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An Investigation of Perceptions of Program Quality Support of Adult Basic Education Programs in Arkansas

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An Investigation of Perceptions of Program Quality Support of Adult Basic Education Programs
in Arkansas

An Investigation of Perceptions of Program Quality Support of Adult Basic Education Programs
in Arkansas

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Adult and Lifelong Learning

by

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Abstract

This study was designed to identify the degree to which the directors of adult basic education programs in Arkansas perceive they have program quality support, as evidenced by a well-defined mission and role in the community, a management system, human resources management, and a suitable learning environment. To collect data for this study, NSCALL's *Evidence-based program self-assessment* (2006) was modified and administered electronically. Thirty-nine administrators of adult education programs funded by state and federal grants under the Arkansas Department of Career Education were invited to participate. The survey consisted of 40 questions scored on a 5-point Likert type scale, four open responses questions, and three demographic questions. The study found that the directors of local adult education programs in Arkansas agree that their programs have a well-defined role in the community. Directors strongly agree that they have quality management systems, but almost a third of directors strongly disagree that they have an adequate budget for their program. The directors agreed that they have quality systems to manage human resources and provide suitable environments for adult learners. No significant differences were found in the responses between the different demographic groups examined.

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I would like to acknowledge the teachers, staff, and directors of Adult Education programs in Arkansas for their perseverance and dedication in helping adults in our state learn English a Second Language, adult basic education, and prepare for college and the workplace.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Status of the Issue

Adult Basic Education programs exist in the United States to provide “second chance” educational services to adults 18 and older who test below a twelve grade level in reading, language, or math. Funding for adult basic education programs is made possible through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which was signed into law by President Obama on July 22, 2014, revising and reauthorizing the Workforce Reinvestment Act (WIA) of 1998 (H.R. 803, 2014). The current accountability standards for adult education programs in the United States were developed by Title II of the WIA to determine program effectiveness. The outcome-based performance measures include adult student educational functioning level gains in reading, math, and language literacy; student gains in workforce readiness skills and knowledge areas; an increase in adult student parental involvement in their children’s academic success, and completion of high school equivalency diplomas. These outcomes reflect the goals of the WIA adult education program, which are to improve English literacy and language skills needed for self-sufficiency, to assist in completion of high school, and to place adults into postsecondary and employment training programs (Condelli, Castillo, Seburn, & Deveaux, 2002). WIOA expands and encourages better coordination between the primary federal programs that support workforce development, employment services, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation services, and establishes common performance measures across these core programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

While state and national standards for adult basic education programs exist, individual programs have traditionally offered a mosaic of services, rather than a cohesive system that

supports learning in and outside the classroom (Alamprese, 1998). A weak programmatic infrastructure, often caused by predominately part-time staff, high turn-over of staff, and inadequate funding, affects a local program's ability to innovate and develop (Beder, 1996). Adults seeking basic skills and training face "a dizzying array of possibilities with little by way of overall guidance and structure" (Fein, 2014, p. 5). An effective adult basic education program needs quality program support, including the existence of a well-defined role, an effective management system, human resource management, and a suitable environment for learning (Comings, Soricone, & Santos, 2006).

A well-defined role can be articulated through a local program's mission, goals and philosophy, and its ability to serve the needs of the community while meeting the state and federal policies. A program's management system includes its use of a governing body, its use of data for program improvement and accountability, its planning and evaluation systems, and its management of financial resources and records. Human resources management includes a program's processes and standards for recruiting and hiring staff, its working conditions, and professional development plans for staff. A program's environment for learning is demonstrated by its hours of operation and locations, its physical and psychological environment, and its use of appropriate learning materials and resources tailored to meet needs of community (Comings et al., 2006).

Problem Statement

The National Reporting System (NRS) is the accountability system for federally funded, state administered adult education programs. It addresses the accountability requirements of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), which is Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (1998). The NRS defines three types of core measures: outcome measures,

descriptive measures, and participation measures. Outcome measures include the number of student educational gains and several follow-up measures, including the number of students who entered employment, retained employment, received a secondary diploma or GED, and the number of students who enrolled in a postsecondary educational or training program. Descriptive measures include student demographics, reasons for attending, and student status. The NRS participation measures include contact hours received and enrollment in specialized programs like family literacy or workplace literacy. WIOA (2014) updates and reauthorizes WIA, and includes six primary indicators of performance, including percentage of program participants in unsubsidized employment; median earnings of participants; percentage of participants who obtain a postsecondary credential or diploma; participants achieving skills gains; and effectiveness in serving employers (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

While these performance indicators are measured and used by state and federal agencies to determine funding and services at the state and local levels, they do not address how programs and practitioners of adult basic education might best achieve improved outcomes. This outcome-based accountability system does not measure program processes or the operations that define program quality, as defined by Comings et al. (2006). There is a need for more research on perceptions of program-level quality standards that direct and guide adult basic education program directors in providing and improving practice in adult basic education. To date, a study like this has not been done in Arkansas.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify the degree to which the directors of adult basic education programs in Arkansas perceive they have program quality support, as evidenced by a

well-defined mission and role in the community, a management system, human resources management, and a suitable learning environment.

Research Question

My guiding research question is: To what degree do the directors of adult basic education programs in Arkansas perceive they have program quality support. To examine this question, the study will determine:

1. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a well-defined role in the community?
2. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a quality management system?
3. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a quality system to manage their human resources?
4. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they provide a suitable environment for learning for adult students?
5. To what degree does the individual program demographic information of Arkansas adult basic education programs affect directors' perceptions of program quality support?

Significance of Study

According to the Arkansas Department of Career Education, Adult Education programs served 39,922 students during the 2012-2013 school year, the latest full year of data available. Forty-four percent of those students functioned between the 4th and 8th grade levels, and 19% were learning English as a Second Language. Seven thousand five hundred twenty eight adults passed the General Education Development (GED) test to earn the Arkansas High School

Diploma in 2013 (Arkansas Department of Career Education, 2014). U.S. Census data identifies 16.7% of adults in Arkansas over 25 years of age with less than a high school diploma (2010).

According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) report *Investing Wisely in Adult Education is Key to State Prosperity* (2005), 17 % of adults aged 25 to 44 in the SREB's member states, which includes Arkansas, have no high school diploma. Of those 5 million people, 1.5 million did not complete the ninth grade. According to the report, unemployment is four times higher for those without a high school diploma than for those with a bachelor's degree.

In 2012, the Arkansas Board of Career Education approved a set of standards for adult basic education programs funded by the Arkansas Department of Career Education, Adult Education Division. The *Standards of a Quality Adult Education Program* addressed recommendations and specific requirements adult education programs should meet to receive state and federal funding. This document lists goals for program planning, administration, curriculum and instruction, educational gains, staffing, student support services, student recruitment and retention, and specifics for personnel, classes, and student assessment information used to determine the educational functioning level of students. Goal 1.4 of the program planning quality indicators states, "The program revises the plan periodically based on various factors, including, but not limited to, changing needs, evaluation results, and staff/client input" (The Arkansas Department of Career Education, 2012, p. 6). An annual self-study that considers the quality indicators is recommended, leaving a need for an appropriate instrument to measure the degree to which quality indicators are being implemented in Arkansas adult education programs.

Delimitations and/or assumptions

This study is specific to adult basic education programs in Arkansas, but the best practices of quality program support surveyed could have further ranging applicability. The study will rely on the directors' survey responses and NRS data collected from the Arkansas Education Reporting Information System (AERIS). Adult basic education programs in Arkansas vary widely in size, geographic area, student race, age, and gender, and this could affect overall results.

Definitions

For the purpose of the study, the following definitions are provided:

Adult Basic Education (ABE): Component of adult education in which instruction in reading, language, and math is geared toward basic skills below the 9th grade level (0-8.9).

Adult Secondary Education (ASE): Component of adult education in which instruction in reading, language and math is geared toward basic skills above the 9th grade level (9.0-12.9).

Adult Education Reporting Information System (AERIS): Used by adult basic education programs in Arkansas to track student data, attendance, testing, and NRS goals and outcomes.

Advancement: Student advancement from one NRS Educational Functioning Level (EFL) to the next, based on performance documented by pre- and post-tests.

Basic English Skills Literacy Test (BEST): Designed for adult English language learners in the United States, the BEST Literacy test is a combined test of reading and writing skills using authentic situations as the basis for test questions.

Career Pathways Model: A framework for connecting a series of educational programs with integrated work experience and support services, creating a ladder for adult workers to advance to successively higher levels of education and employment in an occupational sector.

Career Readiness Certificate (CRC): A credential based on the WorkKeys assessments that demonstrate to employers an individual possesses basic workplace skills.

Contact hours: Hours of instruction or instructional activity the student receives from the adult basic education program.

Core descriptive measures: A self-report completed at intake that includes race, gender, age, and labor force status.

Core outcome measures: Central measures of the NRS which address the core indicators of program performance, including educational gains, entrance into (retain or advance) employment, placement in post-secondary training, and receipt of Arkansas High School Diploma (GED certificate).

Distance education: Formal learning in which students and instructors are separated by geography, time, or both for the majority of the instructional period.

Educational Functioning Level (EFL): Determined by outcome on TABE pre- and post- tests.

Educational Gain: Adult learner advances one or more NRS Educational Functioning Levels (EFL) from starting level, measured on entry into an adult basic education program.

English as a Second Language (ESL): Component of adult education focused on improving English reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Enrolled: Students who have 12 or more contact hours within a program year (July 1 to June 30)

Learner goals: Student's primary reason for enrolling in and attending adult education classes.

Goals are automatically assigned based on student intake information, and student may designate a secondary goal. Goals are:

- Enter employment
- Retain or improve employment

- Obtain a GED or high school diploma
- Enter post-secondary education or training

Additional goals are:

- Achieve citizenship skills
- Increase involvement in children's education
- Increase involvement in children's literacy related activities
- Increase involvement in community affairs
- Leave public assistance
- Obtain WAGE certificate
- Obtain Career Readiness Certificate (CRC)
- Vote or register to vote for first time

Managed enrollment: Intake process which provides a structure and sequence for students to enroll only at designated times in a year.

National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS): Developed by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education Division of Adult Education and Literacy, this outcome-based reporting system is used for state-administered, federally funded adult education programs.

Open enrollment: Intake process in which students may enter and exit a program at any time in a program year.

Postsecondary training: Any training beyond the high school level, including certificates, associate's degrees, and bachelor's degrees.

Served: All students who receive services from adult education and literacy programs count as "served". Students are considered "enrolled" after 12 hours of instruction.

Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE): Survey and/ or complete battery of tests used to assess reading, language and math levels. TABE scores are used in AERIS to determine students' educational functioning level.

Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE): An Arkansas adult education program designed to help unemployed and underemployed Arkansans acquire the basic academic skills to gain employment. Certificates are earned by meeting specific standards.

Conceptual Framework

An Evidence-based Adult Education Model Appropriate for Research (2006) is an extension of the 2003 National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) publication *Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System*, which described the steps to using empirical evidence and professional wisdom to improve practice in adult basic education programs (Comings et al., 2006). According to Comings et al. (2006), the first step is to review the available empirical wisdom and professional wisdom to define program models that meet requirements of good practice, describing what teachers, administration, and stakeholders should do to provide adults students with both effective instruction and support services. The goal of the model is to provide a basic context of good practice that facilitates researchers' focus on approaches to instruction and support services and improve the reliability of that research by enabling them to look at programs of similar quality when exploring a specific area.

Comings et al. (2006) cite the findings of Hal Beder's (1999) *Outcomes and impacts of adult literacy education in the United States*, a study in which 115 outcomes and impact studies of adult literacy education in the United States since the 1960s were evaluated. The evaluation criteria were based on an impact/outcome component; adequate documentation with respect to design and methods; an adequate number of cases, sampling plan, data collection procedures;

valid and reliable measures; inclusion of a control group in the research design; and logical inferences made from the design and data (Beder, 1999). Beder finds that most of the studies he reviewed were flawed in a way that “severely compromised the validity and utility of their findings” and possibly led to bad policy decisions based on misleading data. He identifies six causes of the flaws: over-reliance on self-reported data; lack of adequate controls; lack of valid, reliable, and appropriate tests; poor quality research reports; and lack of relevant standards (Beder, 1999).

To avoid such flaws, the research model designed by Comings et al. (2006) identifies the principles of best practice of four components: program quality, entrance into a program, participation in a program, and reengagement in learning. Entrance into a program includes a program’s approach to student recruitment, intake, and orientation. Participating in a program includes a program’s approach to classroom management, instruction, and supporting student persistence. Reengagement in learning includes practices for supporting student reengagement in learning. These components explore the principles derived from empirical evidence and professional wisdom that support them, allowing researchers to more accurately seek, develop, or evaluate interventions by studying programs that have the ability to deliver services.

Although the model is designed to help identify sites with similar practices for research in adult education, it is also to be used as an instrument for guiding program improvement, and serves as the basis for NSCALL’s *Evidence-based Program Self-Assessment* survey instrument, which allows adult basic education programs to identify the principles of best practice that they currently employ, and to identify which areas need improvement. In the *Research Site Identification Protocol (RSIP)* appendix, Comings et al. (2006) also allow for the principles to be addressed to the degree to which a program quality or practice is evident, allowing for a more in-

depth analysis of program components and activities. When used as a self-assessment tool, respondents can rate the degree to which a certain principle is evident in their program, allowing administrators and researchers to diagnose program strengths and areas for improvement.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

This literature review is divided into two sections. The first section explores the legislative history of current adult basic education programs in the United States. The second section explores the subset components of program quality support as presented by Comings et al. (2006). These components are the foundation of the survey instrument used in this study.

A wide range of books and journal articles were reviewed for this project using the University of Arkansas Mullins library and search engines, including Ebsco, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. The key words used included adult learner, adult basic education, program quality, and terms more specific to the individual components of program quality, including mission statement, professional development, financial management, human resources, teacher evaluation, and student centered learning.

A legislative history of current Adult Basic Education Programs

Although federal statutory involvement in adult education in the United States began in 1964, the National Advisory Council on Adult Education (NACAE) report, *A History of the Adult Education Act* (1980), traces the earliest expenditure of federal funds to 1777, when the soldiers in the Continental Army were provided instruction in math and military skills. States also provided adult education, with evidence of adult education programs in the 18th century, including U.S. citizenship classes for immigrant adults, evening literacy classes, and the Chautauqua movement (Eyre, 2013). During the depression era of the 1930s, several employment-related education programs were initiated at the federal level, including the Works

Projects Administration (WPA) which provided literacy education and employment, and the Civilian Conservation Corps, which provided job training and employment (NACAE, 1980).

The Department of Defense developed the general education development program during World War II to provide service personnel the chance to attain high school completion. In cooperation with the American Council on Education, they helped develop the General Education Development (GED) tests in use today. In 1943, the first GED tests were standardized by administering the tests to 35,000 seniors in 814 high schools in 48 states (Allen & Jones 1992). By 1965, one million adults had taken the GED test (Allen & Jones, 1992).

The Economic Opportunity Act passed in 1964, less than nine months after President Lyndon Johnson took office (Eyre, 2013). Part of his “War on Poverty,” this act created the Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program and granted funds to states to develop programs providing reading and writing instruction to help adults obtain or retain employment. This legislation addressed adult illiteracy in the U.S., offering adults 18 and older the opportunity to develop reading, writing, language, and numeracy skills to help them become more fully productive and responsible citizens. The act created new resources for families trying to escape poverty, providing college work study programs, adult basic education grants, and several new programs in the Office of Education, under Johnson’s belief that government involvement in education could serve as an antipoverty strategy (Eyre, 2013).

The Adult Education Act of 1966 moved the adult literacy program from the Office for Economic Opportunity to the Office of Education, expanding programs and encouraging a focus on basic education needed for occupational training, profitable employment, and helping people become more productive and responsible citizens (NACAE, 1980). The Act helped expand adult education programs at the state level, with emphasis on improving local ABE programs, training

of personnel, student recruitment procedures, instructional materials, and program administration (Eyre, 2013). States were granted money based on the proportion of adults who had completed five grades of school or less (NACAE, 1980). A federal advisory committee on Adult Basic Education was formed to help coordinate programs and eliminate duplication, review the effectiveness of federally supported adult education programs, and make annual reports to the president of the United States (NACAE, 1980).

Between 1968 and 1978, there were five amendments to the Adult Education Act, including new sections authorizing grants for pilot demonstration projects, such as English as a Second language classes for refugees from Southeast Asia; high school equivalency exam preparation courses; and programs to improve education and employment for Native Americans (Eyre, 2013). The federal role continued through the Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988, the National Literacy Act of 1991, and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) and Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (Eyre, 2013). In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the ESEA School Improvement Amendments, which included legislation that created workforce literacy and English literacy grants, and strengthened evaluation requirements, creating programs for dropout prevention and basic skills improvement, as well as parent education programs. By 1991, President George H. W. Bush signed the National Literacy Act into law, creating the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), which served as a clearinghouse to provide technical assistance and training to adult education providers and foster research-based instructional practices. The National Literacy Act mandated development of program quality indicators in the areas of recruitment, retention, and improvement of literacy skills. States developed performance standards for these three areas, as

well as additional standards for program planning, curriculum, instruction, professional staff development, and support services (Eyre, 2013).

The current system of Adult Basic Education is the result of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1998 (WIA, 1998). The purpose of the WIA was to coordinate and consolidate employment, training, literacy, and rehabilitation programs in the United States (Eyre, 2013). The law consolidated more than fifty employment, training, and literacy programs, including the Adult Education Act and the National Literacy Act (Tracy-Mumford, 1998). Title I of the WIA, which is Workforce Investment Systems, established a “One-Stop” delivery system, including language requiring coordination of local Workforce Investment Boards (WIB) and adult education programs (WIA, 1998).

Title II Adult Education and Literacy created a partnership between federal, state, and local adult education programs to provide adult education and literacy services that would assist adults in becoming literate and obtaining the skills needed to be full partners in their children’s education. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) is authorized by Title II and administered by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). AEFLA was passed to assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency; assist adults who are parents to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children; and assist adults in the completion of a secondary school education (Bradley, 2013).

Title II also established the accountability system with the National Reporting System (NRS) reporting educational gains, attainment of a high school diploma, entry into post-secondary education or training, entry into employment, and job retention (Eyre, 2013). States

would negotiate levels of performance needed to show continuous improvement and develop five-year plans to improve adult education and literacy services (Tracy-Mumford, 1998).

AEFLA included four core measures of performance accountability requirements, including improvement in literacy skill levels in reading, writing, and speaking the English language; numeracy; problem solving; English language acquisition; and other literacy skills; placement or retention in, or completion of, postsecondary education, training, employment, or career advancement; and receipt of a secondary school diploma or the equivalent (Bradley, 2013).

AEFLA's authorization of appropriations expired on September 30, 2003, and its programs have been funded through annual appropriations. On July 22, 2014, President Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (H.R. 803, 2014). WIOA amends and reauthorizes the WIA of 1998 through the fiscal year 2020, emphasizing the creation of career pathways programs, the integration and coordination of adult education and training services, and streamlining service delivery to underprepared workers (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). AEFLA remains a core program in WIOA, with changes in WIOA emphasizing the transition of adult education participants to postsecondary education and training, and creating new adult education opportunities for workforce preparation and integrated education and training, enabling participants to secure employment in particular industry or occupational sectors and advance to successively higher levels of education and employment in those sectors.

The WIOA adds four new required leadership activities to be supported with state leadership funds: alignment among core programs to implement state plan strategy; establishment of high quality professional development programs to improve teaching and

learning processes; technical assistance based on rigorous research; and evaluation and dissemination of information about promising practices within the state. The four new technical assistance activities include support for implementing the new common performance measures; conducting rigorous research and evaluations; and evaluating adult education and literacy activities every four years (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). WIOA also codifies the integrated English literacy and civics education programs set up in WIA, providing annual funding to programs that prepare adults who are English language learners “for unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to self-sufficiency” (H.R. 803, 2014, p. 546).

States are required to submit Unified Plans by March 3, 2016, with new performance indicators negotiated as part of the approval process (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The six primary indicators of performance include the percentage of program participants in unsubsidized employment during the second and fourth quarter after exit; median earnings; percentage of participants who earn a postsecondary credential or diploma during participation or within one year after exit; participants achieving measurable skills gains; and effectiveness in serving employers (H.R. 803, 2014). WIOA is scheduled to go into effect July 1, 2015, with the current performance accountability system remaining through the first program year (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

In 2011, President Barack Obama set a goal for the U.S. to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by the year 2020, and challenged every American to complete at least one year of higher education or career training (Cook & Hartle, 2011). In order to meet that goal, the U.S. Department of Education developed a strategic plan for 2011-2014 that outlines National Outcome Goals for Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education (CTE),

and Adult Education; Elementary and Secondary; Early Learning; equity; continuous improvement to the U.S. Education system; and improving the capacities of the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The first of these 6 goals calls on postsecondary, CTE, and adult education programs to increase college access, quality of programs, and completion rates by improving higher education and lifelong learning opportunities for youth and adults, and by requiring effective, high quality CTE programs aligned with college and career readiness standards and the needs of employers, industry, and labor (Eyre, 2013). According to the plan, over 40% of students who enroll in four-year colleges, and over 70% of students who enroll in two-year colleges fail to graduate. In order to improve completion rates, the Department intends to fund programs and services that meet the educational needs of adult learners, transitioning workers, and career changers. The goal specifically calls on adult education programs to increase the number and percentage of adult education students obtaining a high school credential (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

According to the Southern Regional Education Board's (SREB) report *A Smart Move in Tough Times: How SREB States can Strengthen Adult Learning and the Workforce*, there is an urgent demand for high-quality adult learning programs as a result of increased layoffs, plant closings, and high unemployment rates since the beginning of the recession in 2008 (Lord, 2010). Arkansas has over 335,000 adults over 25 years of age with less than a high school diploma, equaling 17.6% of that population (U.S. Census, 2013). Adults need educational services to prepare for both post-secondary training and/or the workforce.

The Report of the National Commission on Adult Literacy cites rising high school dropout rates, low literacy rates in a growing prison population, demographic shifts, and the growing need for English language instruction, as well as the effect of parental education levels

on children's learning among the reasons for developing more robust adult literacy programs (2008). The same study finds that half of the adult workforce does not have the basic education and communication skills required to get or advance in jobs that pay a sustainable wage.

Summary

Adult basic education programs in the United States as we know them today are the result of federal statutory involvement beginning with the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act, the Adult Education Act of 1966, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. The future of adult basic education is outlined in the Department of Education's plan to help the U.S. achieve the goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by the year 2020. The next section discusses the research-based components of program quality support that are required to help adult basic education programs meet this goal.

The Components of Program Quality Support

The first of the four components identified in *An Evidence-based Adult Education Model Appropriate for Research (2006)* is program quality support, which Comings et al. describe as the organizational structure that supports students and adult education teachers in teaching and learning. An effective adult basic education program requires quality program support, including having a well-defined role, an effective management system, human resource management, and a suitable environment for learning (Comings et al., 2006).

A well-defined role.

A program with a well-defined role will have both a clear organizational mission and an awareness of the program environment (Comings et al., 2006). According to the Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL), an international association whose mission is

to advance professional expertise in English language teaching and learning for speakers of other languages worldwide, an adult education program needs a mission statement, with goals developed with input from stakeholders (TESOL, 2003). The mission of adult education as a field emphasizes literacy and lifelong learning in a changing workplace, aligning it with an agenda of economic competitiveness (Kerka, 1996). Missions for adult education programs vary by program and state, but generally focus on improving adults' capacity to participate in society and improve their lives (Comings et al., 2006). An adult education program should organize its instructional offerings to be consistent with the program's mission and the goals of the learners being served by the program (TESOL, 2003).

A 2013 study compared mission statements of National Blue Ribbon Schools to those of unacceptable high schools (Perfetto, Holland, Davis, & Fedynich, 2013). The study was a mixed methods analysis of mission statements of 49 high performing schools and 50 underperforming schools as identified by the Texas Education Agency. The mission statements were read and codified to determine frequency of key words, which was converted into percentages that determined the dominate themes. Thirty-one dominate themes were identified, and Pearson chi-square analysis differences between the high and under-performing schools yielded differences for the themes of: Excellence, Academics, Learning, Challenge, and Life-long Learning. Perfetto et al. (2013) found that high performing schools had mission statements that reflected emphasis on academics, student learning, challenging students, providing a nurturing/caring environment for learning, expecting excellence in what students are learning, and emphasizing that learning is a lifelong process.

A well-defined role is also evidence of a program's awareness of its position in the community through maintenance of communication with relevant stakeholders, keeping

informed of policies and trends, and engaging in advocacy efforts to raise community awareness (Comings et al., 2006). An adult education program should foster and maintain linkages and clear communication with internal and external stakeholders (TESOL, 2003). A lack of communication between adult education providers and various community agencies can be a major obstacle to program effectiveness (Stites, Foley, & Wagner, 1995). Strengthening marketing and communication helps convince potential students that adult learning programs can help them reach their goals conveniently and efficiently (Lord et al., 2010). Marketing and communication efforts can include radio public service announcements, adult educators speaking at community events, and using newsletters, posters, and the internet to promote program services. Program administrators can advocate for policy change at the state and national level, both directly and indirectly; indirectly, by implementing strategies that lead to better results and documenting the results, and directly, by using the results to advocate for state and federal policies that support program improvement (Taylor, Smith, & Bingham, 2005). Areas for advocacy can include funding, performance accountability, teacher working conditions, and research, among others (Taylor et al., 2005).

To maintain an awareness of the environment of the adult education program and to maintain communication with relevant stakeholders, programs conduct needs assessments. A needs assessment answers the question “Why do we teach what we teach?” (Kaufman & English, 1979, p. 15). In the human services field, the Community-Oriented Needs Assessment (CONA) is one way that service providers determine their role within the broader community service planning efforts (Neuber, 1980). The CONA model is designed to use data from community demographic and statistical profiles, surveys of designated key stakeholders, and individual interviews with clients and potential consumers. The needs assessment can be used to design

positive and constructive change to help meet the needs of citizens, educators, and learners (Kaufman & English, 1979).

King & Jakuta (2002) conducted a bounded case study of the use of needs assessments in adult education programs in New York in 2001. The study used nine extensive interviews and four surveys, conducted with 13 representatives of urban and rural, publicly and privately funded, and paid and volunteer staff adult education programs. Programs were randomly selected, and free responses were coded for emergent themes and frequencies. Of the 13 subjects interviewed, 12 used needs assessments to varying degrees and forms, including surveys, observations, discussion groups, interviews, feedback from administrators, student assessments, and staff meeting discussions. Half used needs assessments on a regular, ongoing basis, using both formal and informal assessment tools. The programs used these needs assessments in a variety of ways, including helping redesign courses and restructure programs; identifying needs for new programs; checking to see if the programs were meeting community needs; eliminating unneeded segments of the programs; recognizing an inability to meet specific needs; and developing curriculum. The respondents recommend changes in needs assessment practices, and identified a need for more in-depth program assessments, more faculty input, and more group discussions. When asked for direct recommendations to other adult educators, the primary response was “listen to your customers” (King & Jakuta, 2002, p. 169). Other recommendations included using a variety of methods for needs assessment; using them continuously; being sensitive to the needs of adult learners; and involving students and faculty in the process (King & Jakuta, 2002).

It is important to note here that adult education programs are required to have a well-defined role under Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Local

adult basic education programs must be responsive to the regional and local needs of the community, serving individuals in the community who are identified as most in need of adult education and literacy services, including adults who have low literacy levels and adults who are English language learners (H.R. 803, 2014). Adult education programs must demonstrate alignment between their proposed activities and services and the strategies and goals of the local WIOA plan, providing opportunities for cooperation between adult education, youth services, rehabilitation, and other workforce services (H.R. 803, 2014).

An effective management system.

The second main component of program quality support identified by Comings et al. (2006) is an effective management system. An effective management system includes governance of a program, data collection and use, a planning process, regular evaluation, and financial management. Governance of a program must include a governing body that is representative of the local community, and it should meet regularly to oversee program activities. A program should have an advisory group and bylaws or a board of directors that ensures accountability, administration of program activities, and stakeholder participation (TESOL, 2003). Stakeholders can include students, community members, agencies, and businesses. Opportunities for involvement can include informal verbal communication, face-to-face meetings, email and website interactions (Reeves, 2004).

A program should also gather and use data for program improvement and accountability (Comings et al., 2006). A program should have an accountability system for record keeping and reporting that is consistent with program policies, and legal and funding requirements (TESOL, 2003). The former Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE, now the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, OCTAE) implemented the National Reporting System (NRS) in

2000 as an accountability system for adult education programs (Condelli et al., 2010). The NRS tracks student learning gains, goal attainment, and attendance. Learning gain is advancement through the educational functioning levels as measured by pre- and post-testing on standardized instruments like the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Goal attainment measures whether students retained or obtained employment, entered post-secondary education, or obtained a high school diploma or GED credential. Local programs and states use student contact hours to measure attendance (Condelli et al., 2010).

Beginning in July of 2012, the NRS changed the way student goal attainment is tracked, assigning automatic cohorts for students who meet the criteria for each goal (OVAE, 2012). The goal of *entered employment* is automatically set for students who are unemployed and looking for work in the labor force when they enter the adult education program and exit the same year. *Retain employment* is the automatic goal for students who are employed and in the labor force when they enter the program, and who enter the workforce the first quarter after exiting the program. Students who take all of the GED tests, or are enrolled in adult high school at the high ASE level, and exit during the program year, will have the goal *Obtain a secondary credential*. *Enter postsecondary education or training* is the automatic goal for students who get their GED credential, who have a secondary credential upon entry, or are enrolled in a special transition class, such as preparation for a college entrance exam like the ACT or COMPASS (OVAE, 2012). The NRS also added two new measures for states, requiring states to report the highest level of U.S. or non-U.S. schooling by each student (i.e. 10th grade), and requiring states to report the number of years of teaching experience and credentials for adult education teachers (OVAE, 2012).

The data collection that is required by the NRS can be used for program improvement (Comings et al., 2006). Teachers can use data to improve retention, instruction, or follow-up. Program administrators can use data to help teachers plan professional development, and state administrators may use it to determine funding, evaluate policies, or project future program needs (Condelli et al., 2010). This planning process is another component of an effective management system. Programs should seek input from their stakeholders to address student and community needs, program goals, student goals, persistence patterns, staffing and resource needs, technology needs, and community relations (Comings et al., 2006). Programs must examine data about student outcome and program processes, identifying and implementing plans for change based on those data (Ziegler & Bingman, 2007).

Programs should engage in a regular process of evaluation for program development and accountability, assessing the effectiveness of recruitment, intake, orientation, instruction, counseling, transition, and support services (Comings et al., 2006). The program evaluation policy should link assessment to instruction and learner goals, providing recommendations for further assessment (TESOL, 2003). Adult education programs should have a structure in place to support continuous improvement, allowing them to identify areas of need, develop strategies to address the needs, pilot test the strategies, integrate solutions program-wide, and evaluate the impact of the strategies (McLendon & Polis, 2009).

A 2012 study by Lobaccaro examined the use of data to improve instructional outcomes, and examined best practices used in ABE that can be applied in a correctional setting to increase educational functioning level (EFL) gains. The six year study examined NRS data, including number of students, hours of instruction, and number of GED diplomas, and applied two interventions to increase EFL gains in inmate students in Delaware. The first intervention

involved creating and distributing a 60-hour monthly reassessment report, designed to help teachers keep track of student attendance and let them know when the student had achieved the required 60 hours needed to post-test. The second intervention involved the creation of a fast-track GED program that focused on identified problem areas in the correctional setting: use of contextualized, real-life materials to enhance instruction, quality writing instruction, and the use of technology (Lobaccaro, 2012). The research cites the Delaware ABE Program monitoring instrument, which is divided into seven sections: program focus, program administration, instruction, staff development, community and educational linkages, student support, and facilities (Lobaccaro, 2012). The instrument is used by the Delaware Department of Education in the review process of adult basic education programs to improve program quality, ensure compliance with federal requirements, recognize commendable program aspects, and maintain a high standard of program quality in adult education. Lobaccaro (2012) found that in the first year of the study, only 4 of 46 students had completed the High Intermediate level, but three years after the interventions were introduced, 63 of 81 students had completed the level.

In the report *Evaluating Learner Outcomes in Adult Education Programs: An Analysis of Kansas Learning Gains and Employment Outcomes* (2005), Patterson examined characteristics that differentiate local adult basic education programs from each other in relation to student outcomes, specifically educational gain and employment. Patterson argues that a national trend towards accountability requires adult education programs that receive state and federal funding to “get results” (p. 7). Patterson examined characteristics related to student learning gains and outcomes in nine clusters of potential predictors: direct effects, program funding, assessment and instruction, program environment, program capacity, program improvement, recruitment and intake, program exposure, and support services and learner advancement.

The direct effects cluster contained characteristics that are believed to predict student learning gains, including entry level of the students, hours of instruction, type of instruction, staffing patterns, staff experience and training, curriculum type, and program size. The funding cluster examined cost-effectiveness in federal and non-federal investments in adult education programs. The assessment and instruction cluster included content and methods of instruction and learner outcomes. The program environment cluster examined characteristics that add to or detract from a program's ability to provide services, including barriers to learner participation, needs of the community, service delivery systems, and characteristics of the local population. The program capacity cluster included a program's capacity in management, staffing, facilities and location, fiscal and non-fiscal resources, and design. The program improvement cluster consists of programmatic aspects that may be continuously improved, like professional development, monitoring of student progress, assessment of staff needs, and review of instructional methods, materials and resources. The recruitment and exposure clusters include marketing and intake, intensity, duration, times and locations of instruction. The final cluster examined support services, including counseling, childcare services, transportation, health services, case management, and employability training (Patterson, 2005). Patterson used program-level data from 32 AEFLA funded adult basic education programs in Kansas across three fiscal years, employing secondary data analysis examining descriptive data including program status, program sites, program staffing, instruction, program inputs, program results, and aggregate learner data (2005). The first dependent variable studied was Proportion of Learning Gains per Level 1-6 Participant, which measured the number of students in each of the 32 programs who showed a gain between the CASAS pre- and post-test, the NRS-approved test given in Kansas. The CASAS measures gains in reading, math, and writing. This variable was

calculated by dividing the number of students making gains by the total number of participants in each program. The second dependent variable was the proportion of outcomes of employment gain within the programs (Patterson, 2005). Several trends emerged across the three years of the study. The correlation of proportions of learning gains with overall outcomes dropped, suggesting that learning gains become secondary to other types of outcomes reported, like receiving a GED diploma or gaining employment. Patterson found moderate correlations between proportion of learning gains and number of ABE and ASE participants, in contrast to ESL learners, with programs that serve a higher proportion of ABE/ASE students reporting higher proportions of learning gains than programs that had lower proportions of ABE/ASE students. There was a rising correlation between the number of advisors to the program and proportion of learning gains, suggesting the stakeholder input is relevant to learning gains. Patterson (2005) found three independent variables associated with proportion of learning gains: number of administrators per ABE/ASE student; number of instructors who had completed a “technology checklist”; and the number of staff teaching ESL within all subject areas.

The final component of an effective management system identified by Comings et al. (2006) is financial management. A program should have sound financial management procedures to collect and maintain fiscal information, guide program budgeting, ensure continuity of funding, and meet reporting requirements (TESOL, 2003). A program should have sustainable funding and manage resources effectively by maintaining records, establishing and monitoring a budget, and engaging in fundraising (Comings et al., 2006).

The Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 requires states to implement fiscal management and accountability information systems based on guidelines to be established by the Secretary of Labor and Secretary of Education, in consultation with state

governors, elected officials, and one-stop partners (H.R. 803, 2014). The guidelines will promote “efficient collection and use of fiscal and management information for reporting and monitoring use of funds authorized under the core programs” (H.R. 803, 2014, p. 155). States will be required to use some WIOA funds to align adult education activities with other core programs, including training services and career pathways. They will need to establish high quality professional development programs to improve instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners, and to disseminate “information about models and promising practices related to such programs” (H.R. 803, 2014, p. 522). No more than 5% of WIOA funds are to be used for state administration, 12.5% for state leadership, and 82.5% for local programs, with no more than 20% of that to be used for corrections education (H.R. 803, 2014).

In awarding grants to local programs, the states must consider the degree to which the local program would be responsive to regional needs; to serving individuals identified as most in need of adult education services (students with low literacy levels and English language learners); the ability of the program to serve students with disabilities; the program’s past effectiveness; the program’s alignment activities; and the goals of local one-stop partners. Another consideration is whether the program is of sufficient intensity and quality so that participants achieve learning gains, and whether the program uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction. Other considerations for funding include whether the local program bases instruction on research-based best practices; whether technology is used to increase the amount and quality of learning; and whether activities are provided in context thought integrated education and training. Another funding consideration is a program’s use of well-trained instructors and administrators who have access to high quality professional development. Local programs must provide proof of coordination with other

available education, training, and social service resources in the community. Programs must offer flexible scheduling and coordinate with transportation, childcare, mental health and career planning services to enable individuals to attend and complete programs. Programs funded by WIOA must maintain high-quality information management systems and be able to report participant outcomes. The final consideration is whether a program provides English language acquisition and civics education programs (H.R. 803, 2014).

Human resource management.

Human resource management is another area of program quality improvement identified by Comings et al. (2006), encompassing staff selection, working conditions, and professional development. A clear process is needed for recruiting and hiring qualified instructional and support staff (Comings et al., 2006; TESOL, 2003). While qualifications may vary according to local educational agency requirements, staff should reflect the cultural diversity of the program learners (TESOL, 2003). Researchers suggest that adult education teachers have personal qualities that include general knowledge, sensitivity to people, and good communication skills, as well as professional qualities that include a philosophy about adult education, the ability to translate that philosophy into practice, and organizational and managerial skills (Soifer, Irwin, Crumrine, Honzaki, Simmons, & Young, 1990). Darling-Hammond (1999) suggests that policy investments in the quality of teachers, including teacher education, licensing, professional development, and hiring, may be related to improvements in student performance. Danielson (2007) found that recruitment and hiring of teachers is facilitated by a coherent definition of good teaching, aligned with mentoring, professional development, and teacher evaluation. A professional development plan should be established that meets the needs of the teachers and provides opportunities to receive training, practice new skills, and receive feedback (Comings et

al., 2006). Opportunities should be provided for teachers to examine current trends, best practices, and technology in adult education and English as a Second Language (TESOL, 2003). A professional development plan should be created with input from staff and stakeholders, appropriate resources to implement the plan should be acquired, and staff should be paid to attend training (Taylor et al., 2005; TESOL, 2003). Expectations need to be set that all teachers should and must continue to learn, and opportunities must be provided for teachers to interact and participate together (Taylor et al., 2005).

In *Professional Development in Adult Basic Education*, Marceau (2003) recommends professional development based on field-based research, reflective practice, and learner-driven instruction (2003). Field-based research relies on peer generated materials and resources, giving programs the opportunity to solve program-level problems and develop a plan for improvement. Reflective practice involves developing a personal philosophy of adult education, allowing educators to reflect and develop perspective on the roles of teachers, students, and the purpose of education. In learner-driven instruction, learners take part in deciding learning goals, connecting their own experiences and evaluating previous assumptions, and gaining new knowledge that can be used in the classroom (Marceau, 2003).

A 2003 National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) study of professional development in adult education examined how 106 adult education teachers changed after participating in one of three different models of professional development: the multi-session workshop, the mentor-teacher workshop, and the practitioner research group (Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe, 2003). The topic of the professional development was learner persistence, and the study measured overall amount of teacher change, or thinking and acting on the topic of learner persistence, and the type of change. The study found that 90%

of the subjects gained some knowledge on the topic, but for some it was only one or two concepts. Seventy-eight percent took some action, but for some it was minimal. The research identified three types of change: no change; nonintegrated change, and integrated change, with 72% of the teachers demonstrating some kind of change, and 24% experiencing significant change. The model of professional development was not a significant factor. The significant factors identified included teachers' access to prep time and benefits, the program's history addressing learner persistence, and the teacher's access to decision making in the program (Smith et al., 2003).

The study recommended that adult education directors improve teachers' working conditions; pay teachers to attend professional development; increase access to colleagues and directors during and after the professional development; and establish expectations at the state and the program level that require professional development for teachers (Smith et al., 2003).

Adult education programs should provide working conditions that support the work and growth of the staff, treating staff as professionals (Comings et al., 2006). The program should provide a safe and clean working environment, with compensation and benefits commensurate with other professional staff at similar institutions (TESOL, 2003). Teachers are affected by working conditions, and respond to them either by coping, trying to improve the situation, or leaving the job and possibly the field (Taylor et al., 2005). Adult educators want to work in an environment that provides opportunities to dialogue with colleagues and directors, where they can exchange ideas and get feedback on their teaching (Marceau, 2003). Program directors should understand the factors that influence teacher's satisfaction with their work lives and the impact this satisfaction has on teaching competence, administrative control, and organizational culture (Xin & MacMillan, 1999). One such factor is full-time employment versus part-time

employment. For example, *Teachers of English as a Second Language* (2003) suggest making adult education positions full-time. Rifkin (1998) studied the difference between attitudes of full-time and part-time faculty at community colleges, finding that part-time faculty have lower levels of involvement in knowledge acquisition, and make less effort to maintain educational integrity. Other research suggests that hiring more full-time staff may be important to maximizing outcomes, such as educational functioning level gains or entrance into post-secondary training (Chisman, 2002).

A study conducted in 2007 examined the implementation of best practices of adult education programs in South Carolina (Ritter, 2007). Using an instrument based on best practices developed from a 2004 survey of adult education teachers, Ritter surveyed adult education directors to determine the level of implementation of these best practices in the 37 rural and 16 urban adult education programs in that state. The study researched eight hypotheses that related best practices to program location and assessment, and two hypotheses that studied the relationship of best practices to academic gains and enrollment. The study looked specifically at the areas of managed enrollment, program leadership, instructional practices, and professional development. In the area of managed enrollment, the survey examined the degree that programs use managed enrollment in GED classes, work-place classes, computer skills classes, community classes, ABE and literacy classes, and ESL classes. In the area of program leadership, the survey examined best practices including whether programs are conducting regular staff meetings; developing and following a schedule for classroom observations; developing potential leaders within the program; and whether programs are using data analysis to improve the local program.

The best instructional practices examined included placing students into leveled classes according to their performance levels; using a variety of instructional groupings such as whole

group or individualized; providing teachers with at least one hour of preparation time for each class taught; and using technology to enhance student learning. The survey also examined best practices in professional development, including whether programs have a professional development plan that coincides with the state plan; teachers attend a range of staff development models, including workshops, classes and mentoring; teachers are allowed to visit other programs and converse with colleagues; teachers are allowed time to practice new strategies and interact with participants (Ritter, 2007). The survey provided the descriptors of best practices and asked directors to check their level of implementation of those practices: fully implemented, partially implemented, planned for implementation, not implemented, or not implemented due to restraints.

The study found that most local programs, both urban and rural, were implementing the identified best practices of managed enrollment, leadership expertise, varied instructional strategies, and professional development (Ritter, 2007). The study revealed a relationship between implementing the practices and enrollment, as well as academic achievement. As enrollment increased, the academic scores of the students enrolled in the programs that implemented the best practices also increased. Ritter (2007) found that only 30% of the programs surveyed had formally evaluated their best practices, and 46% of the respondents had a formal schedule for observing and evaluating adult education instructors in their programs. The study also found that only 36% of the programs had fully implemented managed enrollment for GED and ABE level classes.

A suitable environment for learning.

The final component of program quality support identified by Comings et al. (2006) is a suitable environment for learning. Programs must offer flexible hours and convenient locations, a

both physically safe and psychologically safe environment, and learning materials and resources relevant to adults. Knowles (1973) presented a “process model” in which an adult education teacher establishes a climate for learning, establishes opportunities for mutual planning, and works with adult students to diagnose student needs, formulate objectives, design and conduct learning experiences with appropriate techniques and materials, and evaluate outcomes.

To meet the needs of adult learners and the community, programs should provide courses with flexible schedules in convenient locations (TESOL, 2003), offering classes both day and night to accommodate working adults, within the constraints of program resources (Comings et al., 2006). Adults face both situational barriers and institutional barriers to participating in adult education programs (Cross, 1981). Situational barriers arise from life circumstances of adults, and could include home and job responsibilities. Institutional barriers are practices, policies, and procedures that limit access to adult education programs, and can include times and locations of classes (Cross, 1981). Programs should make provisions for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning (Knowles, 1973).

A 1994 qualitative study on the perceptions of quality indicators in Nebraska adult basic education programs included interviews with adult education instructors, directors, and volunteers with at least one year of experience in adult basic education (Eichhorn, 1994). The participants were asked to describe something that had happened in the last six months that had a positive or negative impact on their local ABE program. Using this critical incident technique, the purpose of the study was to develop a model of quality indicators based on their perceptions. The major categories that were identified included program management, student success, instructional techniques, agency collaboration, qualified staff, staff development, recruitment/retention, student orientation and assessment, public relations, physical

setting/resources, and student/staff recognition (Eichhorn, 1994). One hundred twenty adult educators participated in the study, providing 338 separate incidents. Of the 338 separate incidents that were recorded, 77 related to program management, more than any of the other categories, indicating that overall the respondents were concerned with how a program was managed. They were least concerned with student assessment and orientation (Eichhorn, 1994). The key characteristics of effective program management that were identified included clear lines of communication with staff, strong and responsive leadership, responsiveness to student and community needs, written and explicit program policy and procedures, and current and appropriate materials (Eichhorn, 1994).

Distance education is another way that students who are unable to attend classes can access adult education programs. Distance education has evolved from correspondence courses and television broadcasts to computer-based and on-line distance education (Askov, Johnston, Petty & Young, 2003). Given the demographics of most adult literacy programs and the “Digital Divide” some adult students face, utilizing new technologies will help diverse adult learners develop the language and literacy skills and the proficiency with new media needed to fully participate in our rapidly evolving information society (Warschauer & Liaw, 2010). Wikis and blogs, mobile devices, cell phones, open source software, and other Web 2.0 technologies can be used to reach the diverse needs of adult students, from developing reading, writing and oral communication skills, to developing vocational skills.

There is a need for teaching and learning strategies that utilize the capabilities of technology (Howell, Williams, & Lindsey, 2003). The inclusion of distance learning options allows programs to reach out to wider areas, serving more students and helping alleviate transportation barriers. However, while the use of technology can expand adult education

programs' capabilities to serve students, it also presents challenges. For instance, adult education instructors need training in the new technologies and how to best implement them, and programs need secure funding to purchase computers and software.

Another component of providing a suitable environment for learning is the physical environment of a program. Adult education programs should maintain a safe and comfortable physical environment that supports adult learning (Comings et al., 2006). The physical environment can include temperature, ventilation, access to bathrooms, adequate light, comfortable chairs, and access to refreshments (Knowles, 1973). A learning space that lacks a comfortable degree of personal space will detract from the learning process (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Danielson (2007) stresses classroom safety and accessibility to learning. No exits should be blocked and traffic flow should be efficient. Students need access to learning resources, the teacher, and the white board. Classroom furniture should be best arranged to suit the classroom activities, including group work, pair work, and class discussions.

Drago-Severson et al. (2001) conducted the two-year NCSALL Adult Development Research group study in 1998-1999, evaluating a group of 41 adult learners at three different ABE programs, including a community college, a family literacy site, and a work-place site . At each of the sites, the student cohort designs were different. At the Bunker Hill Community College site in Charleston, Massachusetts, the students started the program together and were enrolled in the same two classes the first semester. At the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Cambridge, the students determined their own entry and exit dates from the program. At the work-place site Polaroid in Norwood, the students enrolled at the same time, worked toward the common purpose of a high school equivalency, and left the program at the same time. Despite the differences in cohort styles, students at all three sites reported that the participation in a

learner cohort served several key purposes. First, students reported that their academic learning was enhanced by participating in collaborative learning activities within their cohort. Second, students reported providing each other with a variety of forms of emotional and psychological support, including an increased sense of belonging and decreased feelings of isolation. Lastly, students reported that participation in the cohort broadened their perspectives, supporting and challenging them in multiple ways, including providing a context in which they could learn about other people's experiences, ideas, and perspectives. The researchers found that the cohort experiences seem to facilitate academic learning, increase students' feeling of belonging, broaden perspectives, and increase learner persistence (Drago-Severson, Helsing, Kegan, Popp, Broderick, & Portnow, 2001).

A program should also be psychologically safe for adult learners by protecting student confidentiality and demonstrating respect for student, staff, and stakeholder cultures (Comings et al., 2006). Procedures should be established for ensuring internal and external stakeholder confidentiality (TESOL, 2003).

In *Persistence: Helping Education Students Reach their Goals*, Comings (2007) writes that because many students come to adult education with goals that will require hundreds of instructional hours to achieve, adult education programs need to provide services that will help them persist in learning long enough to reach their goals. These efforts might include monitoring persistence, building self-efficacy, providing counseling, and offering other support services (Comings et al., 2006). In adult education, persistence, also called "retention" by many programs, refers to the number of hours a student is involved in instruction per month (intensity) and the number of months of engagement in instruction (duration) (Comings, 2007). Comings identifies studies that indicate 100 hours of instruction as the point at which most adult education

students are likely to show measurable progress, therefore serving as a benchmark of persistence. In her review of studies on program practices, Kerka (1995) sites numerous program practices that can improve adult student persistence, including comprehensive persistence strategies for specific subpopulations, providing student opportunities to succeed during each class meeting, and challenging, adult-centered curriculum. Kerka found that the recurring theme in the studies was the crucial first class and first few weeks of instruction.

Quigley (1995) conducted a study of twenty adults in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area who were eligible, but did not attend, adult basic education classes. The 8 males and 12 females were interviewed twice, first to collect demographic data, and then to explore their resistance to attend classes. The adults said they dropped out of K-12 schooling because of insensitive teachers, irrelevant subject matter, pressure from peer groups, racism, and problems with school rules. Quigley found that the three main reasons they gave for not attending ABE classes were personal/emotive, cultural ideological, and age related. Most saw education as having the possibility of providing social and economic value for their children, but felt that education had failed them. The participants stated that ABE classes could be improved by providing smaller classrooms with sensitive, culturally-aware teachers who respected learners as adults. Based on the interviews, Quigley concluded that ABE course design and marketing should be based on needs assessment from potential learners, and teachers should be trained to be aware of cultural matters and the previous schooling experiences of adult learners.

In a study related to the persistence of adult basic education students taking pre-GED classes, Comings, Parrella, and Soricone (1999) interviewed and tracked the persistence of 150 adult students from 19 pre-GED (5.0 to 8.0 reading level on the TABE test) classes in 15 adult basic education programs in the northeast United States. They defined persistence as “adults

staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of their programs, and returning to programs as soon as the demands of their lives allow” (Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 1999, p. 3). The students were interviewed about their backgrounds, educational experiences, and the positive and negative forces that affect their persistence. They were interviewed again four months later, and data were compiled and coded to search for common themes. Students were rated as persisters if they were still attending their class, had transferred to another class or were involved in self-study in preparation for the GED exam, or had earned a GED credential. One hundred of the 150 students were rated as persisters (Comings et al., 1999).

Comings et al. (1999) explored the relationship between persistence and other factors like learner background, educational experience, supports and obstacles to learning. In looking at demographic factors that significantly affected persistence, students over 30 years of age persisted at higher rates than students under 30. Gender and ethnicity did not significantly affect persistence. Students who had children had higher rates of persistence than those who did not, and parents with older children had higher rates of persistence than those with younger children. Neither employment status nor previous school experience significantly affected persistence.

Each of the respondents was asked to name three supports and three barriers to their persistence in adult education. The supports to persistence that students most identified included goal orientation, personal relationships, teachers and other students, and self-efficacy. Findings showed a significant relationship between having specific goals as a reason for entering a program and persisting in it. The most frequently mentioned support was that of family, friends, the community, their employer, and other personal relationships, but this did not prove to be statistically significant in terms of persistence. Relationships with teachers and other classmates

were also mentioned frequently, as was self-efficacy, or believing that they could achieve their goals. The only negative force that was mentioned as often as the four positive forces was “life demands” (Comings et al., 1999, p. 64), including personal health, lack of childcare or transportation, family needs, work demands, and welfare rules or other regulations.

The authors concluded that the most important supports to persistence are the establishment of a goal by the student; self-efficacy; management of positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence, and student progress toward reaching a goal (1999). Adult education programs must help students define their goals and understand the instructional objectives that must be accomplished to achieve the goal. Programs should help students build self-efficacy focused on the specific tasks needed to achieve their goals, and the feeling of being able to accomplish those tasks. Students should understand and manage the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence. At intake, students could be encouraged to make a force-field analysis of positive and negative forces affecting their ability to persist, and develop strategies to manage those forces (Comings et al., 1999). Teachers can help students see the progress they are making towards goals by revisiting them periodically, identifying benchmarks for success, finding ways to celebrate progress, and providing ways for students to see success early in program participation (Taylor et al., 2005).

Tracy-Mumford (1994) suggests that a support network should be an integral part of adult education design, and should include counseling support and classroom support; other support services like childcare and transportation should be provided when possible. Counseling should identify adult students at risk of dropping out before reaching their goals, and should include a system of follow up with dropout students to help them return to the program. Student retention teams should collect student dropout data, coordinate dropout prevention activities, and

should include input from students and teachers (Tracy-Mumford, 1994). Comings et al. (2006) suggest that student reengagement in learning is more than just students returning to a program after dropping out. It could involve continued study at home between periods of program attendance, transition to postsecondary training, and encouragement of participation until a student's goals are met. This can be accomplished by monitoring and addressing the reasons for student departure, and by providing support for transitions to continue education opportunities in job training or postsecondary programs (Comings et al., 2006).

Several studies have been conducted related to enrollment policies of adult basic education programs. For example, Comings et al. (2006) found that programs should employ managed enrollment rather than open enrollment. A managed enrollment policy limits when students can enroll in classes, and sets rules for absences from class. Open enrollment allows students to enroll in class as long as space is available. While open enrollment allows for flexibility for adults who work or have other family obligations, it can be a source of instability in the classroom, as new students may enroll and join the class at any time.

A study by The Center for Learning Leadership looked at how changing from open to managed enrollment affected enrollment in Illinois adult education programs, as well as a few other states. The study examined not just open enrollment and managed enrollment, but also fixed enrollment, in which students may only enroll at the beginning of a term, after which enrollment closes (Scogins, Thompson, & Reable, 2008). Findings revealed that open enrollment is often associated with low learning gains, classroom instability, higher student turnover, and a diminished sense of professionalism in teachers due to the difficulty to plan, follow a syllabus, and provide sequential instruction. Most non-ESL classes were organized in independent group instruction, in which students worked independently from workbooks. Teachers that used whole

group instruction spent time reviewing, and often taught out of sequence, rather than providing sequential instruction (Scogins et al., 2008). In managed enrollment classes, advantages include local control of student access and class structure, as well as the creation of student cohorts, which have been found to increase retention, persistence, and learning gains (Drago-Severson, et al, 2001).

Due to high student demand for non-credit adult ESL classes, Miracosta Community College moved from open enrollment to managed enrollment in 1999-2000, and increased educational advancements from 8% to 35% in the first year, and to 50% each 9 weeks by 2002 (Ramirez, 2005). By implementing 8-week non-credit ESL courses and establishing attendance requirements, they also improved the student retention rate to 80%, with less than 1% of students staying 15 hours or less. The noncredit ESL faculty and staff documented the transition from open enrollment to managed enrollment, listing specific steps that were taken. First, they identified specific program issues based on interviews with students, faculty, and instructional aides, and studied student enrollment patterns, retention and promotion data. Next, they developed priority outcomes for ESL instruction, and established the 8-week terms based on enrollment data, and curriculum to support the identified priority outcomes. Finally, they piloted the plan with a small group of instructors to learn what worked and what needed to be changed. Upon completion of the program, students are transitioned to credit courses.

The final component identified by Comings et al. (2006) of a suitable environment for learning is maintaining materials and resources appropriate for learning and for adult students. Learning materials should be up-to-date, culturally sensitive, and suitable for a variety of learning styles (TESOL, 2003). Resources may include texts, supplementary materials, and print materials, but also may include human resources such as experts from the community (Danielson

2007). Resources may also include museums or materials from local businesses or agencies, as well as technological resources.

According to Warschauer and Liaw (2010), there are five areas of emerging technology that are especially promising for meeting the needs of adult learners. Multimodal communication, involving linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial modes of learning, has been around for more than 20 years, but it is still considered an emerging technology because of the new applications like podcasting and YouTube that make it feasible for large numbers of people to share their work. The authors give examples of audio and audiovisual applications for English language learning programs. Premade podcasts can promote academic listening skills, develop language skills, and encourage dialogue. Students can record their compositions or discussions with Garage Band or Audacity, and communicate via Skype or Google talk. Students can create audiovisual media collaboratively and post it using YouTube and other Web 2.0 sites.

Another emergent technology in adult education is collaborative writing. The use of blogs, wikis, and other free online writing resources opens the door to many possibilities in adult education. Blogging is ideal for adult learning because it is self-directed, based on personal experience, and relevant to social content. Wikis, like Wikipedia, can be edited or contributed to by anyone. This varies from traditional email or chat in that the writing is more formal and depersonalized. Some EFL programs have used wiki writing to develop formal writing skills, while others have focused on collaborative writing with lower literacy students. Google Docs, Moodle, and FanFiction.net each present opportunities for students to collaborate on documents, presentations, real-time chats, and synchronous and asynchronous discussions. These tools promote fluency and confidence more than they promote accuracy and basic mechanics (Warschauer & Liaw, 2010).

Online networking includes virtual environments, social networking, and multiplayer online games. Virtual environments like Second Life offer second language learners opportunities to produce language. Social network sites like Facebook are hugely popular and offer opportunities for reading and writing authentic material related to students' personal lives. Massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) provide opportunities to communicate via texting, letter writing, and even poetry.

One-to-one and mobile computing includes netbooks and smartbooks, nettops, "rich clients," cell phones, and open-source computing. The emerging hardware and software enable more adult literacy and ESL programs to provide consistent, flexible access on an individual and mobile basis. In addition, cell phones can be used to deliver educational content, allowing access anywhere and anytime, making them ideal for adult students (Warschauer & Liaw, 2010).

Summary

The first of the four components identified in *An Evidence-based Adult Education Model Appropriate for Research* is program quality support, which Comings et al. (2006) describe as the organizational structure that supports students and adult education teachers in teaching and learning. An effective adult basic education program needs quality program support, including having a well-defined role, an effective management system, human resource management, and a suitable environment for learning. A well-defined role is evidenced by a program's awareness of its position in the community through maintenance of communication with relevant stakeholders, keeping informed of policies, trends, and engaging in advocacy efforts to raise community awareness. An effective management system includes governance of a program, data collection and use, a planning process, regular evaluation, and financial management. Human resource management encompasses staff selection, working conditions, and professional development.

Finally, a suitable environment for learning can include offering flexible hours and convenient locations, a both physically safe and psychologically safe environment, and learning materials and resources relevant to adults.

Chapter III

Methodology

Type of Study

This descriptive study explored adult education director's perceptions of best practices used in adult basic education programs in Arkansas. Data were gathered using a survey based on the practices identified by Comings, Soricone, and Santos in their study *An Evidence-based Adult Education Model Appropriate for Research* (2006). The study also examined demographic data for each program as reported by the survey participants.

Description of Variables, Constructs, or Phenomena

Comings et al. (2006) identify and define program quality support through specific principles that individual adult basic education programs should demonstrate. Further, they identify key components of each of these principles related to program quality. These key components include having an organizational mission and awareness of program environment. The authors cite the need for an effective management system, which is based on five components: Governance, data collection and use, planning processes, evaluation and financial management. They identify the key components to human resource management in adult education programs: Selection of staff, working conditions, and professional development. Finally, they identify the components of a program's environment for learning, including its hours of operation and locations, its physical and psychological environment, and its use of appropriate learning materials and resources.

The guiding research question for this study is: To what degree do the directors of adult basic education programs in Arkansas perceive their program has quality support, as evidenced by a well-defined mission and role in the community, a good management system, sound human

resources management, and a suitable learning environment? The research will address five questions:

1. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a well-defined role in the community?
2. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a quality management system?
3. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have an adequate system to manage their human resources?
4. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they provide a suitable environment for learning for adult students?
5. To what degree does the individual program demographic information of Arkansas adult basic education programs affect directors' perceptions of program quality support?

Selection of Subjects

The target group of participants was Arkansas adult basic education program administrators. All 39 administrators of adult education programs funded by state and federal grants under the Arkansas Department of Career Education were invited to participate. These administrators were contacted individually via email, and received the survey in electronic format. Because this is a small group, all administrators in the state were asked to participate.

Instrumentation

To collect data for this study, NSCALL's *Evidence-based program self-assessment* (2006) was modified and will be administered electronically. The original survey was designed as a self-assessment tool to be used by adult education programs to determine whether they are using principles of best practices based on research, theory, and professional wisdom. Permission

was obtained to modify the instrument, and the instrument was approved through the University of Arkansas Human Subjects Review Board. The modified survey instrument focuses on perceptions of program quality support, and asks for basic student and program demographic information.

The survey instrument is divided into five sections. In the first four sections, participants were asked to respond using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 5 being strongly agree and 1 being strongly disagree. Following each section there is a place for the participants to provide additional comments. Section one of the survey includes four questions pertaining to the administrators' perceptions of their role in the community. Section two includes 13 questions pertaining to the participants' perceptions of the planning, evaluation, and governance of their programs. Section three contains 12 questions related to how human resources are managed. Section four contains 11 questions related to the degree to which participants perceive they provide a suitable environment for learning for adult students in their programs. Section five contains three questions related to the demographics of individual programs. The first asks if the program is urban or rural. The second question asks how many counties the program covers: 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 or more. The final demographics question asks the participant to describe their Local Educational Administrator (LEA): public school district, 2-year college, or other.

Data Collection Procedures

The survey was given to three adult education directors to help establish the validity of the instrument and the readability of the questions. The panel was asked to:

1. Read each statement and make sure its meaning is clear.
2. Make suggested changes to improve how questions and statements are written.
3. Make suggestions to add or delete items to this survey.

4. Make suggestions to improve the format and general appearance of this survey.

Following this, an introductory email with details of the survey and how responses will contribute to research was sent to all Arkansas adult basic education administrators, excluding the researcher. The survey was then distributed electronically using Qualtrics survey software to the remaining adult basic education directors in Arkansas as an online survey. A reminder email was sent one week later, and follow-up phone calls we made to nonrespondants. The survey was then closed after two weeks.

Data Analysis

After the survey was closed, the response rate was determined to be 92%, with 36 of the 39 directors completing the survey. The data from Qualtrics were then imported into SPSS software to analyze descriptive statistics, including determining the mean and standard deviation for each response. Demographic information was also described using mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentage. Independent t-tests were performed to compare urban and rural programs, and public school LEA and 2-year college LEA. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there were significant differences between programs who served 1-5 counties. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient test was performed to determine the internal consistency reliability of the survey instrument. The open response questions were copied directly from SPSS to Microsoft Word to analyze trends.

Chapter Summary

Using a modified survey based on the practices identified by Comings, Soricone, and Santos in their study *An Evidence-based Adult Education Model Appropriate for Research* (2006), this study sought to identify the degree to which the directors of adult basic education programs in Arkansas perceive they have program quality support, as evidenced by a well-

defined mission and role in the community, a management system, human resources management, and a suitable learning environment.

The survey consisted of 40 questions scored on a 5-point Likert type scale, four open responses questions, and three demographic questions. The response rate for the survey was 92%, with 36 of the 39 directors surveyed responding.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

This study sought to identify the degree to which the directors of adult basic education programs in Arkansas perceive they have program quality support, as evidenced by a well-defined mission and role in the community, a management system, human resources management, and a suitable learning environment. Data was gathered using a modified survey based on the practices identified by Comings, Soricone, and Santos in their study *An Evidence-based Adult Education Model Appropriate for Research* (2006). The study also examined demographic data for each program as reported by the survey participants.

Summary of the Study

This descriptive study explored adult education director's perceptions of best practices used in adult basic education programs in Arkansas. The guiding research question was: To what degree do the directors of adult basic education programs in Arkansas perceive they have program quality support? To answer this question, the study examined:

1. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a well-defined role in the community?
2. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a quality management system?
3. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a quality system to manage their human resources?
4. To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they provide a suitable environment for learning for adult students?

5. To what degree does the individual program demographic information of Arkansas adult basic education programs affect directors' perceptions of program quality support?

Significance of Study

In 2012, the Arkansas Board of Career Education approved a set of standards for adult basic education programs funded by the Arkansas Department of Career Education, Adult Education Division. The *Standards of a Quality Adult Education Program* addressed recommendations and specific requirements adult education programs should meet to receive state and federal funding. This document lists goals for program planning, administration, curriculum and instruction, educational gains, staffing, student support services, student recruitment and retention, and specifics for personnel, classes, and student assessment information used to determine the educational functioning level of students. Goal 1.4 of the program planning quality indicators states, "The program revises the plan periodically based on various factors, including, but not limited to, changing needs, evaluation results, and staff/client input" (The Arkansas Department of Career Education, 2012, p. 6). An annual self-study that considers the quality indicators is recommended, leaving a need for an appropriate instrument to measure the degree to which quality indicators are being implemented in Arkansas adult education programs.

Data Collection

Data was gathered using a modified survey based on the practices identified by Comings, Soricone, and Santos in their study *An Evidence-based Adult Education Model Appropriate for Research* (2006). The survey was administered to three adult education directors to help establish the validity of the instrument and the readability of the questions. Following this, an introductory email with details of the survey and how responses might contribute to research was sent to 39

Arkansas adult basic education administrators. The survey was then distributed electronically using Qualtrics survey software to all adult basic education directors in Arkansas. The survey was then closed after two weeks, and the data from Qualtrics were uploaded to SPSS software for analysis.

Survey Results

In February of 2015, an introductory email with details of the survey and how responses may contribute to adult education research was sent to 39 of the 40 Arkansas adult basic education administrators (The researcher is also an administrator, but excluded himself from taking the survey). The survey was then distributed electronically using Qualtrics survey software to the 39 adult basic education directors in Arkansas as an online survey. A reminder email was sent one week later, and follow-up phone calls were made to nonrespondants. The survey was then closed after two weeks. After the survey was closed, the response rate was determined to be 92%, with 36 of the 39 directors completing the survey. All 36 responses were used in the analysis.

The survey instrument was divided into five sections. In the first four sections, participants were asked to respond using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 5 being “strongly agree” and 1 being “strongly disagree.” Following each section there was a place for the participants to provide additional comments. Section one of the survey included four questions pertaining to the administrators’ perceptions of their center’s role in the community. Section two included 13 questions pertaining to the participants’ perceptions of the planning, evaluation, and governance of their programs. Section three contained 12 questions related to how human resources are managed. Section four contained 11 questions related to the degree to which participants perceive they provide a suitable environment for learning for adult students in their

programs. Section five contained three questions related to the demographics of individual programs. The first asked if the program is urban or rural. The second question asked how many counties the program covers: 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 or more. The final demographics question asked the participant to describe their Local Educational Administrator (LEA): public school district, 2-year college, or other. For the purposes of data analysis, the 5-point Likert-type scale questions were interpreted as: 1 to 1.49 equals “strongly disagree,” 1.5 to 2.49 equals “agree,” 2.5 to 3.49 is “neither agree or disagree,” 3.5 to 4.49 is “agree,” and 4.5 to 5.0 is “strongly agree.”

Data Analysis

Data from Qualtrics were imported to SPSS to conduct statistical analyses. A Cronbach coefficient alpha test performed on the completed survey resulted in a reliability of .883, which is above the .7 level of acceptability (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Research question one: To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a well-defined role in the community?

The four questions that addressed an adult education program’s role in the community included in the survey are listed in Table 1. The respondents tended to agree on all of these items, with means falling between 3.5 and 4.49. The means on these questions ranged from 4.08 (I believe our adult education program has a clear statement of goals that helps us meet our mission) to 4.36 (I think that our adult education program’s services are designed to meet community needs). Standard deviation ranged from .639 (I think that our adult education program’s services are designed to meet community needs) to .770 (I believe our adult education program has a clear statement of goals that helps us meet our mission).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for a Well-defined Role

	Mean	SD
I think that our adult education program's services are designed to meet community needs.	4.36	.639
I believe we have a clear mission statement that is used to provide direction for the adult education program.	4.25	.692
Our adult education program's mission is used to guide most aspects of the program's services.	4.14	.683
I believe our adult education program has a clear statement of goals that helps us meet our mission.	4.08	.770

Note. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Eight of the respondents submitted written responses for this section. Comments made in this section suggest that programs' mission statements help guide their adult education programs. One director wrote, "Our goal is to help students to make successful transitions to the workplace." Another director wrote, "Our mission statement is very long. I doubt if anyone would be able to repeat it without intentional learning. However, the gist of the mission statement is clear, and it drives our organization." One director suggested that funding issues "inhibit many the ability to become more progressive in the needs of the community." (see Appendix E for complete written comments).

Research question two: To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a quality management system?

The 13 questions that relate to an adult education program's management system are listed in Table 2. The respondents strongly agreed with three items, agreed with seven items, and neither agreed or disagreed with three items. The lowest mean and highest standard deviation came in response to the statement, "I think we have an adequate budget for our adult education

program” ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.402$). Eleven of the 36 respondents strongly disagreed, 8 disagreed with this statement, while four strongly agreed, 7 agreed, and 6 neither agreed or disagreed. The highest mean and lowest standard deviation came in response to the statement, ”I feel we monitor our budget on a regular basis within our adult education program” ($M = 4.67$, $SD = .478$).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Quality Management System

	Mean	SD
I feel we monitor our budget on a regular basis within our adult education program.	4.67	.478
I am confident the financial records in our adult education program are accurately maintained.	4.64	.639
I believe our program’s services adhere to policies set by state and national funding agencies.	4.61	.494
I think our adult education program has adequate management of the financial resources.	4.47	.696
I feel our program’s planning process facilitates program development and accountability.	4.22	.485
I believe our program has a regularly scheduled evaluation process.	4.19	.749
I believe our advisory board has regularly scheduled meetings.	4.08	.841
I believe our advisory board is fairly representative of the local community.	4.08	.604
I believe our program has a regularly scheduled planning process.	4.06	.674
I think our adult education program uses its advisory board or board of directors to provide direction to the program.	3.94	1.194
I believe our advisory board properly guides the activities of the adult education program.	3.39	.994
I believe we seek out fundraising opportunities from multiple sources for our adult education program.	3.17	1.108
I think we have an adequate budget for our adult education program.	2.58	1.402

Note. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Five of the respondents submitted written responses for this section. The five written responses related to a quality management system suggested that many of the programs hold

regular advisory board meetings. One director wrote, “We serve multiple counties, and it can be difficult having sufficient planning meetings due to logistics. When we do have them, they are very helpful.”

Research question three: To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a quality system to manage their human resources?

There were 12 questions on the survey related to human resources management. Respondents strongly agreed with one item, and agreed with the rest. Means ranged from 3.61 (I believe our staff is provided with adequate pay and benefits) to 4.69 (I believe staff within our program are treated as professionals). Table 3 shows the ranges in standard deviation from .467 to 1.337 for the same two questions.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Human Resource Management

	Mean	SD
I believe staff within our program are treated as professionals.	4.69	.467
I believe our program's working conditions support staff improvement.	4.44	.735
I believe working conditions for our faculty and staff contribute positively to student progress.	4.44	.652
I think our adult education program's hiring policy equally considers the skills, knowledge, and life experiences of applicants.	4.44	.504
I believe our professional development plan provides staff opportunities to receive proper training.	4.33	.586
I believe our adult education program has a clear process for hiring instructional and support staff.	4.22	.898
I believe our staffs' professional development plan takes into account the needs of the program and staff.	4.19	.624
I believe our professional development plan provides staff opportunities to practice new skills.	4.17	.775
I feel our adult education program helps employees create a professional development plan that enables them to grow professionally.	4.17	.609
I believe our adult education program has a clear process for recruiting instructional and support staff.	4.00	.956
I believe our professional development plan provides staff opportunities to receive constructive feedback.	3.94	.630
I believe our staff is provided with adequate pay and benefits.	3.61	1.337

Note. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Six of the respondents submitted written responses for this section. The six written responses for this section generally affirm that programs offer professional development for staff. One director wrote, "Our professional development is of the highest quality because of the AALRC (Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center) and the training available."

Research question four: To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they provide a suitable environment for learning for adult students?

Table 4 exhibits the 10 questions related to a suitable environment for learning.

Respondents strongly agreed with five items, and agreed with five items. Means had a low of 4.36 (I believe our program provides instructional services at locations that are convenient for our students) and (I believe our program provides instructional services at hours convenient for students). The highest mean was 4.83 (I believe our program makes appropriate efforts to protect the confidentiality of students and staff). Standard deviations ranged from .639 (I believe our program provides instructional services at locations that are convenient for our students) and (I believe our program provides instructional services at hours convenient for students) to .878 (I believe our program makes appropriate efforts to protect the confidentiality of students and staff).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Adult Education Learning Environment

	Mean	SD
I believe our program makes appropriate efforts to protect the confidentiality of students and staff.	4.83	.878
I believe our program demonstrates proper respect for the cultures of students and staff.	4.78	.866
I believe our program's physical environment is safe for staff and students.	4.56	.652
I believe our program's physical environment supports adult learning.	4.53	.696
I believe our program environment is psychologically safe for staff and students.	4.53	.654
I believe our program uses appropriate / relevant written materials that were designed for use by adult students.	4.49	.562
I believe our program's physical environment is comfortable for staff and students.	4.47	.696
I believe our program uses software that was designed for use by adult students.	4.44	.504
I believe our program provides instructional services at locations that are convenient for our students.	4.36	.639
I believe our program provides instructional services at hours convenient for students.	4.36	.639

Note. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Three written comments related to a suitable environment for learning were added by directors. One director wrote, "All decisions are made with the student as the focus." The other responses suggested funding issues inhibit the learning environment and satellite classrooms.

Research question five: To what degree does the individual program demographic information of Arkansas adult basic education programs affect directors' perceptions of program quality support?

The demographic information in Table 5 shows that of the respondents, 38.9% of adult education centers in Arkansas were urban, while 61.1% were rural. Half of the programs served only one county, while 19.4% served two counties, 13.9% served three counties, 2.8% served

four counties, and 13.9% served five counties. Just over 52 percent (52.8) of local programs in Arkansas adult education programs were administrated by 2-year colleges, and 38.9% by public school districts.

Table 5

Demographic Information for Adult Education programs in Arkansas

Which best describes your program?	Frequency	Percent
Urban	14	38.9
Rural	22	61.1
Total	36	100.0
<hr/>		
How many counties does your program serve?		
1	18	50.0
2	7	19.4
3	5	13.9
4	1	2.8
5	5	13.9
Total	36	100.0
<hr/>		
Which best describes your Local Educational Administrator (LEA):		
Public School district	14	38.9
2-year College	19	52.8
Missing	3	8.3
Total	36	100.0

Overall means were used to compare urban and rural programs in Arkansas in relation to the Likert-type scale survey questions. Overall means were determined for urban and rural adult education directors' perceptions of program quality in each of the four sections: a well-defined role in the community (OverallmeanMPG), a quality management system (OverallmeanPEG), a quality human resource management (OverallmeanHR), and a suitable environment for learning (OverallmeanAE) (see Table 6).

An overall mean was determined in each of the areas and urban and rural programs were compared by mean and standard deviation. Independent t-tests showed no significant differences between urban and rural program directors' perceptions of program quality.

Table 6

Comparison of Urban and Rural Responses

Which best describes your program:		Mean	SD	t-value	Sig
OverallmeanMPG	Urban	4.2679	.59213	.497	.623
	Rural	4.1705	.54219		
OverallmeanPEG	Urban	4.0110	.35554	.03	.976
	Rural	4.0070	.42393		
OverallmeanHR	Urban	4.1429	.47415	.84	.409
	Rural	4.2727	.41562		
OverallmeanAE	Urban	4.4935	.43630	.399	.694
	Rural	4.5496	.36952		

Overall means of programs based on the number of counties they serve were also compared. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there were significant differences between programs who served 1-5 counties. There were no significant differences found in each of the four areas (see Table 7).

Table 7

Comparison of the Mean for the Number of Counties Served

ANOVA		F	Significance
OverallmeanMPG	Between Groups	1.147	.353
	Within Groups		
	Total		
OverallmeanPEG	Between Groups	2.450	.067
	Within Groups		
	Total		
OverallmeanHR	Between Groups	1.626	.193
	Within Groups		
	Total		
OverallmeanAE	Between Groups	1.407	.255
	Within Groups		
	Total		

Overall means were determined for adult education programs who partner with public school and 2-year college LEAs in each of the four areas. An overall mean was determined in each of the areas, and public school and 2-year colleges were compared by mean and standard deviation, and independent t-tests. There were no significant differences ($p \leq .05$) found between public schools and 2-year college program perceptions (see Table 8).

Table 8

Comparison of the Mean of the Different Areas and the LEA Type

Which best describes your Local Educational Administrator (LEA):		Mean	SD	t-value	Significance
OverallmeanMPG	Public School district	4.2500	.43853	.62	.54
	2-year College	4.1316	.65811		
OverallmeanPEG	Public School district	4.0055	.41749	.183	.856
	2-year College	3.9798	.37232		
OverallmeanHR	Public School district	4.2143	.46076	.204	.84
	2-year College	4.2456	.40011		
OverallmeanAE	Public School district	4.4870	.48579	.182	.75
	2-year College	4.5359	.33866		

Chapter Summary

Directors of adult education programs in Arkansas were surveyed electronically about their perceptions of local program quality. A 5-point Likert type scale was used, and data were analyzed for mean and standard deviation in each of the four main categories. Open response questions were recorded and analyzed in each of the sections. Demographic information was used to perform independent t-tests for urban and rural classifications and LEA associations. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there were significant differences between programs who served 1-5 counties. No significant differences were found between demographic groups.

Chapter V

Conclusions

Introduction

The results of this study provided new information regarding how directors of adult basic education programs in Arkansas perceive they have program quality support, as evidenced by a well-defined mission and role in the community, a management system, human resources management, and a suitable learning environment.

Summary of the Study

This descriptive study explored adult education directors' perceptions of best practices used in adult basic education programs in Arkansas. The guiding research question was: To what degree do the directors of adult basic education programs in Arkansas perceive they have program quality support? Data was gathered using a modified survey based on the practices identified by Comings, Soricone, and Santos in their study *An Evidence-based Adult Education Model Appropriate for Research* (2006). The survey was distributed electronically using Qualtrics survey software to 39 of the 40 adult basic education directors in Arkansas. The survey was then closed after two weeks, and the data from Qualtrics was uploaded to SPSS software for analysis.

The initial survey was reviewed by three adult education directors to help establish the validity of the instrument and the readability of the statements, and the resulting survey was distributed to 39 adult education directors in Arkansas. The survey was closed after two weeks, with a 92% response rate. A Cronbach coefficient alpha test performed on the completed survey resulted in a reliability of .883. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, means, t-tests, and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). For the purposes of data analysis, the 5-point Likert-type scale responses were interpreted as: 1 to 1.49

equals strongly disagree, 1.5 to 2.49 equals agree, 2.5 to 3.49 is neither agree or disagree, 3.5 to 4.49 is agree, and 4.5 to 5.0 is strongly agree.

Conclusions

Findings for the survey supported previous research, indicating that most directors of adult education programs in Arkansas perceive that they are implementing the indicators of program quality support in all of the areas surveyed. Demographic variables showed no significant differences on the survey.

Research question one: To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a well-defined role in the community?

Responses on the first four statements on the survey related to a program's role in the community. Research suggests that the mission of adult education as a field emphasizes literacy and lifelong learning in a changing workplace, aligning it with an agenda of economic competitiveness (Kerka, 1996). The directors surveyed agreed that their programs are designed to meet community needs, and that they use their mission statements to help guide services and direction. The means on these four questions ranged from 4.08 to 4.36, indicating that all directors surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they were implementing these practices. Standard deviation ranged from .639 to .770. The written responses suggested that directors use mission statements to help guide practice.

Research question two: To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a quality management system?

Thirteen statements on the survey referred to a program's management system. An effective management system includes governance of a program, data collection and use, a planning process, regular evaluation, and financial management (Comings et al., 2006).

Results from the survey revealed that Arkansas Adult education directors strongly agreed that their programs monitor their budgets ($M = 4.67$, $SD = .478$), maintain accurate financial records ($M = 4.64$, $SD = .639$), and adhere to state and national policies ($M = 4.61$, $SD = .494$). They agreed that they have a planning process that facilitates program development and accountability ($M = 4.22$, $SD = .485$). Research suggests that programs should engage in a regular process of evaluation for program development and accountability, assessing the effectiveness of recruitment, intake, orientation, instruction, counseling, transition, and support services (Comings et al., 2006). The survey results indicated that Arkansas adult education directors perceive they have a regularly scheduled evaluation process ($M = 4.19$, $SD = .749$) and planning process ($M = 4.06$, $SD = .674$). While the program directors surveyed perceive they have advisory boards that are fairly representative of the local community ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .604$) and meet regularly ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .841$), the survey indicated that directors had less agreement on whether the advisory boards provide direction to the programs ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.194$).

Responses supported findings of previous research that a program should have sustainable funding and manage resources effectively by maintaining records, establishing and monitoring a budget, and engaging in fundraising (Comings et al., 2006). Respondents neither agreed or disagreed with the survey statement, "I think we have an adequate budget for our adult education program." This statement had the lowest mean of the 40 Likert-type questions ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.402$), with 31% of respondents choosing "strongly disagree," indicating that almost a third of respondents perceived that their programs are underfunded. Directors reported being also less likely to seek funding for their programs from multiple sources ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.108$). Several of the written responses referred directly to a lack of funding, with one director writing

that “lack of funding inhibits many (programs) the ability to become more progressive in (meeting) the needs of the community.”

Research question three: To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they have a quality system to manage their human resources?

Twelve statements on the survey referred to human resources management, encompassing staff selection, working conditions, and professional development. The directors surveyed agreed ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .956$) that they have a clear process for recruiting and hiring qualified instructional and support staff (Comings et al., 2006; TESOL, 2003). The respondents agreed that their program’s hiring policy considers the skills, knowledge, and life experiences of applicants ($M = 4.44$, $SD = .504$), aligning with research that suggests that adult education teachers have personal qualities that include general knowledge, sensitivity to people, and good communication skills, as well as professional qualities that include a philosophy about adult education, the ability to translate that philosophy into practice, and organizational and managerial skills (Soifer et al., 1990).

Research indicates that adult educators want to work in an environment that provides opportunities to dialogue with colleagues and directors, where they can exchange ideas and get feedback on their teaching (Marceau, 2003). Program directors should understand the factors that influence teacher’s satisfaction with their work lives and the impact this satisfaction has on teaching competence, administrative control, and organizational culture (Xin & MacMillan, 1999). Results from the survey revealed that Arkansas Adult education directors agreed that they provide working conditions that support the work and growth of the staff ($M = 4.44$, $SD = .735$). They strongly agreed that they treat staff as professionals ($M = 4.69$, $SD = .467$), and agreed that

the working conditions for faculty and staff contribute positively to student progress ($M = 4.44$, $SD = .652$).

Research suggests that a professional development plan should be established that meets the needs of the teachers and provides opportunities to receive training, practice new skills, and receive feedback (Comings et al., 2006). The survey results indicate that the directors agree they provide opportunities for training ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .586$), opportunities to practice new skills ($M = 4.17$, $SD = .775$), and provide staff opportunities to receive constructive feedback ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .630$). Opportunities should be provided for teachers to examine current trends, best practices, and technology in adult education and English as a Second Language (TESOL, 2003). A professional development plan should be created with input from staff and stakeholders, appropriate resources to implement the plan should be acquired, and staff should be paid to attend training (Taylor et al., 2005; TESOL, 2003). The directors surveyed agreed that their programs' professional development plans take into account the needs of program and staff ($M = 4.19$, $SD = .624$). There was a greater standard deviation related to staff salaries ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.337$) on the statement "Staff is provided with adequate pay and benefits," with 11 respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with that statement.

Research question four: To what degree do directors of Arkansas adult basic education programs perceive they provide a suitable environment for learning for adult students?

The directors' responded to ten statements on the survey related to providing a suitable environment for learning, which includes offering flexible hours and convenient locations, a both physically safe and psychologically safe environment, and learning materials and resources relevant to adults. Research indicates that procedures should also be established for ensuring internal and external stakeholder confidentiality (TESOL, 2003). Directors strongly agreed that

their programs make efforts to protect the confidentiality of students and staff ($M = 4.83$, $SD = .878$), and that they provide both physically safe ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .652$) and psychologically safe ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .654$) environments for students and staff, and that this supports student learning ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .696$). Research indicates that programs should make provisions for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning (Knowles, 1973). Directors were in agreement that their programs offer flexible scheduling ($M = 4.36$, $SD = .639$) and convenient locations for students to learn ($M = 4.36$, $SD = .639$). Research demonstrates that learning materials should be up-to-date, culturally sensitive, and suitable for a variety of learning styles (TESOL, 2003). Resources may include texts, supplementary materials, and print materials, but also may include human resources such as experts from the community (Danielson 2007). Program directors agreed that they maintain materials and resources appropriate for learning and for adult students ($M = 4.49$, $SD = .562$), including software that was designed for use by adult students ($M = 4.44$, $SD = .504$).

Research question five: To what degree does the individual program demographic information of Arkansas adult basic education programs affect directors' perceptions of program quality support?

Directors indicated that adult education programs were 61% rural, with 11 programs serving three or more counties. More than two-thirds (69.4%) of the programs served two or less counties. The survey examined how many counties a program served, whether programs were urban or rural, and whether the programs were associated with public schools or 2-year colleges, and then compared those results with the Likert-type survey questions, finding no significant differences between any of the groups. While some anecdotal evidence exists related to program differences by urban or rural setting, program size, or affiliation to a public school or 2-year

college LEA, a review of current research does not support that. The directors' responses to the survey statements also indicated there were no significant differences.

Implications for Practice

Adult Education in Arkansas provides a second chance for adults to complete a high school equivalency diploma, to prepare for secondary training, and to prepare for the workforce. It also provides needed English as a Second Language and U.S. Citizenship preparation instruction to a growing population of immigrants and non-native English speakers. In order to ensure consistency and program effectiveness throughout the state, programs should perform regular self-assessment, and state funding needs to keep pace with rising costs.

The Arkansas Board of Career Education approved a set of standards in 2012 for adult basic education programs funded by the Arkansas Department of Career Education, Adult Education Division. The *Standards of a Quality Adult Education Program* addressed recommendations and specific requirements adult education programs should meet to receive state and federal funding. This document lists goals for program planning, administration, curriculum and instruction, educational gains, staffing, student support services, student recruitment and retention, and specifics for personnel, classes, and student assessment information used to determine the educational functioning level of students. Goal 1.4 of the program planning quality indicators states, "The program revises the plan periodically based on various factors, including, but not limited to, changing needs, evaluation results, and staff/client input" (The Arkansas Department of Career Education, 2012, p. 6). An annual self-study that considers the quality indicators is recommended, leaving a need for an appropriate instrument to measure the degree to which quality indicators are being implemented in Arkansas adult education programs. This research only represents the initial part of such a tool. Adult education

programs should have a structure in place to support continuous improvement, allowing them to identify areas of need, develop strategies to address the needs, pilot test the strategies, integrate solutions program-wide, and evaluate the impact of the strategies (McLendon & Polis, 2009).

Adequate funding for adult education programs in Arkansas remains a concern for many directors ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.402$), with 31% of respondents choosing “strongly disagree” on the survey in response to the statement “I think we have an adequate budget for our adult education program.” In awarding grants to local programs, federal WIOA legislation requires states to consider the degree to which the local program would be responsive to regional needs; to serving individuals identified as most in need of adult education services (students with low literacy levels and English language learners); the ability of the program to serve students with disabilities; the program’s past effectiveness; the program’s alignment activities: and the goals of local one-stop partners. Programs need to be of sufficient intensity and quality so that participants achieve learning gains, and the program must use instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction. Other considerations for funding include whether the local program bases instruction on research-based best practices; whether technology is used to increase the amount and quality of learning; and whether activities are provided in context through integrated education and training. Programs should use well-trained instructors and administrators who have access to high quality professional development. Local programs should demonstrate proof of coordination with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community. Programs need to offer flexible scheduling and coordinate with transportation, childcare, mental health and career planning services to enable individuals to attend and complete programs. Programs funded by WIOA must maintain high-quality information management systems and be able to report participant outcomes. The final

consideration is whether a program provides English language acquisition and civics education programs (H.R. 803, 2014). While the state Department of Career Education, Adult Education Division examines these considerations when awarding grants to local programs, the amount available from the state budget for distribution to local programs needs to increase to keep up with the pace of salary increases, costs, and the demand for adult basic education services in Arkansas.

Another implication for practice might involve professional development for directors in using their boards of advisors to guide and provide direction to their programs. The Arkansas Department of Career Education requires local adult education programs to hold semi-annual meetings of a board of directors, made up of stakeholders from the community. Stakeholders might include business leaders, other service agency representatives, students, human resource managers, staff, and others. The survey indicated ($M = 3.39$, $SD = .994$) that directors have less agreement on how advisory boards guide the activities of their adult education programs. Training in using a board to promote, guide, and improve local programs is warranted.

Recommendations for research

Data for this study were gathered using a modified survey based on the practices identified by Comings, Soricone, and Santos in their study *An Evidence-based Adult Education Model Appropriate for Research* (2006). While this study examines the first part of the model, program quality support, the 2006 model also addresses three chronological components: student entrance into a program, participation in a program, and re-engagement in learning. Entrance into a program includes recruitment, intake, and orientation to adult education programs, and addresses wait list management. Participation in a program addresses classroom instruction and support services that help students participate, persist, and engage in learning for enough time to

achieve their goals. Reengagement in learning addresses ways in which adult education programs help students continue learning after they have stopped participating, resume participation in an adult education program, or begin training or postsecondary education after completion of the adult education program. Further research into a useful self-evaluation tool for adult education programs in Arkansas, to include program quality support and these additional three components, is recommended.

While this survey looks at the self-reported perceptions of directors of adult education programs in Arkansas, further research might look at the perceptions of program quality of teachers and staff of these same programs, and compare those perceptions to those of the administrators. Further, a qualitative study might use focus groups and in-depth interviews to examine the perceptions of both directors and staff and the reasons behind their responses. Further examination might also include other stakeholders, including students, board members, and community members.

For the 2012-2013 school year, the Arkansas Department of Career Education reported that 2,507 adults in Arkansas entered post-secondary training after leaving adult education programs; 1,618 adult education students entered employment, while 1,570 retained employment (Arkansas Department of Career Education, 2014). Further study could explore a comparison of specific local program practices to these student outcomes. Furthermore, such a study could compare specific instructional strategies to the same outcomes. Program practices to explore might include classroom management factors such as student-to-staff ratios, intensity and duration of instruction, enrollment policies, and the organization of instructional levels (Comings et al., 2006). Further research could explore the effects of learning environment, curriculum

design, instructional approaches, contextualized learning, and assessment on student goal achievement.

Chapter Summary

The results of this study provide new information regarding how directors of local adult basic education programs in Arkansas perceive they have program quality support, as evidenced by a well-defined mission and role in the community, a management system, human resources management, and a suitable learning environment. Findings for the survey indicate that most directors of adult education programs in Arkansas perceive that they are implementing the indicators of program quality support in all of the areas surveyed. Demographic variables showed no significant differences on the survey. In order to ensure consistency and program effectiveness throughout the state, adult basic education programs should perform regular self-assessment; state funding needs to keep pace with rising costs; and, further research can be done comparing specific program practices to student outcomes.

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Appendix A

Email Requesting Permission to Adapt Survey Instrument

From: Gary Udouj
To: "Dr. John P. Comings"
Date: Mon, Mar 12, 2012 at 10:33 AM
Subject: Request to adapt and use survey

Dr. Comings,

I am writing to request permission to adapt and use the survey instrument "NCSALL's Evidence-based Program Self- Assessment" for my doctoral dissertation in Workforce Development Education at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

I would like to administer the survey to adult education directors in Arkansas using an online survey tool (such as surveygizmo.com or keysurvey.com). I would like to add a Likert scale to allow the directors to rate the degree that their programs are following the principles of best practice. I would also like to add a few demographic questions.

This survey and its results will be used for academic purposes only. Full credit and acknowledgment of your permission will be included in the paper. The modified survey will be reproduced in the dissertation with proper credit and citations.

I would like to look into the degree that adult basic education programs in Arkansas are following best practices, and how that is related to program size, location, and other demographic factors. I would also like to look at NRS reported outcomes for the programs.

I am grateful for your work in the field of adult education, and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Gary Udouj, Jr., Director
Fort Smith Adult Education Center

From: John Comings
To: Gary Udouj
Date: Mon, Mar 12, 2012 at 4:28 PM
Subject: Re: Request to adapt and use survey

Permission is not needed. Everything on the NCSALL site is in the public domain. I would like to read your dissertation when it is done. Let me know if I can be of any help in your work. Good luck.

Sent from my iPhone

Appendix B

Invitation Letter to Survey Participants

Gary Udouj

Feb 10

Dear _____ ,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting as part of the requirements for my doctoral degree in Workforce Development Education at the University of Arkansas. The purpose of the research is to identify the degree to which the directors of adult basic education programs in Arkansas perceive they have program quality support, as evidenced by a well-defined mission and role in the community, a management system, human resources management, and a suitable learning environment. You were selected to be part of this project because of your role as a director of an adult education program in Arkansas. I know that this is a busy time of year for you, but I hope that you will take some time to participate.

As a participant, you will be asked to complete an electronic survey. Participation will take approximately 10 minutes of your time. Possible benefits of participation include contributing to the body of knowledge related to best practices in Adult Education in Arkansas. There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. All data collected will remain anonymous and will be stored in a locked desk when not being analyzed by the principal researcher/faculty adviser.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences.

Feedback about this study will be available from Gary Udouj, PI, upon completion of project.

Email: gudouj@. If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Gary Udouj, PI, or Dr. Kenda Grover, Faculty Advisor, at kgrover@. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board, protocol #15-01-417.

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP

Institutional Review Board Coordinator

Research Compliance

University of Arkansas

irb@uark.edu

Thank you for your assistance in this project. To complete the survey online, please go to the URL below:

Sincerely,
Gary Udouj, Jr., Doctoral Candidate

Follow this link to the Survey:
Take the Survey

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
http://uark.qualtrics.com/WRQualtricsSurveyEngine/?SID=SV_29LQCjUCg3vFRtz&Preview=Survey&_=1

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:
[Click here to unsubscribe](#)

Appendix C

IRB Approval



*Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board*

January 28, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: Gary Udouj
Kenda Grover

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 15-01-417

Protocol Title: *An Investigation of Perceptions of Program Quality Support of Adult Basic Education Programs in Arkansas*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 01/28/2015 Expiration Date: 01/27/2016

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 50 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior* to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

109 MLKG Building • 1 University of Arkansas • Fayetteville, AR 72701
Voice (479) 575-2208 • Fax (479) 575-6527 • Email irb@uark.edu

The University of Arkansas is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.

Appendix D

Survey Instrument



(Adapted) NSCALL's Evidence-based Program Self-Assessment
(Adapted from Comings, J., Soricone, L., & Santos, M. (2006). *An evidence-based adult education program model appropriate for research*. NCSALL Reports, Boston, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how adult basic education program directors in Arkansas perceive local program quality support. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. All individual responses will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy, and only group data will be reported. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Gary Udouj at (479) 784-8185, or by email at gudouj@fortsmithschools.org.

All statements and questions in this survey refer to your local adult education program.

>>

Please answer each item according to your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement. The following statements relate to your local program's mission statement, philosophy and goals.

I believe we have a clear mission statement that is used to provide direction for the adult education program.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our adult education program has a clear statement of goals that helps us meet our mission.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Our adult education program's mission is used to guide most aspects of the program's services.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I think that our adult education program's services are designed to meet community needs.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Additional comments you would like to provide concerning your local program's mission statement, philosophy and goals:

<<

>>

The following statements are directed toward systems for planning, evaluation, and governance of local program. Please answer each item according to your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement.

I believe our program's services adhere to policies set by state and national funding agencies.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I think our adult education program uses its advisory board or board of directors to provide direction to the program.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our advisory board is fairly representative of the local community.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our advisory board has regularly scheduled meetings.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our advisory board properly guides the activities of the adult education program.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program has a regularly scheduled planning process.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I am confident the financial records in our adult education program are accurately maintained.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I think we have an adequate budget for our adult education program.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I feel we monitor our budget on a regular basis within our adult education program.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program has a regularly scheduled evaluation process.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I feel our program's planning process facilitates program development and accountability.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I think our adult education program has adequate management of the financial resources.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I feel we monitor our budget on a regular basis within our adult education program.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe we seek out fundraising opportunities from multiple sources for our adult education program.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Additional comments you would like to provide concerning systems for planning, evaluation, and governance of your local program:



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>>

The following statements deal with how human resources are managed at your local program. Please answer each item according to your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement.

I believe our adult education program has a clear process for recruiting instructional and support staff.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our adult education program has a clear process for hiring instructional and support staff.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I think our adult education program's hiring policy equally considers the skills, knowledge, and life experiences of applicants.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I feel our adult education program helps employees create a professional development plan that enables them to grow professionally.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our staffs' professional development plan takes into account the needs of the program and staff.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our professional development plan provides staff opportunities to receive proper training.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our professional development plan provides staff opportunities to practice new skills.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our professional development plan provides staff opportunities to receive constructive feedback.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe staff within our program are treated as professionals.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our staff is provided with adequate pay and benefits.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe working conditions for our faculty and staff contribute positively to student progress.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program's working conditions support staff improvement.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Additional comments you would like to provide concerning how human resources are managed at your local program:



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>>

The following statements deal with how well the adult education environment is student centered at your local program. Please answer each item according to your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement.

I believe our program provides instructional services at hours convenient for students.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program provides instructional services at locations that are convenient for our students.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program's physical environment supports adult learning.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program's physical environment is safe for staff and students.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program's physical environment is comfortable for staff and students.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program environment is psychologically safe for staff and students.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program makes appropriate efforts to protect the confidentiality of students and staff.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program demonstrates proper respect for the cultures of students and staff.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program has appropriate / relevant learning materials that were designed for use by adult students.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe our program uses software that was designed for use by adult students.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Additional comments you would like to provide concerning how well the adult education environment is student centered:



The following are demographic questions related to your local program.

Which best describes your program:

- Urban
- Rural

How many counties does your program serve?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Which best describes your Local Educational Administrator (LEA):

- Public School district
- 2-year College

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>>



We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.



Survey Powered By [Qualtrics](#)

Appendix E

Written Responses from Survey

Comments related to a well-defined role in the community.

Constantly reevaluating mission and goals.

We actually use the College's Mission Statement and have not created a separate one for our department. We do, however, set specific department goals.

I try to address our mission statement, philosophy, and goals at our staff meeting each month.

Our mission statement is very long. I doubt if anyone would be able to repeat it without intentional learning. However, the gist of the mission statement is clear, and it drives our organization.

Recent changes in LEA administration have resulted in confusion over the role of adult education.

Our local program's mission statement has been the same for many years. In today's changing times, I can see that it may need to be revised.

The economy, State mission, and lack of funding inhibits many the ability to become more progressive in the needs of the community.

Our goal is to help students to make successful transitions to the workplace.

Comments related to a quality management system.

We have expanded into another county this year. We currently lack proper representation from that area on our advisory board.

We serve multiple counties, and it can be difficult having sufficient planning meetings due to logistics. When we do have them, they are very helpful.

The advisory board is representative of our community, and we hold regular meetings. I would like to see more follow through with our partners and more support. It seems like most attending focus on their organizations accomplishments since the last meeting rather than what can we do together to help adults with their education.

Our Advisory Board does not really direct our program activities, but they do offer suggestions. We seek out fundraising opportunities but could probably do a better job.

Our program goals are annually outlined within the college's operational plan and evaluated bi-annually.

Comments related to a quality system to manage human resources.

Professional development handled through Adult Ed. Not a lot offered from LEA.

OPM (Office of Personnel Management) on the state level regulates pay for classified staff. I believe that its procedure is NOT appropriate. I have one full-time office manager who has worked for us 12 years; she makes less than the two newer office managers with less experience or training. I cannot do anything about it!

It seems that after the required professional development to maintain information and certification for adult education, there is little time to spend improving one's self. I would estimate that only 1 or 2 professional development days are the choice of the instructor.

Answers above are not equally true for all staff - 3 county area and multiple locations - part-time and full-time staff - but answers are accurate in general.

We have a small program that has received cuts several years in a row, and as a result, we only have two full-time instructors, six part-time teachers and a part-time test proctor. All of my part-time staff would like more hours, and our program really needs full-time staff but cannot afford either. We serve two counties, and it is difficult to even budget the funds necessary for travel.

Our professional development is of the highest quality because of the AALRC and the training available. As director, I can see I need to improve in the area of constructive feedback. I disagreed with the statement concerning our program's working conditions supporting staff improvement. My teachers are carefully hired, wonderfully trained, but stretched like rubber bands to work conditions. They travel to outside areas, many with little or no technology, and with no travel.

Comments related to a suitable environment for learning.

All decisions are made with the student as the focus.

It would be nice to have enough money to provide instructors to cover more hours that would cater to students who work.

Some of our satellite locations are held in areas that could use improvements.