community colleges. Perkins Program is the Career and Technical Education (CTE) for all community colleges and their occupational area programs. Lively assures that his division has connections to community colleges for adult education students. For example, he points out that they are currently meeting with County Community Colleges to see if they can collaborate with their local adult education schools to work on the Promise incentive program.

He reasons the Promise is happening because this Mid-Western urban city is the heartbeat of Mid-Western state that has a very high population of under-educated adults. Overall rank in the country as 44th in adult education reflects their low scores and graduation rates. If they help to improve the scores and outcomes of those adult education students in this Mid-Western urban city Public Schools by breaking the financial barrier, they believe that the scores can help to improve the state as its rank score will go up. His division is talking about measurable skill gains and increase in students' educational functioning levels so these will help improve funding status of adult education programs so that it can serve even more students.

Returning The Mid-Western urban city to Former Glory

Lively offers several ways of enabling this Mid-Western urban city to former glory: motivating private investors, building community relationships, educating for self-sustaining lives, and looking to major professional sports teams.

Motivating Private Investors. Lively argues, one way is to motivate private investors to turn around this Mid-Western urban city economy. Concerning this outlook, he states that private investors and people with a lot of money in the community need direction. They have businesses, some political power, and funds that can help drive education. If business people are aware that in the Mid-Western state educational funding, 95% goes to K -12 and only 5% goes to adult education, it would then change their views of investing. The business sectors should be made aware that investing in adult education compared to K – 12 programs will produce an economic turnaround much faster. Thus, all of the stakeholders (governor, legislators, city residents, community members, and educators) would be granted an opportunity to commit themselves more to drive adult education.

Building Community Relationships. Lively further notes that the Mid-Western state governor stated a couple of months ago that he wants to see closer relationships with the city of this Mid-Western urban city and neighboring communities. This Mid-Western urban city once had a thriving community that attracted suburbs to patronize, and Lively now wonders, How can this Mid-Western urban city return to its former glory? The challenge he poses is how can we make this Mid-Western urban city and close neighborhoods look prosperous again? Lively puts forward a step towards the right solution to the problem in this Mid-Western urban city and that is to educate the uneducated adults.

Educating for Self-Sustaining Lives. In support of his declaration, Lively shows a document that has facts on the return on investment in adult education that can save the state $385 billion in a ten-year period. He insists that if we educate the masses of adult students within the state, specifically in this Mid-Western urban city, we can save in other areas such as incarceration,

and other areas, including criminal and gang activity, illegal substance/alcohol or drug abuse, and imprisonment that Mckay (2013) alluded to.

By saving money, Lively suggests the state help uneducated people acquire self-sustaining lives by obtaining a basic education, a two-year degree that is connected to an internship or some type of training program to upgrade their skills for employability and eventually finding good jobs that make them proud of their achievements. As an example, he focuses on how employed people will develop interest in their neighborhoods and mentions several instances where educated people can finance.

> *Like, if they have a damaged roof, they could replace it; if they have a front door that needs replacing, they can buy a new one or have the locks changed, or they can upgrade their homes and improve their front lawns. Once the financially able and the self-assured development-conscious people start taking care of their homes, the neighborhoods would start looking better because they now have high self-esteem and want to be productive citizens of the community. Having disposable income because of better education and better jobs, one could become more self-sustaining as a person, family member, and neighbor. This is how the Return on Investment through adult education, private investors, and state and federal funds legislation function.*

Looking to Major Professional Sports Teams.

Lively suggests looking into the four city's major professional sports teams to partner in local adult education programs. He muses that if the community can convince each of these MidWestern urban city teams to donate $1 million apiece for five years that will provide perhaps $20 million or more to invest in adult education. He is just excited at the thought what could have

been done with this $20 million just in this Mid-Western urban city to educate the adults. He expands, if 7,000 students can be educated by the sports teams, then they will give back to the economy of the community. They will have disposable income to turn around their neighborhoods, improve their property and they can go to games, which will all be in downtown area. Lively's argument is how the four professional major sports owners can invest in adult education and help those students continue their education with scholarship. He calculated that it would cost $1 million for every 212 students to provide them full tuition at a community college.

The notion of return on investment when applied not only helps adult education students and adult education programs in the city and its suburbs, but also aids the community colleges with increase in their enrolment. They can buy more equipment, hire more and better teachers and expand their programs to serve more students

Summary. As the director of adult education in Mid-Western state, Lively's passion is to help the city more than any other city to bounce back to its former glory. As of now, he believes that no one else has advanced a defensible solution to help this Mid-Western urban city bounce back faster. The 13-Point Plan containing the Return on Investment document has all the facts and research to support his vision. As a transformative leader, Lively thinks what he is proposing is a reform for adult education in the Mid-Western state. It is attempting not exactly to solve present problems, but rather define solutions to future challenges by stopping the recurring civic, economic, and social concerns and issues in and around this Mid-Western urban city.

Developing Partnerships for Contextualized Workplace Training

Because of the 2016 Federal Act--the Mid-Western state Works Association's (MWA) improvements are under Workforce Innovative Opportunity Act (WIOA), Lively points out that there is now a forced marriage between the two groups, which are the state department of adult

education and MWA. If local adult education providers work collaboratively with MWA, then they can engage students while the school is preparing for the GED in contextualized workplace training with the hopes of getting a job when they complete the program. They can also get a job while attending school to improve their job obtainment and retaining performance objective measures under WIOA.

Related to the collaboration with the MWA, Lively informs a transition work group will meet with the MWAs and the Mid-Western state Association of Community and Adult Education (MACAE). They promise to offer a special grant for every region in the state called the MWA Adult Education Navigator Position. He encouraged me to apply for this special grant as a Region 10 member. Region 10 is going to get three grants and one base will be in this Mid-Western urban city and others in other surrounding counties. He promotes that navigator position will help build relationships between adult education and MWAs. This is to make sure both organizations work collaboratively to assist adult education students.

Lively explains that transition work groups will involve the "field", referring to principals, teachers, and Mid-Western state Works agencies. "When we say supporting the field, includes everyone who is not employed in the adult education office. "Lively wants to work with the "field" to hear their voices of concerns. He also adds, "The transition work groups will give opportunities to principals and directors to become change agents". According to Lively, the transition work groups is a way to reform adult education, involving as many people as they possibly can. For example, they will also begin a mentoring program for the field by matching leadership from low performing schools with leadership from high performing schools.

Lively points out that he himself has a mentor who is the director of Talent Policies and Planning for the state of Mid-Western state. His mentor supervises the Mid-Western state funding

rules, regulations and laws. Their relationship is strong at the state level and therefore they are working together to implement new resources and best practices among the partnership between their two departments. They are doing so by bringing people to the discussion table in joint meetings. The plan is to begin the joint meetings soon. During the meetings, the discussion will involve working of the collaboration, identifying barriers and failures in communication, outlining absolute non-negotiables for each department, and setting goals and timelines.

Lively wants the departments to move forward together by having a common enrollment process where data can be shared and he wants adult education to monitor students' assessment by using Mid-Western state pretest/posttest TABE instrument. Currently, some adult education programs are using different assessments. He believes that there should be one common assessment, the TABE.

Characterizing Integrated Contextualized Adult Education

The Integrated Education Training (IET) is a program to prepare for the GED while working on job skill development. A curriculum outlining IET is yet to be developed. One example is using a regular teacher and a vocational education teacher to co-teach in an algebra class. They could apply algebra with engineering careers. The two teachers will work together to show students how math applies directly to engineering positions that they might possibly have one day. This is a sample of authentic integrated contextualized education and is aligned with WIOA.

With aforementioned example, Lively affirms that overall the adult education department goal is to understand and implement the new Workforce Innovative Opportunity Act (WIOA). The act directly connects employment opportunities for students. Lively wants to implement more IET programs in the state.

Lively clarifies that using Career Pathways in adult education programs is a mandate from the federal government. Therefore, funding is not going to be an issue. However, he notes that Career Pathways needs to be developed for adult education. Lively likes to see the career clusters developed by regions. This Mid-Western urban city, is the "automotive territory", so one should train students for careers in the auto industry. He also explains the Upper Peninsula cities of the Mid-Western state as "forestry areas" and adult education programs in that area should train students for agriculture careers. He indicates that the two areas in the Mid-Western state are completely different in career opportunities, so their career pathways should be different. Another career cluster example he poses is in downtown where many technology companies' headquarters and branch offices are stationed. Since there are many of IT business companies investing in this Mid-Western urban city, and at the same time it is helping the technology career demands for the residents. Lively concluded by stating that the Career Pathways plays off the state's career clusters and therefore, adult education programs must base their career training on the Career Pathways available in the area. Career Pathways are essential to reforming adult education department because it is the bridge to the next step of an adult student's educational process.

Providing Adult Education-Related Curriculum, Andragogy, and Evaluation

Curriculum. Lively believes utilizing the Mid-Western state curriculum--the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS)--the state's graduation requirements, will provide equal opportunities to the adult education learners.

Andragogy. To improve andragogy in adult education, Lively proposes to use the research-based, Common Knowledge Construction Model (CKCM) of teaching and learning rooted in conceptual change inquiry that promote intellectual empathy (Ebenezer & Haggerty, 1998; Wood, Ebenezer, & Boone, 2013) and post-modern frameworks (Doll, 2004) that focuses on the 4 R's--

"richness", "rigor", "recursion", and "relation" (pp. 253-260). Lively is inclined to use this teaching and learning model with adult education learners because it was tested in a MidWestern state school district with high school alternative students who significantly scored higher in the study of Mid-Western state-based unit on acids and bases. Furthermore, he wants to ensure adult students are directly involved with their curriculum and instruction based on their own conceptual ideas that the CKCM promotes. Lively argues that adult students who return to school based on their past education experiences and downfalls need new methods of teaching fitting with the 21st century. Lively's leadership thinking is, if adult students are directly connected with their curriculum development and lesson planning, negotiated with the teacher, which the CKCM strongly espouses, more adult learners will remain in the adult education programs and pass the GED. He believes that students will sustain their interest and motivation to remain in the program while attempting to improve their overall academic performance and GED scores.

Lively states that the CKCM will not be forced on adult education programs, but it will be offered as a choice because the model works and right now they are 44th in the country and the facts show that improvements are needed in the way we teach. "Whatever is going on in adult education classrooms, the practices are not working and instructional reform of teaching methods could improve overall adult education and scores in the future. If your adult education score improve, funding will increase."

Evaluation. Lively states that the adoption of new high school equivalency tests will assist the economically disadvantaged students who cannot afford the GED. However, Lively desires to provide each local school principal the freedom to make his or her own decision to adopt the new tests on the basis of what works best for his or her students. Lively announces that as of 2016 the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) and the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC)

have been legislatively approved to administer in Mid-Western state as credentials for high school equivalency completion. There is no adult education program in the state that is yet offering the new tests. However, some schools are using the demonstration instrument as test preparation. Lively states that the implementation of the two new tests will help reform by assisting economically disadvantaged students who cannot afford the GED. The two new tests are not as expensive. Lively states, "I want each local school principal to make her or his own decision on the administration of the new tests as it is not a mandate to adopt them. See, what is best for your students."

Situating Professional Learning and Development for Adult Student Educators

As contexts for professional development, Lively refers to his own learning experience, the 2017 MAETC, and Road Shows. Each context, events, and Lively's thinking will be discussed in turn.

Learning Experience. Lively states that the 13-Point Plan was developed by formally and informally involving as many people as he possibly could before making any decisions. He points out that the 13-Point Plan to reform the Mid-Western state's adult education programs were not only his strategies but also that of other states' adult education directors. He shared his concerns with them to determine what best practices they were doing that Mid-Western state is not doing. As a doctoral student, Lively seeks the advice of his Wayne State University professors, who specifically influenced him on the values of transformative leadership. He points out that in the program he is researching and studying theories: "When I was working on my policy document at work, I was enrolled in a course learning policy. Right after that, I was in a class focusing on curriculum reform in theory, practice, and inquiry. Now, I have a class discussing educational

history and philosophy with Monte Piliawski that is giving me a larger perception on equity and equality in education".

Expand the Mid-Western state Adult Education Training Conference (MAETC). Lively urged me and my staff to attend the 2017 MAETC in this Mid-Western urban city because for the first time all partners with adult education will be brought together at the conference. In his opinion, there were essential features of the conference missing in the past years, not putting the blame on the former event planners of the annual conference. He states that the conference planning committee does a nice job putting together the event, but they lacked sessions on reform and transformation within adult education. In Lively's words:

> *We must network face to face by shaking hands, making deals and building a better*
>
> *bond or relationships with our partners at this event. We must focus on why we are*
>
> *in business. We are in business for people like your 70-year-old female student I*
>
> *just met upstairs. We need to see whom we are working with face to face. I do not*
>
> *care what age, sex, race or religion you are, we must provide services for people*
>
> *like her. That is our job to make sure the 70 year-old is finishing her high school*
>
> *equivalency. It is not because she is going to make any more money, it is for her*
>
> *self-esteem and pride. When I was an adult education director and principal, I had*
>
> *a 72-year-old woman with many children and grandchildren. She started having*
>
> *children at the age of 14. She just wanted to pass the math part of the GED. It*
>
> *took her 10 years to pass, but she did it. We must service more people like her.*

Lively confirms that adult education has plenty of success stories and they must be told when we bring stakeholders together at events such as MAETC. He assures the focus 2017 MAETC professional development will emphasize successes with community colleges,

universities, Mid-Western state employment partners, educators, and the department of labor. Lively says these partners have never been at the past MAETCs. He adds the ten regions will have mandatory breakout sessions during this year's event to discuss and make plans for adult education and training. The reformed MAETC is going to be enormous in building relationships and having conversations as a reality check to say, "We have to get to work and work together." The togetherness should be done now to improve and reap the benefits. Lively assures there will be professional learning and development for improving leadership; curriculum, teaching, students' learning and assessment.

Road Show and Reaction. When Lively went on a road show to different regions in Mid-Western state to discuss the future of adult education in the state, he introduced Shields' position on transformative leadership that focuses on equality of students and offered professional development and technical assistance for WIOA and Section 107 funding. At each stop, Lively gave the state of adult education address. The road show concept was adopted from the state of Texas adult education department.

Lively says he was constantly questioned why he is implementing these things and he explained to them that there are reasons behind his actions. One reason is in his own words, "We are in close collaboration with each other constantly because we all want to improve practices." He wishes to see all directors and principals take university courses on transformative leadership, cultural changes and how to think out of the box. This is because adult education programs are struggling with scores and meeting performance objectives and he believes, it is the school's program, and the teachers' and principal's lack of professional development. He knows it is more than the students and their barriers. "I will never put all the blame on the students." Lively informs that most of the principals at adult education programs have not earned a master's degree, meaning

they are not certified principals or administrators. He has an issue with adult education providers with no credentials. In this regard, he describes his own education in becoming a credentialed professional. His graduate program in education involved a state administration certification. In order to earn the certification he had to spend 200 hours in classroom, observing teachers in practice. Lively stated that over eighty percent of adult education directors and principals in the state of Mid-Western state do not have the proper training to observe and evaluate teachers. He passionately states:

> *I'm not upset, but how can we not have directors and principals that are educated and trained, qualified or certified overseeing adult education programs? Are they not evaluating our programs properly? (Sarcastically says) Now, I wonder why we are 44th in the country! I wonder why our adult education scores are low!"* He also adds that adult education has principals that have never taught before.

When Lively gave the fact on certification during his road show, he mentions that the current adult directors and principals were upset with him. They had told him that they have been adult administrators for a long time. So, Lively shares that when he was told this fact by the untrained professionals, he thought, "well, you are one of the lowest performing schools, I wonder why?" Adult education administrators and teachers underperforming destroys accountability. These individuals should aim at doing their work competently to attain equity and excellence for the schools they work for. The days of getting a full-time paycheck and not doing work are long gone. To monitor accountability to adult education, those involved need to be provided with written evaluations and discussions about their performance over time.

Concerning the teachers who teach adult students, Lively confirms that most of them are state certified. He uses the muse, "If I had an uncertified principal and I am a certified teacher, I

would do what I wanted. How can you hold me accountable for curriculum and instruction when you don't even know what you are doing?" The researcher responded: *As a state certified teacher and school administrator, I agree with Lively.*

I do not like when people apply for jobs in the education field without a certification to teach. I do not like when people apply for school administration jobs when they have never taught or were never trained for the position. You can't apply to be a doctor without a license to practice medicine. I feel that I have been trained for the profession and have the state certification, you can't do my job better than I coming in with no training. The charter schools are good at this, hiring teachers and school administrators from other profession. I am very passionate about this too, just as you are.

Lively responds, to run a school correctly, to evaluate teachers properly, one must have proper education and training in curriculum design and development, assessing programs, climate and culture, understanding laws and finance, grant writing, to name a few.

Lively conducted a survey of state directors in the country in regards to their education and of their teachers. The results are really sad, out of 50 states only 26 state directors returned the survey and 14 state directors responded saying they have a minimum requirement for adult education directors to hold a master's degree in education.   Twelve said they did not have any minimum requirement. This Mid-Western state was among those 12.

Lively entertained the researcher stating, "Guess where those 12 ranks are in the country? They are in the bottom 25. Think about that." "What type of reform can we do with this?" The fact is the majority of our adult education directors and principals are not qualified to run a school. K

– 12 administrators must have the school administration certificate in Mid-Western state, but not adult education directors and principals. With this conclusion, Lively affirms again that his department must have yearly director, principal and teacher evaluations.

>*If there is no training and evaluating, he believes there will be no reform. Lively has selected to use the Charlotte Danielson Model to evaluate the teachers and principals. We are going to train our principals and directors to use this model because we have unqualified principals who do not know how to evaluate teachers and they need to know how to identify what a bad teacher and a good teacher looks like. They need to know the indicators of the two types of teachers. If they know what to look for, programs and student progression will improve. This is why we are rolling out the Danielson model, spending $40,000 to train administrators. The adult education department is not forcing anyone to pay for the evaluation tool, they are covering the bill and the training to properly evaluate teachers. According to Lively, When staff improves, curriculum will improve, scores will improve.*

For classroom instruction, Lively is looking to new and innovative teaching methods to engage adult students in classroom instruction which entails adult education teachers having a proper evaluation system. There is a mandate from the state teacher evaluations and the process to evaluate. Principals will be evaluating adult education teachers correctly without bias along the criteria of administering valid and relevant assessments, instructional methods, and student growth. Lively attests that for principals to evaluate teachers fairly, they must be visible and observe classes often. He also confirms that principals will be evaluated as well by his office or local district offices along the same domains as teachers, but on a larger scale. According to Lively, the results from all evaluations must have constructive criticism for improvements.

Implications

Adult Education Directors, particular in poverty states such as Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama (Egen, Beatty, Blackley, Brown, & Wykoff; 2017) can relate to Lively's reform efforts and the development of the 13-Point Plan which will have two implications: Transforming Mid-Western state and transformative adult education leadership.

Transforming the Mid-Western state and Similar Poverty States

When this Mid-Western urban city rises from the 44th to 25th ranking over time based on transformative leadership models already discussed, the depressed states in the nation because of poverty and urban issues will be able to follow suit. Adult learners can become socially just by overcoming poverty and substance abuse (Ho, 2017); educational inequalities posed by unqualified teachers and non-credentialed principals (Sun, Saultz, & Ye, 2017; Murphy, 2017); and outdated approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment (Espin, Wayman, Deno, McMaster, & Rooij, 2017). The latter two issues are important because we are living in a of time quality assurance. The most important aspect of quality assurance is student learning and achievement (Whitelock-Wainwright, Gašević, & Tejeiro, 2017). For successful student learning, quality administrators and teachers with relevant degrees and credentials are important. To assure quality, many rounds of valid assessments and evaluations at various segments should be overseen by a specific committee. We are living in an era when unproductive administrators and teachers are laid off based on the productivity of student achievement.

To become socially just, Lively focuses on incentive program; student and leader motivation; private investor awareness and direction; and contextualized integrated learning. The adult education programs across the nation should strive to address the issues that Lively has raised so that students become socially equal.

Poor test scores, graduation rates, dropouts, and ultimately failure in schools are partly because of not having qualified and committed teachers; relevant curriculum, defensible teaching and learning practices; and authentic assessment and evaluation (Espin, Wayman, Deno, McMaster, & Rooij, 2017). These sources may affect adult education schools in terms of poor test scores and graduation rates, particularly with African Americans and Latinos. Unfortunately, the public schools with low academic achievement and the negative statistics, which most often showing this Mid-Western urban city near the bottom sadly sparks concern and intimidation. Rather, we need to focus on academic rigor, strong relationships between teacher and student, and community involvement. The parallel is fixing student discipline problems before teaching subject matter. But, if the focus is on good teaching, students will do well academically because they are engaged and discipline problems diminish. When the negatives are in the background and positives are in the foreground, school performances triumph.

Despite containing areas of poverty, some districts have found ways of performing far better than others, and that we should look at what is happening in the bright spots to inform ways of improving education. In contrast to some who feel poverty must be "fixed" before we can make progress in districts serving poor students, he feels there is a great deal educators can do even with the challenges of poverty, and so he advocates for a more positive "let's find what works and do it" mindset. This Mid-Western urban city and other urban areas have low test scores, low graduation rates, Lively has attempted to provide insights on how to change this situation. The following statement, without the money to hire more teachers and qualified administrative staff, and providing rich resources, this Mid-Western urban city and other low performing urban areas will never be able to reach the levels of the districts with much higher funding has a deficit

mindset. It is important to look what resources in this Mid-Western urban city is blessed with and work with those tools.

Implementation of nationally mandated curriculum; research-based approaches to teaching and learning; staff PD; certification of principals; and investors' awareness of the needs of adult learners are expected to break down inequalities and emphasize social justice in the urban city. The enrolment and completion of adult education program at the national level profiled by McLendon, Jones, and Rosin (2011) report that one in five (20%) of the residents do not have a high school diploma or GED, and Koenig (2011) and McKay (2013) point out several reasons for the dropout rates. Bridgeland, DiIulio and Morison (2006) refer to the increased dropout rate as a silent epidemic in education. We can learn from Lively's thinking as a way to remove inadequate leadership; improve human and financial resources; and to build the talents of educators. These attributes may narrow racial and economic gaps reflecting social injustice in schools.

By the end of the study, the state of Mid-Western state laid off 22 directors. Unfortunately, Lively was one of them. However, for adult education to propel in the upward direction, the state needs to hire a visionary that exudes missionary zeal, a person with the background he has experienced, but became successful in life as the leadership thinker and actor as the study shows. This sort of thinking has implications for the hiring process of adult education directors and even principals, to hire professionals who have had similar background and experiences so that they have empathy with adult education learners.

Transformative Leadership Thinking

There is sufficient evidence that shows Lively may be characterized as a transformative leader. The 13-Point Plan to reform Mid-Western state adult education programs was constructed based on Lively's communication with the other states' adult education directors concerning

successful practices that Mid-Western state can model. Looking at other states with successful adult education programs may bring Mid-Western state to the top 25. The communication with other adult education directors in successful states allowed Lively, as educator, to look at examples of where they are "beating the odds" and are trying the programs that work. Lively did not overlook the situations and practices that he can bring to his own state. To improve urban adult education, he was swift in focusing on dialogue surrounding those positive areas such as bringing awareness to investors and establishing partnerships integrated education training. Identifying issues and creating space such as stakeholders networking, credentialing the professionals, professional learning for the teachers are important starting points and practices. Some practices that he borrowed from other states may not work in Mid-Western state, but it is one of inventing similar practices and experiences that may benefit adult education programs and students in this MidWestern urban city. The 13- Point Plan was also developed using others perspectives while making decisions for adult education. This included the advice of his university's professors who influenced him in the areas of transformative leadership; curriculum theory, policy, and inquiry; and educational history and philosophy. These areas have broadened Lively's understanding of the notions of equity and equality in education that can be translated to this Mid-Western urban city.

Lively likes to adopt novel approaches to adult education. However, he wishes to provide each local school principal the freedom to make his or her own decision, for example, to follow model of teaching and learning that works for them and their students to adopt the new tests on the basis of what works best for students. While it is important for adult education directors to introduce innovative or alternative approaches suitable for the time and the contemporary learners, they should not impose their beliefs on others. In response, principals and teachers need to be

cooperative to experiment with defensible models of teaching and learning such as the CKCM rooted in contemporary philosophy, psychology, and sociology.

The aforementioned sorts of transformative leadership thinking and acting by Lively for the urban this Mid-Western urban city reflects Van Oord's (2013) five-step transformative leadership process, as Lively points out about his own thinking and acting as a transformative leader. Along this line of thought, it is significant all directors in various states together with stakeholders informally and formally share their ideas, weigh in according to the contextual dynamics, and attempt to implement them.

Lively' leadership thinking on the poverty of this Mid-Western urban city and how it impacts adult education align with the advocacy of Wilson's (2016) transformative leadership in schools that is highly impacted by poverty in urban communities. For students, education is a way out of society perils and live a sustainable life.

Delimitations of the Study

This study rests only in adult education in a Mid-Western state. It is only from the director's point of view. The application of the reform points were only based on the MidWestern state adult education programs. I only had one opportunity to interview the director face to face. Other conversations were via email and telephone calls to follow up and conduct a "member check".

Recommendation for Future Research

There should be future research to investigate if the 13-Points Plan reform policy helped to improve the state's adult education rank in five years. Future research should investigate if the reform points are working at local adult education programs. This study was based on the director's point of view. Future research should investigate and explore the perspectives of the

state's adult education program from local employers in preparing adults for the workforce. While a district like this urban city (which ranks at or near the bottom) is considered an area of highly concentrated poverty, research must be conducted whether there is a correlation between funding and performance.

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CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative research study has narrated the realities and perspectives of adult students' learning experiences in a General Education Development (GED) preparation program in a MidWestern urban city and documented the thinking of the former director of adult education at the state level to understand the reforms of adult education program he envisioned. Data sources were: researcher's journal entries of classroom observations and transcripts of individual interviews of three adult education students, one teacher, one counselor and the state adult education director at the time of this study. Next, the portrait of each article is provided.

Article One

This qualitative research study was on an adult education program in a Mid-Western urban city. The research question is as follows: What are the realities and perspectives of students' learning and development in an urban adult education program? A narrative inquiry approach (Phillion, 2008) was used to document, describe, and discuss the experiences of adult education students in a GED preparation program. The realities and perspectives of students' learning and development in this urban adult education program was based on three students who dropped out of high school, returned to school through the Adult Education GED program for earning the high school equivalency credentials, and dropped out again for various reasons. The issues that prevented adult education students to continue with the program were personal and program dependent. The personal realities were poor attendance and not fulfilling the requirement of completing the sixty-hour instruction of the GED between the pretests and post practice tests. The program-dependent issues were 60-hour instruction before practice test; requirements of multiple testing prior to taking of the GED examination; the quality of teaching methods; the lack of learning with the standards-based college and career readiness curriculum; and access to

appropriate teachers. The study pointed out that adults motivated to return to school needed more support, just as when they were teens in high school such as planning for future careers and mentorships suggested by Angus and Hughes (2017). Access to quality teachers and teaching are very important in any learning institutions for student achievement. Teachers and school administrators must have professional development on topics that promote the adult learner achievement. Identifying student realities at the beginning of the program and finding resolutions could have helped at least one of the participants in the study to earn his GED credential. Another issue was that the students in the current study were not engaged in contextualized workplace training to improve their career skills of interest. The availability of College and Career Readiness Standard (CCRS) curriculum and partnerships with local businesses may have helped adult students in this study to sustain their interest in preparing for the GED examination and careers. Thus, the study suggests implementation of the GED and CCRR curriculum to reach as well as engage adult students in a social setting where they can interact with others while learning. The participants were not placed in a situation to learn as according to the Situated Learning Theory that suggests people learn by observing and interacting in social settings (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This theory states that knowledge is acquired by people interacting in daily actions and situations, which is a result of a social process encircling ways of thinking, perceiving and interaction although generated in a different setting, can potentially transform adult learning and learning environment in the GED programs. The implications for high schools and GED adult education programs, respectively, are as follows; prevention of teens dropping out of school, and a promise to school returners as adults through the adult education program. This study informs adult educators how to identify and improve adult education students' experiences in preparing for the GED examination as well as college and career readiness.

Article Two

The purpose of this research study is to investigate a Mid-Western state adult education director's (Lively, 2016) leadership thinking for the improvement of the economically stressed and striving urban city in a Mid-Western state. The director's leadership thinking on the 13-Point Plan that he developed for adult education reform was influenced by several factors: Wilson's (2016) transformative leadership framework that can be translated to schools that are highly impacted by poverty in urban communities; the reforms and successes of adult education in the top 25 states of the nation; and the perspectives of his university's professors who influenced him in the areas of transformative leadership; curriculum theory, policy, and inquiry; and educational history and philosophy.

The director was probed in a three and half hour-conversational interview as he described and interpreted his thinking on seven ways of reforming adult education in the Mid-Western state that aspired to reach to the top 25 in five years. His 13-Point Plan to transform adult education programs generated six themes: (1) Overcoming adult students' financial barrier; (2) returning the urban city to its former glory; (3) developing partnerships for contextualized workplace training; (4) characterizing integrated contextualized adult education; (5) providing adult education-related curriculum, andragogy, and evaluation; and (6) situating professional development for adult educators. The implications point to the need for transformative leadership at the state and local levels of adult education to address the following areas: poverty and social issues that surround adult learners; quality administrators and teachers with relevant degrees and credentials for successful adult learning; incentives, social justice programs motivated by all stakeholders; and school-community partnerships for integrated education and career training in order to move this Mid-Western state from the 44th to 25th ranking over a five-year period.

Limitations of the Study

The low enrollment of GED students in the Urban City's GED adult education program prohibits the study at hand to make substantive claims. Thus, the findings are relevant to only those who are situated in similar GED programs and experiences.

The other limitation of the study was only one Mid-Western state director's thinking on adult education program reforms was documented. No other adult education administrator apart from the state level was interviewed to find out their perspectives on the Mid-Western state's adult education reforms.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research study at hand has generated sites and opportunities for future research and researchers. It is the goal of this researcher to do a similar study in an adult education program that has higher enrollment and attendance to identify the realities and perspectives of student education and learning. The GED completers in this particular adult education program should be also tracked during their next level of education whether it be a college or training program. Tracking the learning experience of the GED returners and completers would provide rich information and additional insights about their realities and perspectives.

Future research suggestions concerning the reform are as follows: To explore the state adult educators' perspectives of the 13-Point Plan; and to investigate if the 13-Points Plan reform policy developed by the former adult education state director was indeed implemented and if so, to what extent and how it has helped to improve the state's adult education programs.

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ABSTRACT

AN URBAN MID-WESTERN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM: PERSPECTIVES OF STAKEHOLDERS

by

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August 2017

Advisor: Dr. Jazlin Ebenezer

Major: Curriculum and Instruction

Degree: Doctor of Education

The purpose of this qualitative research study is two-fold: (1) to narrate the realities and perspectives of adult students' learning experiences in a General Education Development (GED) preparation program in a Mid-western urban city; and (2) to document the thinking of the former director of adult education at the state level to understand the reforms of adult education program he envisioned. Data sources to achieve the first objective comprised of classroom observations, researcher's journal entries, and transcripts of individual interviews of three adult education students, one teacher, and one counselor. The data source to realize the second objective was the transcript of an interview with state adult education director at the time of this study. Through observations of the participants of this urban adult education program, the following issues are clearly in need of reform: ways to prevent high school dropouts; and a promise to school returners through adult education programs. The student-barrier realities and perspectives observed are: students' personal issues, students' attendance, students' performance on posttest, practice GED tests, and GED examinations, and teaching methods, and absence of a GED math teacher. The implications for high schools and GED adult education programs are as follows: prevention of teens dropping out of school; and a promise to school returners as adults. The study may inform

educators of other adult education programs on how to identify adult education students' problems and improve their experiences in preparing for the GED examination, college and careers. The findings based on the director's thinking of what is necessary for a successful adult education program are as follows: (1) aspiring to reach the top 25 in five years; (2) overcoming adult students' financial barrier; (3) returning this Mid-Western urban city to former glory; (4) developing partnerships for contextualized workplace training; (5) characterizing integrated contextualized adult education; (6) providing adult education-related curriculum, andragogy, and evaluation; and (7) situating professional development for adult educators. The implications of these findings point to the need for transformative leadership to deliberately and strategically focus on areas such as poverty and social issues that surround adult learners; quality administrators and teachers with relevant degrees and credentials for successful adult learning; incentives, social justice programs motivated by all stakeholders; and school-community partnerships for integrated education and career training, in order to move Michigan from the 44th to 25th ranking over a five year period.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

NAME: Dedria Lynette Willis			

EDUCATION	DEGREE	MM/YYYY	FIELD OF STUDY/MAJOR
Mercy College of Detroit	Bachelor of Science	12/1991	Human Resource Management
University of Detroit Mercy	Master of Science	05/1993	Computer and Information Systems
University of Detroit Mercy	Teacher Certification Program	05/1996	Social Studies (RX) Vocational Services (VB) Business Education (GX) Computer Science (NR)
Wayne State University	Postgraduate Certificate	12/2000	Education Specialist Certification in General Administration and Supervision, Elementary & Secondary Administration Cert. (ES)
Wayne State University	Doctor of Education	08/2017	Curriculum and Instruction/Education Leadership

A. Personal Statement

I possess the leadership, expertise and enthusiasm necessary to productively perform the proposed research study in the area of adult education students moving from General Education Development (GED) to postsecondary education. I have a broad background in the field of education within adult education and secondary education. My research includes investigation into the motivations of adults returning to school after dropping out of high school, observing their classroom experiences as they prepare for the GED examination. This will be my first time conducting a research study of this magnitude and collection of data.

B. Positions and Employment

2012 – Present	Principal, Detroit Public Schools Community District
1993 – 2012	Assistant Principal/Curriculum, Department Head, Teacher Detroit Public Schools

Other Experience and Professional Memberships

1996 -1999	Phi Delta Kappa, Wayne State University
1998	National Council for the Social Studies
1996 -2001	Association of Career and Technical Education
1999 – Present	Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. – Detroit Alumnae Chapter
2013 – Present	Girl Scouts of America – Troop Leader #71587
2016 – Present	National Association of Parliamentarians- Detroit Unit

Honors

2001	McDonalds and WJBK Detroit Fox TV Educator for Youth Award
2008	Community in Schools and Detroit Parent Network Honoree
2009	David Adamany Scholarship: Alternative Pathways to Teaching, Wayne State University