

A CASE STUDY: THE PREPAREDNESS OF ADULT EDUCATION
STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE-LEVEL EDUCATION

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A Case Study: The Preparedness of Adult Education Students

for College-Level Education

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Abstract

Julie Gibbons Griffin. A CASE STUDY: THE PREPAREDNESS OF ADULT EDUCATION STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE-LEVEL EDUCATION. (Under the direction for Dr. Beth Ackerman) School of Education, November 2008.

Each year adult education programs have served over three million people.

Approximately 40% of these students aged 24 years and younger who were economically and educationally disadvantaged have benefited from postsecondary education. Although adult education programs have offered high school diploma (HSD) and General Educational Development (GED) credentials to the adult population including young adults, many of the graduates who enrolled in higher education failed to enter at college-level. Because most non-traditional students left college during their first year, their preparation for college-level education had a dire consequence for not only their success, but that of society as well. The desired results would be an increased educational attainment leading to economic betterment for the area.

The primary purpose of the research was specifically to study four technical college students who completed an adult education high school credential program and entered postsecondary education. The research focused on preparation for postsecondary coursework and the students' perceptions of the link between their demographic background and their performance. This area of study described a qualitative inquiry approach used to identify, describe, and analyze reasons for and barriers to adult education graduates' postsecondary placement. Data were collected using heuristic interviews on the subjects initially consisting of four adult education graduates selected

as completers of adult education at the local center. A panel of colleagues from the field of adult education provided the interview questions for the study. In addition, each member of the panel acted as peer reviewers. A variety of procedures ensured trustworthiness (e.g., triangulation, member checks, audit trail, thick description, and peer reviewers). The study was unable to demonstrate that the adult education program prepared its graduates for college-level education; however, strong evidence suggested that the adult education program motivated its graduates to enter postsecondary education. The subjects of the study became pioneers, that is, the first in their families to enter postsecondary education. One of the issues that emerged from the finding was the fact that the subjects who entered postsecondary education at college-level have continued in the associate degree program; however, the subjects who entered postsecondary through remedial/developmental studies program have withdrawn from the college. Recommendations for future research on this topic were also included in this paper.

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CHAPTER 1

THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

Introduction

South Carolina (SC) has long ranked near the bottom nationally in academic achievement and overall low socioeconomic attainment. According to South Carolina Kids Count (2005), South Carolina median family income ranked 40th (\$45,000) in the nation with the graduation rate ranking 36th (43%). Despite these grave statistics, the state's adult education programs reported an increase in their enrollment and their graduates entering into higher education rather than seeking a job or entering the military (S. C. Department of Education, 2006). Although research existed comparing the traditional high school diploma and GED graduates as they entered postsecondary education, very little research studied the effects that the adult education program had on the K-12 non-completers. The primary purpose of this research was to study four technical college (TC) students who completed an adult education (CCA) high school credential program and entered postsecondary education. Interviews with four participants focused on their preparedness for postsecondary coursework and the students' perception of the link between their demographic background and their performance.

Background of the Study

The study area was located in a rural county (CC) in South Carolina along Interstate 95, the corridor between Florida and New York. According to United States House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (2004), the I-95 corridor has long been home to

families haunted by decades of poverty, unemployment, and low academic and literacy rates. Citizens who lived along this corridor, the most undeveloped stretches of the Interstate System, sought “decent jobs, safe drinking water, accessible health care, affordable housing, and an adequate educational system” (Clyburn, 2004, p. 1). This stretch of Interstate Highway System was depicted in the 2005 documentary, *The Corridor of Shame: The Neglect of South Carolina’s Rural Schools*, produced and directed by Charleston native Bud Ferillo. While legislators have passed sweeping reforms in recent years, CC School Districts 1, 2, & 3 remained among the poorest and neediest districts in the state.

According to data, South Carolina had a significant problem with the fundamental education system; many students left high school without the proper skills and credentials to survive and thrive in society, much less continued to postsecondary education. This trend affected not only the young; many adults faced the dilemma of inadequate preparation for employment opportunities due to a premature departure from a traditional high school setting. In order to equalize educational inadequacies experienced by so many adults in CC, individuals must return to some type of adult education program to receive either the educational credential of the GED or high school diploma as well as remediation to prepare them for the rigors of postsecondary education opportunities.

Former South Carolina Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum (2003) acknowledged the importance of adults returning to the educational system in order to increase literacy levels, gain better employment potential, and/or simply maintain current employment. In agreement with Tenebaum, U. S. Secretary of Education Spelling (2007, ¶ 2) stated, “College access is not just about access for high school students; it’s about

access for adult learners.” She went even further by stating the need to improve access to postsecondary education for all students:

When 90% of the fastest growing jobs in America require a postsecondary credential or training, we have a duty to educate students of all ages and backgrounds to meet the needs of our new knowledge-based economy. I look forward to working with my colleagues to improve adult access to postsecondary education as an avenue to greater employment opportunities. (Spelling, 2007, ¶ 2)

In a state where almost 50% of the students dropped out of school, reasons differed for their early departure from school. For those who were high school dropouts, the GED may have given them a second chance to address the problem of poverty associated with unemployment. Former South Carolina Adult Education Director, Dr. Cherry Daniel (2004), said adult education enrollment had increased rapidly in the last decade, especially in the past five years. These learners entered adult education expecting to receive a diploma and increase their economic status: “Some 62 percent of all United States (GED) test passers indicated that they took the tests for educational reasons. Some 48.8 percent cited employment, including 39.5 percent seeking a better job” (American Council on Education, 2006, p.8). Therefore, it was increasingly important that secondary educational systems (traditional or adult education) provided students with the ability to attain more than the minimum high school education credential.

Although issues surrounding the negative effects of high school dropouts were a significant concern in today’s society, the specific aim of this study was to address the problem of academic preparedness of adult education graduates as they entered

postsecondary education institutions. Those who would benefit most from the study may be the instructors, transition specialists, and directors who served adult education students as they prepared for postsecondary education. Although the design of the study was not for generalization, the report of the findings to adult education programs as well as technical colleges would be included in discussions concerning the matriculation of adult education graduates to postsecondary education. New findings could help the programs (adult education and post secondary institutions) provide better service to the adult education population.

Risk Factors

Studies conducted by the Annie Casey Foundation (2001) identified six key risk factors that would lead to negative outcomes in a child's academic future. The factors were (1) not living with both parents; (2) lack of family transportation; (3) absence of steady, full-time employment for parents; (4) inadequate access to healthcare or medical insurance; (5) parents or guardians who are illiterate or school dropouts; and (6) inadequate programs to offset the above risk factors. Almost half of the students in CC were identified as having at least four of these known risk factors, leaving these students with the prospects of a grim future. Table 1 documented the "misery index":

Table 1

<i>Risk Factor Comparisons</i>		
Risk Factor	CC (Rural County in South Carolina)	South Carolina Average
School Dropouts	40%	30%
Illiterate Adults	40%	30%
Children Not Living with Both Parents	30%	25%
Lack of Family Transportation	16%	11%

Annie Casey Foundation, 2001

The 2000 Census reported that approximately 25.7% (104,000) of South Carolinians, ages 18 to 24 years of age, had not completed high school. Significant reduction of the number of citizens who did not possess a high school credential or General Educational Development (GED) credential was vital to the economic and social well-being of the state and the nation. According to *Young Adults in CC (2002)*, CC's per capita income in 1999 was 60.0% of the United States average.

In addition, the 2000 Census reported CC to have a total population of 32,500. Of this population, 20,700, aged 25+, included 4,475 with a 9th to 12th grade education; however, this group did not receive a high school diploma (S. C. Community Profiles, 2006). The statistics in Table 2 showed only 4.9% of this population received an associate degree:

Table 2

Educational Attainment for the Population Aged 24+ (20,700): 2000

	CC		South Carolina		United States	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Less Than 9th Grade	2,703	13.1	215,776	8.3	13,755,477	7.5
9th to 12th Grade, No Diploma	4,475	21.6	398,503	15.4	21,960,148	12.1
High School Graduate	7,142	34.5	778,054	30.0	52,168,981	28.6
Some College, No Degree	2,999	14.5	500,194	19.3	38,351,595	21.0
Associate Degree	1,023	4.9	173,428	6.7	11,512,833	6.3

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000. SF3 Demographic Profiles, Table DP-2.

Income levels of the citizens of CC strongly correlated with the educational levels and skills of its people. According to *CC MapStats, 2006*, per personal capita income for CC for 2002 was \$21,266 as compared to the per capita income for South Carolina, which reported \$28,285. According to the Santee-Lynches Community Development

Corporation (formed to stimulate economic growth in the area), the per capita income within CC ranked among the lowest 25% of counties in the United States (2002).

The level of educational attainment of parents significantly influenced their children's academic success. In CC, where 60% of children were born to single mothers, one in four mothers never completed high school. The following statistics in Table 3 more clearly illustrated the lack of educational achievement in this area:

Table 3

Comparison of Educational Indicators

Educational Indicators	CC-Rural County in SC	South Carolina (SC) Average	United States Average
Adults who do not possess a high school diploma/GED	33%	33%	14%
Population with less than a 9 th grade education	21%	14%	7%

U.S. Census Bureau 2000

A needs assessment conducted by First Steps (Child Care) identified rampant rates of poverty, illiteracy, low academic achievement, unemployment, and a variety of related social problems within CC with far too few available resources to remedy these problems. CC, declared a county of persistent poverty for the last three decades by the federal government, identified with a high poverty indicator. The following statistics in Table 4 documented this fact in detail:

Table 4

CC Risk Factors

Poverty Indicator	CC	South Carolina Average	United States Average
Free/Reduced Lunch Rates (2005)	79%	47%	40%
Children in Poverty (1999)	32%	23%	12%
Unemployment (2006)	8%	6%	6%

First Steps Assessment and Strategic Plan, S.C. Employment Security Commission 2007

Young adults in CC could not keep up with the progress of other young adults in more affluent areas. A report by the South Carolina Young Adults Count (2002, p.1) stated, “The economic problems of young adults are closely linked to employment barriers, to low wages, income and benefits, to limited education, to skills deficiencies, to economic inequity, and to a lack of opportunity for self employment.”

Many companies found that new employees had neither the basic education nor workplace skills required for employment. In addition, current employees did not have the skills to operate the more advanced technological equipment within the plants. According to the Department of Labor, the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) reported, “. . . traditional jobs are changing and new jobs are created everyday. High, unskilled manufacturing jobs are disappearing” (2000, p. 3). In order to increase the economic potential of CC workers and school dropouts, adult education strived to provide programs that would help raise the educational level of these workers.

Adult Education Efforts

South Carolina’s adult education programs acted as a safety net to retrieve the increasing number of students who fell through the cracks at traditional high schools. Adult education was a key to improving the lives of school dropouts. In 2005-2006, approximately one out of every five (22%) adults with high school completion credentials in South Carolina earned his or her certification through the state’s adult education programs. CCAE was one of fifty adult education programs in the state of South Carolina. The mission of CCAE was to provide a learning environment that would foster student success, encourage life-long education, and meet changing community needs.

Two goals of the adult education program were (1) to prepare students to achieve mastery of secondary education credentials (high school diploma and GED) and (2) to prepare students for postsecondary education.

Recent U. S. data reported approximately 48,000 Adult Basic Education graduates enrolled in postsecondary education or training in 2002-2003 (S. C. Dept. of Education, 2004). This number represented 20% of the Adult Basic Education students in its program who indicated postsecondary as an educational goal (Alamprese, 2005). Ideally, the adult basic education program would provide a bridge to postsecondary education rather than a student's terminal place in education (Alamprese).

A solid academic foundation and adequate academic preparation were essential to facilitate the continuation and completion of the adult learner's postsecondary education (Callan et al, 2006; Dounay, 2006; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004; Pierce, 2001). The advantage for individuals whose education exceeded a high school diploma included an increase in income and job availability. In addition, a skilled and academically prepared workforce would increase income and thus would increase tax payments to federal, state, and local governments as indicated in Table 5:

Table 5

<i>Earning Potential</i>	
<u>Educational Attainment</u>	<u>Annual Income</u>
Dropout	\$16,124
HSD/GED	\$22,895
Two-Year Degree	\$29,877
Four-Year Degree	\$40,478
Advanced Degree	\$64,229

U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Postsecondary Education Efforts

The postsecondary education system provided individuals with the opportunity to earn an advanced degree. Although many colleges and universities had strict entrance requirements, some postsecondary institutions allowed individuals to enter with substandard academic preparedness and provided the opportunity for remediation. These open enrollment colleges tested all applicants (high school diploma, GED, alternative diploma, or no credential) as part of their admission requirements (Roa, 2004) and the results of the admission's test helped place students in the appropriate level courses. By testing reading, writing, and math skill levels of new applicants, the institutions could insure proper placement.

Statement of the Problem

Adult basic education programs must prepare their graduates to enter college at the highest possible level to ensure that remediation/developmental courses do not drain students' financial aid dollars at the beginning of their college career. Most students placed in developmental courses did not receive any college credit for developmental courses, leading to frustration for the students. Additionally, students required to take developmental/remedial coursework were significantly less likely to complete a postsecondary degree, certificate, or diploma (Zafft, Kallenback, & Spohn, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this inquiry was specifically to study four technical college (TC) students who completed an adult education high school credential program and entered postsecondary education. The interviews focused on preparation for postsecondary

coursework and the students' perceptions of the link between their demographic background and their performance.

Research Questions

To guide the study, the researcher identified the following research questions:

1. Did the adult education program at the technical college prepare its case study students for college-level education?
2. Did the case study participants perceive a link between their demographics (lack of education attainment by family members, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) and their performance in the college-level coursework?

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because, to date, the researcher had not found any comprehensive study of postsecondary students who were adult education graduates. Existing studies usually focused on the relationship between the GED student and the traditional K-12 graduate. These studies had provided inconclusive documentation that compared first semester GPAs for GED graduates with traditional HSD graduates. For example, studies by Hamilton (1998) and Klein & Grise (1988) concluded that the GED student's GPA was lower than the traditional HSD graduate. However, other researchers (Byrd, Hayes, Hendrix, Simpson, & Cluster, 1973; Colert, 1982; McElroy, 1990; Wilson, 1982; & Wolfe, 1980) found no difference to exist between the mean cumulative GPAs of GED and HSD graduates. See Appendix A.

Other studies addressed college transition programs for adult education GED preparation, adult diploma program (ADP), and external diploma program graduates after the students entered college (Alamprese, 2005; Comings, 1996; & Zafft, Kallenback, and

Spohn, 2006). These studies focused on the transformation of adult education students to include transition activities such as counseling, advising, and study skills. Although the adult education program actively encouraged graduates to continue their education through a postsecondary education program, few researchers had produced valid data that revealed the preparedness of adult education graduates for postsecondary academic work.

Research to study the efficacy of the adult education program and the preparation of adult learners for the academic challenges of postsecondary education was the driving force of this study. The profiles that emerged from the case study would help the professionals better understand the uniqueness of the student population of returning high school dropouts and thus serve them more efficiently. The report of the findings of the study to adult education programs and community colleges would ensure that the adult education graduates truly received a *second chance* (eligibility) by enrolling in postsecondary education.

Definition of Terms

Adult Education - The term adult education means services or instruction below the postsecondary level for individuals

- A. who have attained 16 years of age;
- B. who are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law; and
- C. who
 - i. lack sufficient mastery of basic education skills to enable the individuals to function effectively in society;

- ii. do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent and have not achieved an equivalent level of education; or
- iii. are unable to speak, read, or write the English language.

(South Carolina Department of Adult Education, Training Manual, 2005)

Adult Basic Education - Adult basic education classes take place in classrooms and tutorial settings. Various teaching methodologies include individualized, cooperative learning, classroom lecture, and computer-assisted instruction.

Corridor of Shame - A documentary, *Corridor of Shame: the Neglect of South Carolina's Rural Schools*, offered a stark portrayal of the challenges rural school districts face. Struggling with the effects of reduced state funding over the past several years and the diminished tax base experienced by local governments, school districts along the I-95 corridor found themselves scrambling to provide an education for their youngsters.

Dislocated Worker - Displaced workers are defined as persons 20 years of age and older who lost or left jobs because their plant or company closed or moved, there was insufficient work for them to do, or their position or shift was abolished.

Dropout - A dropout was an eight grade student who did not enroll in grade 12 four years later (S. C. Kids Count, 2006).

Even Start Grant - The William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program was enacted as Part B of Title I. Even Start's premise was that combining adult literacy or adult basic education, parenting education, and early childhood education into a unified family literacy program offered promise for helping to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and low literacy (Even Start Grant application, 2004).

General Educational Development (GED) – “The GED tests are a group of five multiple choice tests that are designed to measure the general knowledge and thinking skills that it takes to earn a high school diploma” (South Carolina GED website, 2008). Adult education classes helped prepare students to pass the GED examination. Instructions in language arts: reading and writing; mathematics; science; and social studies are included.

Grade Point Average (GPA) - The grade-point average (GPA) is determined by dividing the total number of grade points by the number of semester hours attempted (TC Bulletin, 2006).

Graduation Rate - No Child Left Behind Act defined the high school graduation rate as the percentage of students, measured from the beginning of high school, who graduated from high school with a regular diploma (not including a GED). The Editorial Projects in Education Research Center used the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI), method to calculate graduation rates. The formula below illustrated the CPI formula for calculating graduation rates for the class of 2003-04, the most recent year of data:

$$\text{CPI} = \frac{\text{10th graders, fall '04} \times \text{11th graders, fall '04} \times \text{12th graders, fall '04} \times \text{Diploma recipients, spring '04}}{\text{9th graders, fall '03} \times \text{10th graders, fall '03} \times \text{11th graders, fall '03} \times \text{12th graders, fall '03}}$$

By multiplying grade-specific promotion ratios together, the CPI estimated the likelihood that a 9th grader would complete high school on time with a regular diploma. The CPI counted only students receiving standard high school diplomas as graduates, following the definition of a graduate adopted by the No Child Left Behind Act (*Education Week*, 2007).

High School Diploma (HSD) - Adult education programs operated by school districts in South Carolina provided the opportunity for adults to earn a high school diploma. The

traditional high school diploma requirements were similar to the adult education program with one exception. The adult education program required a minimum of 60 hours to receive a high school unit while the local high school program required 120 hours. Only those teachers who met South Carolina Department of Education requirements could teach diploma classes.

National Reporting System (NRS) - The National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS) was an outcome-based reporting system for the state-administered, federally funded adult education program. Developed by the U.S. Department of Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL), the NRS continued a cooperative process through which state adult education directors demonstrated learner outcomes for adult education. The South Carolina Department of Education / Office of Adult Education required all adult education programs receiving federal funding to adhere to the NRS framework and operations (Adult Education Assessment Policy, 2006-2008).

Poverty Level - The United States Census Bureau (USCB, 2005) defined the poverty level as an income threshold of \$19,971 in the United States for a family of four. CC ranked among the lowest 25% in the United States (Santee-Lynches Community Development Corporation, 2002).

Rural Poor - Rural Poor were farm or non-farm workers living in areas with a population of less than 50,000 inhabitants and earned less than \$9,393.

Technical College – A college which offered an array of associate degree, diploma, and certificate programs to provide access for its students to enter the job market, to transfer to senior colleges and universities, and to achieve professional and personal

goals. College programs and student-supported services provided citizens, businesses, industries, and communities with quality post-secondary education that is affordable, accessible, and customer-responsive. Additionally, these services and programs provided specialized training opportunities specifically designed to develop the foundation for personal growth, economic development, and an improved quality of life (TC website, 2008).

Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) - This act, passed in 1974, assisted workers who are dislocated due to foreign imports.

Study Design

The study was grounded in the belief that the best way to extract both reliable and valid testimony from the study group was through a descriptive qualitative case study investigation. Based on Patton's axioms of qualitative inquiry (1990, p. 13) where "little work has been done, few definitive hypotheses exist, and little is known about the nature of the phenomenon..." the researcher focused on a unique topic: the preparedness of the adult education student for college-level education. However, experts in the field of qualitative investigations, including Sharron Merriam and Robert K. Yin, strongly cautioned that such descriptive studies at best could be challenging even for experienced researchers. With this advice in mind, this researcher explained in detail not only the methodology used in conducting interviews, selecting subjects, controlling for bias, and other topics but also spelled out the underlying theory behind conducting qualitative research as well. By carrying out a systematic approach, the study was reliable, valid, and trustworthy.

The researcher purposely selected for interviewing four adult education graduates who represented the different areas of study: high school diploma graduate placed in college-level courses, high school diploma graduate placed in remediation courses, GED graduate placed in college-level courses, and GED graduate placed in remediation courses. In short, their testimonies explained to others what was possible and actually attainable through the educational program provided by CCAE.

To provide clarity to the study, the researcher selected three colleagues with many years of experience in the field of education to provide the interview questions for the study. These colleagues were adult education directors in surrounding counties (Berkley, Kershaw, and Florence) who worked with similar but not identical non-high school completers. Their adult education programs provided GED as well as HSD track classes. In addition, these colleagues experienced the same educational trends as the researcher (e.g., an increase in K-12 non-completers in their respective counties and an increase in the number of adult education graduates enrolling in postsecondary education). Many of their students entered local two-year technical colleges where some students, but not all, successfully entered college-level courses. The researcher anticipated that the questions provided by adult educators would supply extensive understanding of the trend in the study.

Overview of Methodology

A panel of colleagues from the field of adult education provided 8 – 10 interview questions for the study. The researcher selected 12 questions from this list and added an additional 3 questions to complete the 15-question interview (see Appendix B). Each member of the panel acted as a peer reviewer. Prior to the interviews, the colleagues

received a copy of the compiled interview questions. In addition, each colleague had the interview transcripts along with the researcher's interpretation of the transcripts. A teleconference among the researcher and colleagues determined whether additional data needed to be collected and/or problems in the interpretation had occurred.

The researcher, assisted by a TC admissions counselor, selected four subjects. The selections (a purposeful typical sample) were based on the college admission dates (2004, 2005, and 2006), the admission's placement (college level/developmental), the subject's adult education high school credential (HSD/GED), and the subject's availability.

Phone calls followed by Letters of Invitation (see Appendix C) to all the potential subjects occurred prior to the time of interview. The letter stated the following about the interviewing process:

- The interview would be conducted at TC;
- The interview would be voluntary; and
- The interview would remain confidential and would protect the anonymity of the participant.

In addition, the participant had the option to answer any one or more question(s) and/or to exit the process at any time. Both communication processes (phone call and letter of invitation) explained the purpose of the study and asked the subject permission for an interview. If the subject agreed to participate in the research, an available time to conduct the interview was set. In addition, the letter of invitation stated that the names of the participants were protected by the use of the following acronyms:

HSDCL for high school diploma graduate placed in college-level courses,

HSDR for high school diploma graduate placed in remediation courses,
GEDCL for GED graduate placed in college-level courses, or
GEDR for GED graduate placed in remediation courses.

The researcher followed the Interview Protocol (see Appendix D) that began with an introduction, a “thank you,” and a description of the interview process. In addition, the researcher explained the study’s purpose and procedures and had the students read and sign the consent form (see Appendix E). The method of data collection was person-to-person interviews. The focused interviews used open-ended questions for the study. The subjects’ interviews were tape-recorded, and each subject was allowed to add additional information. Not only did the researcher note the oral data presented but also noted in an interview log the observed body language, change in voice, and gestures before, during, and immediately after the recorded interviews had taken place.

The researcher hired a transcriptionist to transcribe the recorded interviews. A pledge of confidentiality was obtained (see Attachment F) prior to transcription of the interviews. At the end of the transcription process, the subjects received letters containing translations of their interviews followed by phone calls from the researcher. At this time, the subjects had the opportunity to add, expand, and/or delete information that validated the truthfulness of the interview process.

Additional data were collected from the participants’ CCAE Registration Forms (see Appendix F) which were completed during the participants’ initial registration into the adult education program. These forms provided demographic data such as ethnicity, years of completion in traditional high school, age at time of enrollment into adult education, marital status, birthplace, and gender. After the transcriptions, the researcher

categorized the data from the recorded interviews and the students' initial adult education registration forms and then analyzed the recurrent themes and phrases. From keywords, phrases, and descriptions, the researcher compiled a narrative to describe the graduates' experiences in adult education while completing a high school credential and preparing for postsecondary education.

Organization of the Study

The researcher organized the study into five chapters, discussing the nature of the study in Chapter One. Chapter Two presented a review of the literature. Chapter Three described the methodology and the procedures used, and Chapter Four presented findings of the research questions and interpretation of data. Chapter Five disclosed the summary of the study along with conclusions and recommendations for additional study and research.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

Many reports stated major problems in the secondary education system (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Education at a Glance, 2005; Education Week, 2006). Two of these problems plaguing the system included the inability to retain students to graduation and the academic preparedness of students entering postsecondary education systems (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005; Golden, Kist, Trehan, & Padak, 2005). To address the increasing numbers of high school dropouts, the adult education system provided educational services for the needs of under-educated individuals in the community.

Although Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs (offered through adult education) were available and provided the equivalent of a traditional high school diploma to the vast number of high school dropouts, the question of the academic preparedness of students (both high school diploma and GED graduates) entering postsecondary education institutions remained. ABE programs provided the high school dropout with an opportunity to finish the secondary credential either through the attainment of a General Educational Development (GED) or completion of the credit units necessary for the high school diploma (HSD). ABE, which had been the vehicle for providing adults with the high school education credential (HSD or GED) over the past several decades, has been faced with the increasingly important task of providing students with the ability to attain more than the minimum high school education

credential. Approximately 85% of the workforce required a postsecondary degree or advanced training (D'Amico, 1997). In today's society, adult education programs have had to prepare students for an appropriate level of academic preparedness to enter into postsecondary education systems.

The qualitative research focused on four technical college students who completed an adult education high school credential program and entered postsecondary education. The study, influenced by the researcher's experience as an adult educator and a lifelong resident of the poor rural southern county, reflected the struggle of South Carolina's working class poor in CC. Rural areas such as CC have not kept pace with the growth of South Carolina's urban and suburban areas, either economically or educationally. A thorough review of literature revealed the scope and breadth of the problems related to high school dropouts (lack of educational credentialing, economic disadvantage, and perpetual cycle of poverty) and the potential of Adult Basic Education programs to alleviate some of the negative impacts and to provide students with the appropriate level of academic preparedness for entrance into postsecondary institutions.

Dropouts

Reasons

Numerous studies have documented the reasons why high school students drop out before graduation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005; Golden, Kist, Trehan, & Padak, 2005). The array of reasons expanded from individual circumstances to the general atmosphere of the education system and society as a whole. Students have pulled away from the traditional path of education by enticement of a job and a paycheck despite traditionally low pay and lack of advancement (South Carolina Department of

Education, 2004). Personal reasons and personality conflicts have also been reflected in the decision to dropout. Students frequently reported disciplinary actions such as suspensions and expulsions, drug and alcohol problems, or a simple lack of safety and security in the school setting as justification for dropping out of school (Educational Testing Service, 2005). Whatever reasons led to the decision to drop out, students who did so were likely to be deficient in basic academic skills and to express discontent with the overall education system. These at-risk students needed an educational environment that encouraged academic success, promoted self-worth, and prepared them for postsecondary education if the individual desired to continue the education process (Wolfgramm, 1994).

Prevalence

The 2000 U. S. Census reported that 20% of the total United States population had less than a high school diploma (S. C. Community Profiles, 2006). Consistently, South Carolina ranked in the 5th percentile nationally in terms of high school dropouts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006; Pinkus, 2003). After exploring data over two consecutive decades, the National Dropout Prevention Center estimated that today's high school diploma (HSD) rate was similar to that of years in the past. Although the high school dropout rate has remained consistent, there has been a fundamental shift in what individuals without a high school diploma can do. In decades past, many individuals without a HSD worked in moderately well paying jobs like textiles and farming. However, in today's technologically oriented society, jobs in farming, agriculture, and textiles have diminished, leaving those without a HSD unemployed and in a perpetual cycle of poverty and reduced opportunity (Tyler, Murnane, & Willette,

2001; U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). High school dropouts, those workers with the lowest education and earning potential, have lost ground more quickly due to the increase in the demand for high-performance and technologically advanced workforce skills.

Many dropouts recognized the need to further their education. The Educational Testing Service (ETS, 2005) reported that a significant number of dropouts apply for a General Educational Development (GED) certification with one-half million people obtaining a high school equivalency GED yearly. In 1996, the people who passed the GED test accounted for one-seventh of the population receiving a diploma (Schwartz, 1996). This report suggested that many dropouts recognized the need for further education and actively sought to attain the basic high school credential.

Implications

As a standard estimate, high school dropouts were 4 times as likely to be unemployed as were college graduates (Bedsworth, Colby, & Doctor, 2006). Assuming dropouts found jobs, they would earn nearly 60% less than their college-educated counterparts would. In CC, a small rural county in South Carolina, the unemployment rate was approximately 10.5% as of January 2007. According to CC Development Board Executive Director J. Truluck (personal communication, November 9, 2006), unemployment rates in this county did not necessarily reflect the limited jobs available but instead the lack of educated and skilled workers to fill these positions.

There was a strong correlation between an individual's educational level and income level. As reported by the U. S. Census Bureau in 2005, the income of high school dropouts age 18 and over was \$12,184 in 2003 compared to the income of \$20,431 for those students who received their high school diploma including their GED

certificate. The outlook for poor rural regions was well below the national average. For instance, CC reported relatively high rates of poverty among its population: 35% of its citizens (age 25 years and over) had not graduated from high school (South Carolina Community Profiles, 2006). The number of CC citizens living at or below poverty levels was 21.3% as compared with the South Carolina state average of 13.8% and the U. S. average of 12.5% (U. S. Census Bureau, Quickfacts, 2007). Additionally, the per capita income (\$28,285) in CC ranked among the lowest in the United States (Santee-Lynches Community Development Corporation, 2005). Poverty often trapped families in dependency and unemployment. An additional concern with the cycle of poverty and unemployment was the strong correlation to delinquency and deviant behavior.

Undereducated individuals fed the growing prison population (Tyler, 2005). According to the U. S. Department of Justice (2002), dropouts made up disproportionately higher percentages of inmates, accounting for approximately 30% of federal inmates and 40% of state inmates. Additionally, reports revealed that half of all death row inmates lacked a high school education. In fact, dropouts were 3.5 times more likely to be incarcerated in their lifetime than were high school graduates (Catterall, 1985). The correlation between lack of education and deviance also existed for juveniles. The Coalition for Juvenile Justice (2001) reported that approximately 80% of the youth offenders in adult detention centers had no more than a 9th grade education.

Dropping out of high school affected the individual as well as the local counties, states, and country as a whole in terms of economic impact and public welfare. A primary educational goal was to produce responsible, employable, productive citizens. Since the inception of adult education, the programs and services have been successful in

providing the adult population with a high school diploma or GED credential. However, in light of the current employment opportunities available in today's job market, the need existed not only to provide individuals with basic educational credentials but also to prepare individuals to further their educational attainment in a postsecondary educational system.

To address the dilemma that negatively affected so many levels of society, a study of students who completed an adult education high school credential program and entered postsecondary education is necessary. The interviews in the study focused on preparation for postsecondary coursework and the students' perceptions of the link between their demographic background and their performance. The most important facet of this study was to determine whether the graduates believed that the academic credential provided through adult education, GED or HSD, successfully prepared them for college-level postsecondary education.

Adult Education

For the present study to be complete, an explanation of adult education was provided. In addition, this chapter described the origins of adult education, and explained the partnerships among the local school districts, adult education, and the technical educational system.

The beginning of adult education evolved from religious instruction, vocational apprenticeships, and common schools of the original thirteen colonies and the first federal involvement in adult literacy during the Revolutionary War (Sticht, 2002). Throughout history, the philosophy of adult education had experienced changes in its goals and objectives. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998 addressed

the technological advances and changes in society. Adult Basic Education recently saw a shift from a basic job skills orientation to a more sophisticated academic and workforce skills orientation (U. S. Department of Education, 2007). The U. S. Department of Education's primary vision for the Adult Basic Education program has been to facilitate secondary education and provide an adequate level of academic readiness for entrance in postsecondary education institutions.

History

The historical and current emphasis on adult basic education closely mirrored the early philosophy of E. Lindeman (1926). As a friend of John Dewey, Lindeman shared in the belief of social justice evidenced through his devotion to democracy and undertook pioneering work in adult education (Chaiklin, 2007). His life reflected many of the ordeals of the under-privileged and uneducated as Lindeman himself started his college education late in life. Through encouragement and support of others, he became a productive author of five books and many articles that ranged in titles of social justices (adult education, group work (1924), labor management problems, and community organization (1921)) (Chaiklin). In his book, *The Meaning of Adult Education*, Lindeman noted some fundamental differences in the traditional education system and the adult education program. In a traditional curriculum, the subject matter and teachers were foremost. In adult education, the curriculum followed a humanistic approach of teaching through the works of Carl Rogers.

According to Rogers, founder of client-centered psychotherapy, the teacher's role was a facilitator in a student-centered class. Rogers' contribution to the adult education program through his *Experiential Theory of Learning* defined learning as the following:

Learning rests not upon the teaching skills of the leaders, not upon scholarly knowledge of the field, not upon curricular planning, not upon use of audiovisual aids, not upon the programmed learning used, not upon lectures and presentations, not upon an abundance of books, though each of these might one time or another be utilized as an important resource. No, the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner. (Rogers, 1969)

Following the humanistic approach, the adult basic education program built its curriculum around a good relationship between the teacher and the adult learner specifically tailored to the learners' needs and interests.

In the early 1960's, the Kennedy administration became concerned with poverty and literacy. As a result, the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Title IIB of Public Law 88-452, created the first ABE program through a state grant (Eyre, 1990). The Adult Education Act of 1966 moved the ABE program from the poverty programs of the Economic Opportunity Act to the education program of the U. S. Department of Education (DOE) (Rose, 1991). In the 1990's, the emphasis of adult education broadened its educational goal. Not only must the adult education program eliminate poverty, but it must also ensure America's economic competitiveness in the new global economy (Stinct, 2002). This most recent mission of the adult education program led to the inclusion of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 as Title II: The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) (Tracy-Mumford, 2000).

Current Perspectives

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Title II, Adult Basic Education and Family Literacy Act addressed the technological advances and changes in society. Adult Basic Education had seen a shift from a basic job skills orientation to a more sophisticated academic and workforce skills orientation. Most of the ABE participants had goals of attaining a secondary degree (either a HSD or a GED certificate) and/or entering employment. However, students with a secondary education had a more difficult time finding jobs in the workforce due to the increase in technology-based jobs requiring advanced degrees and/or significant levels of experience. Therefore, the Adult Basic Education program had begun to encourage adult learners to access postsecondary education (U. S. Department of Education, 2007).

Adult Education Programs

The U. S. Department of Education administered several programs under the title of Adult Education and Literacy (e.g., Adult Secondary Education, Adult Basic Education, and English as a Second Language, Family Literacy, Workplace Skills, GED, HSD, and Community Education). The Adult Basic Education (ABE) assisted some adults in completing their secondary education through the high school diploma program, the GED program, and an external diploma program. In addition, state departments of education had affiliation with the adult and community education programs. Many state departments provided at least one full-time position (State Adult Education Director) to serve over the Adult Basic Education division. Each Adult Basic Education program followed its state's educational framework. The implementation of the National Recording System (NRS) measured the accountability of the program's progress.

The mission of the Adult Basic Education program has been to provide instruction in the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics to adult learners in order to prepare them for entrance into the workforce or higher academic/vocational training and the workforce. In keeping with the mission of the U. S. Department of Education/Office of Adult Education, Reder (1999) suggested that the Adult Basic Education system change its goal from high school equivalency to college readiness. This recommendation turned the emphasis of programs in Adult Basic Education to assisting and facilitating the GED or HSD graduate with college enrollment and college readiness/preparedness. This reform had the potential to increase substantially the student's earning potential. In other words, over a lifetime, the college graduate would earn approximately \$600,000 more than a HSD graduate would earn and over \$800,000 more than a high school dropout would earn (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000).

General Educational Development (GED)

As a way to give veterans without a high school diploma a chance to obtain a similar credential, the U. S. Military and the American Council on Education developed the GED testing program in 1942. Initially, this test was implemented to assess the servicemen's educational levels and certify them for further academic work or civilian employment. Ironically, the military has accepted few GED recipients, although GED graduates have enrolled in about 95 % of U. S. colleges and universities and have been eligible for federal aid for postsecondary education (American Council on Education, 2007).

Similar to recent GED tests, the first GED series of tests focused on reading skills- English, social studies, and literature; and mathematical content knowledge. In the

1980's, the GED testing service conducted a five-year review. The purpose of the review was to assess whether the GED accreditation correlated with the secondary education agenda. The results of the review showed that a revised GED test was needed to reflect the shift from an industrial society to an information technology society (American Council on Education, 2002). In 1988, the following changes were implemented:

Addition of a direct writing sample (essay), an increased emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving skills, an increased reflection of the diverse roles adults play in society, greater emphasis on understanding the sources of societal changes, and an increase in contextual setting relevant to adults (American Council on Education, 2002, p. 2).

According to the American Council on Education (2002), the GED tests continued to change and modify because of the changes in the secondary education requirements, curriculum, standards and competency measures, and the candidates reasons for taking the tests. See Figure 1.

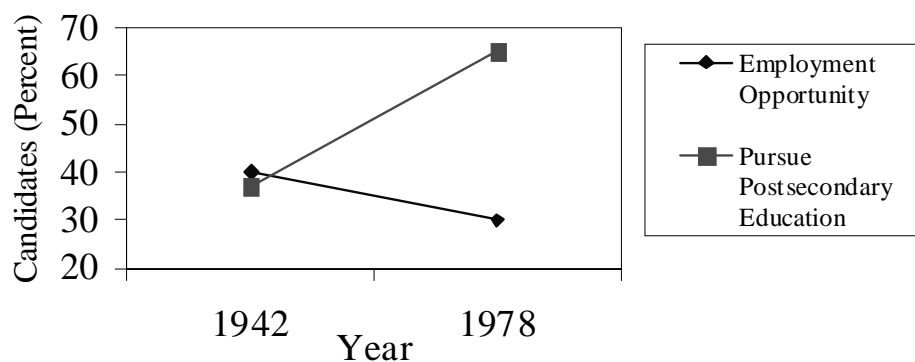


Figure 1. Reasons for GED Testing

Over the 36-year timeline, the percentage of GED candidates seeking employment

slightly decreased by approximately 10%; however, the reason for pursuing a GED for entering postsecondary education increased by approximately 25%. Therefore, to address the goals and needs of the GED candidate, the testing service once again revised the GED tests (American Council on Education, 2002).

The design of the most recent 2002 General Educational Development (GED) tests measured the major academic skills and knowledge associated with a four-year high school program of study (American Council of Education, n.d.). The American Council of Education (ACE) reported that the GED tests identified the content that was representative of secondary education and evaluated the candidate's performance compared to a nationally representative sample of graduating seniors. Dropouts desiring a GED had to attain a state mandated minimum score on the five areas of the GED tests: Language Arts, Writing; Language Arts, Reading; Social Studies; Science; and Mathematics. The third revision of the GED tests implemented the following changes:

More business-related and adult-content information texts across all five tests; tests reflected the impact of welfare-to-work legislation and the increased emphasis on academic standards in the K-12 community; the language arts and writing tests carried an increased emphasis on organization and had implemented a new scoring scale for the timed essay portion; the mathematics test had two booklets: Part I permitted the use of a Casio fx-260 Solar calculator; Part II did not; on the social studies test, U. S. GED candidates could count on seeing at least one excerpt from the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, or a landmark Supreme Court decision; nonfiction now included business-related documents for interpretation; and the science test asked candidates to select the

best way to set up an experiment, interpret others' results, analyze experimental flaws, apply scientific conclusions to their personal lives, and use the work of renowned scientists to explain everyday global scientific issues. (American Council on Education, (2002, p. 2)

The purpose of the GED Testing Program has been to make it possible for adults (17 years and older) to earn a high school credential, thus providing opportunities for hundreds of thousands of individuals to pursue higher education, obtain specific jobs, gain promotions, and achieve personal goals. Hence, the GED program was a valuable one, although its design was not as a substitute for a regular high school diploma but rather a way to certify the knowledge of a person. From 1994 to 2000, the number of GEDs issued had remained relatively stable; but the redistribution of recipients towards adolescents had increased significantly.

Statistics from the South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Adult and Community Education (2006) indicated 7,693 (22%) of all high school credentials awarded in South Carolina were earned through Adult Basic Education with 5,000 awarded through the GED program. The Adult Basic Education program was the largest high school retrieval program in South Carolina. However, GED graduates still faced problems as they entered postsecondary education institutions; nearly three-quarters of GED holders who enrolled in community colleges failed to finish their academic program, compared with 44 percent of traditional high school graduates (Ricketts, 1996). Ideally, a credential equivalent to a high school education should prepare individuals for entrance into a postsecondary system at a level at or above the current level of academic/educational attainment. However, Andrews (2002) found a statistically

significant difference in the high school credential and the equivalent credential of the GED. The U. S. Department of Education (2006) found that compared with traditional (K-12) high school graduates, GED recipients were half as likely to attain an associate's degree and 15 times less likely to earn a bachelor's degree.

Adult Education Awarded High School Diplomas

Many Adult Basic Education HSD programs received sponsorship, financial support, and assistance from their state departments of education. The requirements for the Adult Basic Education high school diploma student were virtually the same as those of a regular/traditional high school student with the exception of time requirements for classroom attendance. Generally, the graduation requirements varied from state to state; however, the curriculum requirements included the following basic skills: language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer skills.

In the state of South Carolina, each student (traditional high school or Adult Basic Education student) must pass the High School Assessment Program (HSAP) exit examination, a high school assessment developed to meet both federal and state requirements. The HSAP satisfied the requirements of the South Carolina Education Accountability Act (EAA) of 1998 that each public school student must have passed an exit examination to receive a South Carolina high school diploma. In addition, the HSAP was used to measure the students' academic achievement on high school standards in accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 (S. C. Department of Education, 2004). To earn a high school diploma, each student (traditional high school or Adult Basic Education student) earned 24 prescribed units of credit. Table 6 outlined these prescribed units.

Table 6

South Carolina High School Diploma Requirements

Course	Units
Language Arts: English I, II, III, IV	4
Mathematics	4
Social Studies	3
Natural Science	3
Computer	1
Electives	9

South Carolina Department of Education, 2007

Additionally, the student must have passed the HSAP exit examinations (Mathematics and English Language Arts).

After completion of the adult education HSD or GED, some students continued to postsecondary institutions. The Statistical Analysis Report: Subsequent Educational Attainment of High School Dropouts (Berktoold, J., Geis, S., & Kaufman, P., June, 1998) examined the educational and employment attainment of 1988 eighth graders who dropped out of high school. The finding included that 26% (1 in 4) of high school dropouts/adult education completions enrolled in some type of postsecondary degree or certificate programs. Approximately, 11% enrolled in a two or four-year degree program. An additional 11% enrolled in some type of certificate program, and the remaining 4% enrolled in other program. In general, students who completed either the HSD or GED through adult education were more likely to enroll in postsecondary institutions than those who were not enrolled in adult education (40% of completers versus 14% of non-completers) (Berktoold, J., Geis, S. Kaufman, P., June, 1998).

CCAIE Adult Education

Completion of the present study required an explanation of CCAIE. Even though the present researcher felt strongly that the local adult education program played a major

role in the preparation of its graduates for postsecondary education, there had to be evidence that CC had the potential to benefit economically due to CCAE. The much-needed evidence lay in the minds of its graduates. This evidence could be seen as an improvement in the quality of life for its citizens.

CCAIE, one of fifty adult education programs in South Carolina, supported instruction in Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), GED, WorkKeys, Computer classes, Literacy, and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for adults aged 17 years and older. The program served five host sites. CCAIE programs awarded over 13% of the high school diplomas earned in the host site last year and served 817 adult students in the 2006-07 school year as shown in Figure 2.

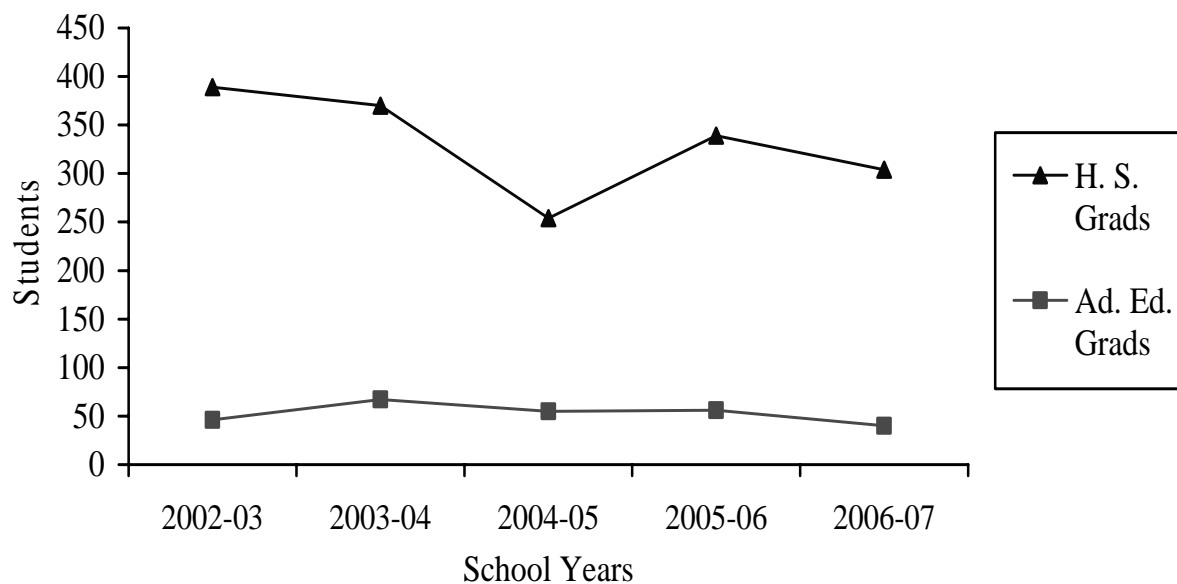


Figure 2. CC Graduates: High Schools/Adult Education
(State of South Carolina Annual Report Card; CC School Districts)

One of CCAIE's goals was to matriculate its graduates to postsecondary education; particularly to the study's technical college (TC), which was housed in the

same facility. The initial requirements in the admission process at TC were (1) take the College's placement test (ASSET or COMPASS), (2) submit acceptable SAT or ACT scores, or (3) provide acceptable college transcripts. As adult education students completed their high school credentials, each graduate was encouraged to enroll at TC. Hence, CCAE contributed to CC's high school completion rate and the enrollment at the local technical college shown in Figure 3.

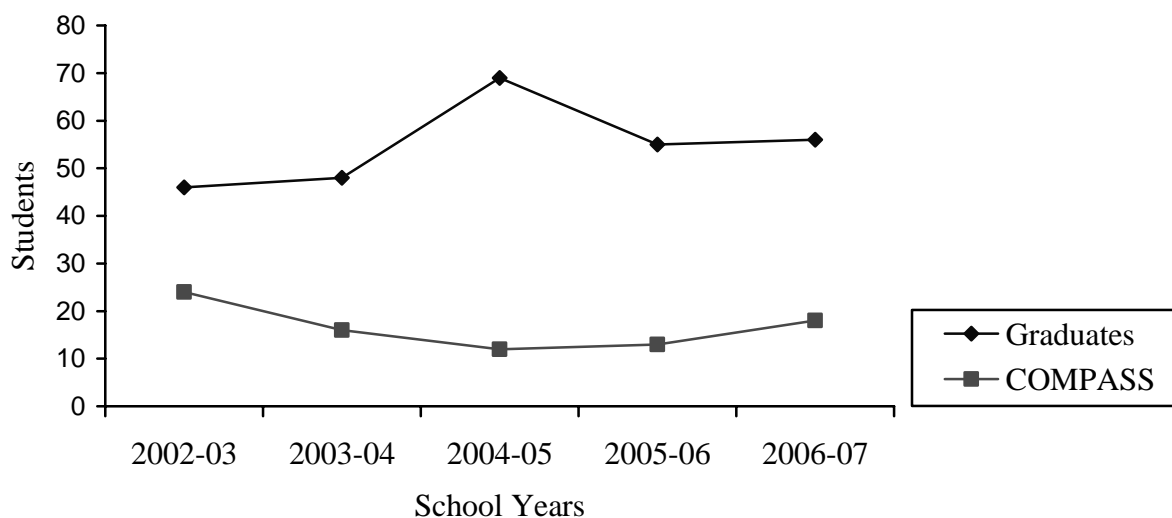


Figure 3. CCAE Contribution to Postsecondary Entrance

CCAЕ has strived to prepare its citizens for the future through a variety of programs. Many activities have taken place within this program as well as adult education programs throughout the state. The program had taken an active role in assisting the local school districts' compliance with the No Child Left Behind legislation through its Para-Professional Project. This project had been a success, not only for the teaching assistants, but also for CC's school districts. Many of the teacher assistants had

become “highly qualified” by passing the ETS ParaPro Exam. In addition, adult education’s partnerships with other agencies such as TC have eliminated duplication of many services, thereby saving the state thousands of dollars.

The Even Start Family Literacy Program, funded by the Federal Government, was an educational program for low-income families. Its design was to improve the academic skills of parents and their children. In January 2003, a partnership between CC School District 2 and CCAE provided their participants with educational services that helped increase reading and mathematics skills. The Even Start program served 60 people who did not have a chance to finish their high school education and found a second opportunity through the adult education program. An article in the Times Extra newspaper entitled “CSD2 and Adult Ed offer CC Parents an Even Start” (Gellately, 2005, February 8) reported the collaboration between the adult education program and CC School District 2. This partnership offered area parents and caregivers the opportunity to complete their secondary education through a GED program and entered postsecondary education at the local technical college: “When students finish (their high school credentials), we (the adult education teachers) walk them right to the TC Admission office to take their entrance test,’ said Griffin” (p. 2).

“The CCAE program takes a back seat to no other adult education program in the state when it comes to meeting state performance standards throughout its curriculum” (Sharron Haley, The CC Sun, Dec. 11, 2007). A “Celebrating Our Success” luncheon held on November 16, 2007, in Columbia, South Carolina, CCAE was recognized along with 10 of 50 programs statewide that met the state standards. During the luncheon, the CCAE program received the Palmetto Achievers Award and Palmetto Partners Award for

continued partnership with CC's Department of Social Services, Employment Preparation, and the Workforce Initiative Act (WIA) Youth Grant Program.

On May 22, 2000, *The New York Times* featured the CCAE program in an article entitled "Technology Savvy Educators Team with ASPs to Update Their Curriculum." The article reported that CCAE offered its students the most up-to-date educational software programs despite its budget constraints. The program continued to provide its students with computer labs with the most current technology programs and software.

Under the mandate of the S. C. Plan for Adult Education and Family Literacy, the South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Adult Education reviewed programs that received federal funds and/or state aid to support approved adult learning services. Recently (January, 2008), the Local Program Review Team (LPRT) visited the CCAE program. In its report by Rupert (2008), the following commendations were cited: "The LPR team wished to commend (the researcher) for her inspired leadership of the CCAE Program. The partnership between Adult Education and TC was a model of interagency cooperation." See Appendix G for complete report.

The LPRT process was a systemic approach designed to assess the educational opportunities and the effectiveness of the adult education programs and serviced to the school districts and the Community-Based Organizations (TC) receiving the federal funds and/or state aid to support such services. One primary reason for the Local Program Review was to determine the extent to which the instructional program was successful in raising the academic achievement of its students. From the indicators and LPRT report, CCAE provided CC educational opportunities that address the needs of its students (i.e.,

achieving high school credentials entrance into postsecondary education or entering the workforce).

The Workforce Gap

David Ellwood's report (Aspen Institute, 2002) addressed three concerns and upcoming gaps: a worker gap, a skill gap, and a wage gap. Ellwood depicted two possible scenarios. The first was that "the worker gap, coupled with the skills gap, leads to a slowing of the economy, a further widening in the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Shared prosperity would continue to elude the nation as the wage gaps widen" (Ellwood, 2002). A more hopeful alternate scenario is:

In the face of impending labor shortages, particularly of skilled workers, businesses and the nation might work together to train and upgrade the skills of existing workers. ...because workers are training and working harder, productivity grows because as some workers move up and out, the number of less skilled workers declines, and their pay rises. With rising productivity, pay can rise without inflationary pressures. Thus, the nation might return to an era of shared prosperity. (Ellwood, 2002)

In either scenario, the importance and need in today's society of a skilled and educated workforce is imperative to bolster the economy (Freeman, 2006).

Many companies had found that new employees lack the basic education and workplace skills required for employment. According to America's Perfect Storm (Kirsch et al. 2007), nearly 50% of the job growth in the next 25 years would be positions that required higher education and skills training. Adults at these levels would have greater earning potential: "Currently, adults with associates degrees earn, on an average, 25

percent more than those with a high school diploma, and this gap is expected to widen by 2030” (U. S. Department of Education, 2007).

Additional studies and reports confirmed a strong correlation between the availability of jobs and highest level of education achieved, and the necessity of a skilled and educated workforce. Day and Newburger (2002) confirmed these facts by stating that many factors influenced the decision to go to college; however, the most compelling was the expectation of future economic success based on educational attainment. The U. S. Census Bureau (2002) reported almost 60% of all young adults between 20 and 40 years of age continued to college. In addition, the U. S. Department of Education (2001) reported the median income of year-round, full-time workers 25 years and older increased directly with their educational level awarded.

Ideally, the Adult Basic Education program would provide a bridge to postsecondary education rather than a student’s terminal place in education (Alamprese, 2005). Educational requirements for the technology-based workforce provided an encouraging argument for the adequate preparation of the Adult Basic Education learner for entrance in postsecondary education institutions. There were limited data on the Adult Basic Education learners’ entrance preparation and successful transition to postsecondary education (Baycich, 2003; Kurleander, 2005). Since the Federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Title II, Adult Basic Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), shifted Adult Basic Education’s goal to include preparing the adult’s entrance to postsecondary education, more statistics on Adult Basic Education graduates’ participation in higher education have been documented (Alamprese).

Academic preparation in the Adult Basic Education program played a critical role in the student's ability to enroll in the first semester of college and remain enrolled and successful throughout. It was imperative the Adult Basic Education program assisted students in attaining a HSD or GED in addition to adequately preparing and providing a solid foundation for the basic academic requirements (reading, writing, and mathematics) of college to facilitate the continuation of their education into the postsecondary program. Students entering a two-year community college or technical college had to be proficient in reading, English, mathematics, and technology. The ultimate goal for individuals whose education was beyond a high school diploma included an increase in income and job availability. In addition, a skilled and academically prepared workforce would increase income and thus increase tax payments to federal, state, and local governments.

Although South Carolina's public schools had adapted to drastic societal changes of the last 50 years and had initiated several reforms: "standards and assessments; improvements in training our teachers; First Steps and other early childhood initiatives; school-based technology; strengthened leadership at every level; and technical assistance to schools most in need" (*South Carolina Personal Pathways to Success*, October 2001), the workplace was changing at a rate many times faster than the schools. This led to a workforce-education gap in the South Carolina education system.

According to *South Carolina Personal Pathways to Success* (October, 2001), these percentages indicated the severity of the problem:

1. Only 32% of South Carolina's ninth graders will pursue a two-year degree or certification, the majority of jobs (65%) will require a two-year degree;

2. Another 28% of the State's ninth graders will pursue a four-year degree, yet only 20% of jobs will require a four-year degree; and
3. Finally, 40% of (South Carolina's) ninth graders will pursue an "unskilled" job—because they either drop out of high school or simply lack the skills needed for employment—but only 15% of jobs available will be considered unskilled.

These statistics suggested that approximately 25% of the ninth graders would not have the skills or the training to enter the workforce at the completion of high school. In addition, "These figures show a mismatch of educational and workforce needs that the state cannot afford, a gap that is growing daily" (*South Carolina Personal Pathways to Success*). Not only did this affect the students, but it also affected the economy in South Carolina. The South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Adult Education could provide a successful pathway toward the workplace skills in order to boost the economy.

In the past, the "U.S. public has believed that a four-year college degree (or more) is the only sure way to ensure success" (*South Carolina Personal Pathways to Success*). However, only 20 % of the jobs required four-year degrees. Conversely, only 15% of the jobs available would be available for high school diploma or GED graduates and high school dropouts. Since the inception of adult education, the programs and services have been successful in providing adult population dropouts with a high school diploma or GED credential. However, in light of the current employment opportunities available in today's job market, individuals not only needed a basic educational credential but also preparation to further their educational attainment in a postsecondary education system: "A high school education alone does not provide the higher order skills and knowledge today's businesses need" (*South Carolina Personal Pathways to Success*). Therefore, the

agenda for the adult education population would be to bridge the “GAP” (32% to 65%) to postsecondary education where the requirements for jobs that require an associate’s degree (postsecondary) or advanced training (certification) could be obtained.

To help bridge the gap, South Carolina state legislators drafted the Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA), which Governor Mark Sanford signed into law on May 27, 2005. This Act provided for the development of a curriculum organized around a career cluster system. The South Carolina Department of Education played a major role in the implementation of this bill through the delivery of a “research and standards-based K-12 career development system in preparation for life and career challenges in the 21st century workforce” (SC Department of Education, 2007, ¶ 1), and the EEDA included the adult education program as a partner.

Following the guidelines of the EEDA, a part-time transition (career) specialist has been employed at each adult education program. See Appendix H for complete job description. The transition specialist has recruited, coordinated, and collaborated with school community, local agencies (DSS, One-Stop, Armed Forces, local technical colleges, and the business community) to guide and counsel students to assure appropriate placement of students who completed their goal in adult education (S. C. Department of Education, Office of Adult Education, 2006). Together with the initiatives of the South Carolina State Government, the South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Adult Education, has provided many programs to address the educational and economic needs of the state as well as its citizens.

Postsecondary Education

Does postsecondary education pay off? According to the U. S. Census Bureau: *Current Population Reports* (Day and Newburger, July 2002), almost 60% of young adults continued to college. This report illustrated the economic impact of an education from the “dropout” who earned approximately \$1,000,000 per lifetime to the “professional” who earned \$4,000,000 per lifetime as illustrated in Figure 4 (U. S. Census, 2000).

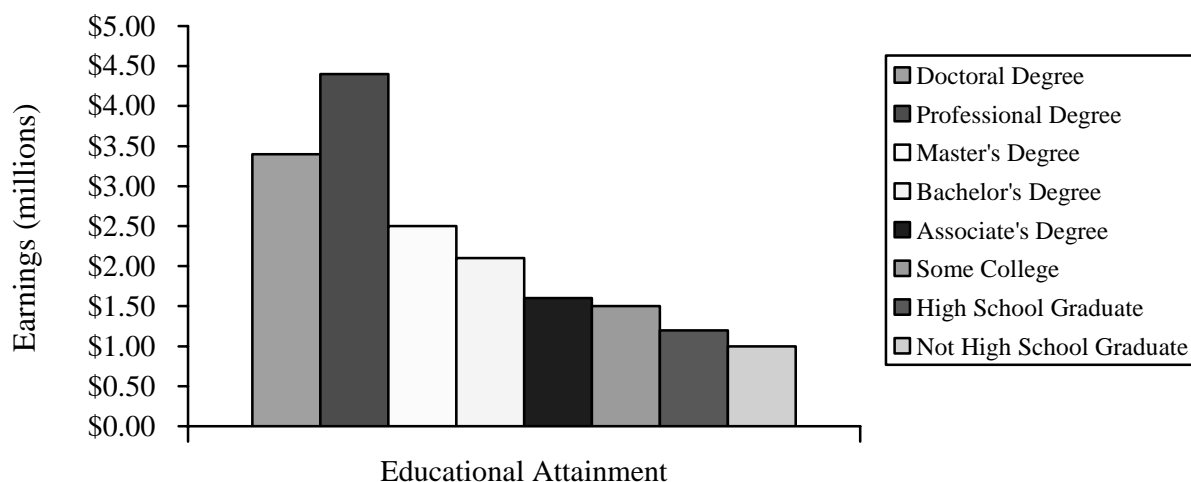


Figure 4. Synthetic Work-Life Earnings Estimates for Full-time Year-Round Workers

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2006), community education’s enrollment in 1997 was 10.4 million (44% of all U. S. undergraduates) with 46% of first-time freshmen. Their average age was 29 years of age. Approximately 500,000 earned associate of arts degrees, and nearly 200,000 earned a two-year certificate.

Open Door Policy

The open admission policy of community colleges has allowed entry to any student possessing a high school diploma or GED. Rao's (2004) article, *The Open Door Policy: Hidden Barriers to Postsecondary Education for Nontraditional Adult Learner*, addressed the placement test and the developmental programs provided at the community colleges. This policy would not turn away any student who had a high school diploma or had passed the tests of General Educational Development (GED). The research concluded that without the community college's commitment to the open door policy and remedial education, nontraditional adult learners (including adult education graduates) could not have access to postsecondary education without open enrollment for all. However, the open door policy has been one of the hidden barriers to completing postsecondary education because it could mask the skill requirements for entrance to college that exist (Rao).

Postsecondary Admission Standards

The postsecondary education system has been in place to provide individuals with the opportunity to earn an advanced degree. Many colleges and universities had strict entrance requirements; however, some postsecondary institutions did allow those individuals to enter with substandard academic preparedness and provide the opportunity for remediation through their open door policy. These open-enrollment colleges test all applicants (high school diploma, GED, alternative diploma, or no credential) as part of their admission requirements (Rao, 2004), and the results of the test helped place students in the appropriate level courses. By testing reading, writing, and math skill levels of new applicants, the institutions could insure proper course placement.

Many colleges used commercially designed tests (ACCUPLACER, ASSET, and COMPASS) which assessed reading comprehension, writing skills, and math computation (Zafft, Kallenback, & Spohn, 2006). For example, TC used the ACT's COMPASS placement system, a computer-based adaptive assessment program, for students who had not taken the SAT or ACT in the last five years. The COMPASS (ACT, 2007), a national college admission and placement test published by the ACT Corporation, used modules that were self-paced, allowing students to work at their own speed and comfort level. According to ACT (2007), the COMPASS test has been a reliable and valid measure of academic placement. The scores were designed to assist the college in placing the student in college-level or developmental/remedial courses.

Although each educational institution had the flexibility to establish the cutoff scores for placement in college-level courses, there were published guidelines (ACT, 2007) identifying the minimum score for each module to indicate college-level academic preparedness. According to TC Admission Counselor (S. Hanna, personal communication, March 16, 2007), the TC cutoff scores for college readiness were: Reading 81, English 75, and Mathematics 47. If the student scored below these cutoffs, the college placed that student in remediation/developmental courses.

Adult Basic Education programs have strived to prepare their graduates to enter college at the highest possible level to ensure that remediation/developmental courses did not drain their financial aid dollars at the beginning of their college career and prolong the time from entrance into college through college graduation. In addition to the problems with prolonging the length of time in college and utilization of financial aid, students in developmental courses did not receive any college credit for developmental

courses, leading to frustration and lengthening the time for degree attainment. Additionally, students required to take developmental/remedial coursework were significantly less likely to complete a postsecondary degree, certificate, or diploma (Zafft, Kallenback, & Spohn, 2006). Researchers found that the financial burden to continue their program led to withdrawal from postsecondary education in addition to frustration with the length of time to complete.

Developmental (Remedial) Courses

In the research, the term developmental course referred to a course in reading, mathematics, or writing for college students who lacked the basic academic preparedness necessary to perform college-level work in a postsecondary institution. Bettinger and Long (2005) indicated that entrance exams (e.g., SAT, COMPASS, and ACT) had become the key academic gatekeepers to postsecondary study. Academic advisement and initial course placement were determined based on the results of these tests (used singularly or in combination with other measures). The course placement determined whether a student placed in either traditional first year college courses or developmental courses, indicating basic proficiencies had not been attained and remediation would be necessary. Researcher Harris (January 6, 2006) stated, “in two-year public colleges, 42 percent of freshmen were found to have at least one remedial course in the fall of 2000, compared with 20 percent of freshmen at four-year public institutions.” Therefore, the community colleges would provide services and resources that fit the needs of the adult literacy training.

Developmental courses were not free. At many community colleges, including TC, the tuition for one developmental course (Math 031, 032, 101; Reading 032; and

English 032, 100) was the same as a credit course. In the 2006-07 school year, one unit at TC cost \$121 per college-level credit hour (M. Davis, personal communication, June 8, 2007). This cost did not include books and fees. The average total expenses in the 2006-07 school year (fall, spring, and summer sessions) for a full-time education at TC, a two-year technical community college, were approximately \$1,500 (A. Mathis, personal communication, June 11, 2007).

The federal government provided some financial aid to qualified college students through student loans and grants. However, students enrolled less than half-time (fewer than 6 hours) including many students taking developmental courses were not eligible for the federal loans. The only federal funding eligible for these students were the Pell Grants (Roa, 2004). Most technical colleges allowed students to use their Pell Grants to pay for developmental courses; however, these courses were not credit-earning courses and did not apply toward an Associate's or Bachelor's degree. In addition, the Pell Grant funds could be applied toward only 30 hours of developmental coursework (M. Davis, personal communication, June 8, 2007).

Although students must reapply each year for the Pell Grant, there was no guarantee of grant renewal. Additionally, the longer a student took to complete a degree, the more likely it was that the grant would eventually be denied (Roa). If a student used all the Pell Grant funding on developmental courses (non-college credit), there was less money to spend on credit-bearing courses; ultimately, the student may be forced to leave school before degree completion due to the financial burden of paying tuition and associated costs (books, lab fees, technology fees, etc.).

The Role of the Technical College (TC)

TC, accredited by the Commission of Colleges of Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, has been a comprehensive, public, two-year institution of higher education that has been “dedicated to fostering a positive environment of teaching and learning for faculty, staff, and students” (TC website, 2007). The college has served primarily a four-county region, which ranged in similarly demographic and economic factors (see Table 7). TC President T. Hardee (personal communication, January 28, 2008) noted, “TC benefits from the excellent working relationships established with adult education programs in the four county service areas. Students are able to gain valuable information about postsecondary education opportunities because of this joint effort.”

Table 7

TC County Characteristics

	CC	Kershaw	Lee	Sumter
Per Capita Personal Income	\$13,804	\$19,231	\$12,331	\$16,298
Unemployment Rate	9.4%	6.5%	9.8%	6.5%
Educational Attainment	10.9	11.6	10.7	11.9
Counties of Original Distribution	15%	14%	6%	61%

TC Quick Facts - Fall, 2005

TC has offered programs that prepared students to enter the job market, to transfer to senior colleges and universities, and to achieve their professional and personal goals as illustrated in Figure 5. The programs of study included: 15 associate degrees, 8 diplomas, and 27 certificates. See Appendix I.

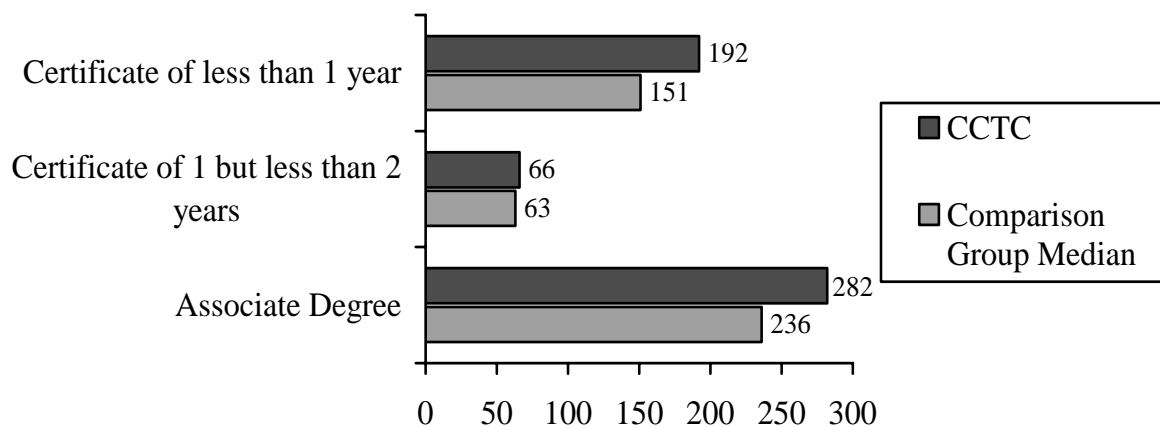


Figure 5. Number of degrees awarded, by level: Academic Year 2003-04.

According to TC Admissions Counselor M. Davis (personal communication, June 14, 2007), 60% of the TC's student population received federal funding with just over half of the student population receiving Pell Grant monies. Therefore, for the Adult Basic Education HSD and GED student to continue through degree completion, the majority of the federal funding must be applied to college-credit or continuing education courses, not just developmental courses. Therefore, the Adult Basic Education program assumed the responsibility to educate the adult learner for college-level status. To show support of the adult education programs, the TC president (T. Hardee, personal communication, January 28, 2008) stated that

Students graduating from the local adult education program in CC, Lee, Kershaw, and Sumter counties have proven to be excellent students when enrolling in TC. Their preparedness for college-level work is evidence of the high quality of instruction taking place in local adult education programs.

Documentation would provide evidence that CC had the potential to benefit economically due to the preparation of the CCAE student for postsecondary education.

The literature in the qualitative research has become part of the research (Creswell, 2003). The design of the case study was described in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

Design of the Study

A Qualitative Study

The researcher used a naturalistic or qualitative method to evaluate the preparedness of the adult education student for college-level education, since “little work has been done, few definitive hypotheses exist, and little is known about the nature of the phenomenon” (Patton, 1990, p. 131). This section covered the rationale for selecting this research method. In addition, specific topics addressed in this chapter are the role of the researcher, research design, methods of data collection, and methods of data analysis. Finally, the researcher examined the topic of trustworthiness. A case study design addressed all these topics.

The Rationale for Case Study Research

The research described the case study as having *boundaries* or limits, being particularistic, and being heuristic. Since the research focused on a particular problem (CCAIE), the study had limitations to “subjects, time, and observations” (Merriam, p. 27). Within the case study, the research focused on a particular event, the college placement of the adult education graduate (particularistic). In addition, the case study would increase the reader’s understanding, add meaning, extend experiences or confirm what the reader already knew, and expose unknown and new relationships. Merriam added these observations about case studies and heuristics:

Previously unknown relationship and variables can be expected to emerge from case studies leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied. Insights

into how things get to be the way they are can be expected to result from case studies. (Stake, 1981, p. 47).

In addition, the study reported the findings of the event under investigation in a descriptive narrative, meaning the case study used well-documented descriptions of the event.

The study used a descriptive qualitative research design, which asked “how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin, 2000, p. 8). Yin (1994) referred to the research design as “an action plan for getting from here to there, where ‘here’ may be defined as the set of questions to be answered, and ‘there’ is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions” (p. 24). Several authors and educational reformers (Henderson & Kesson, 2004; Maxine Greene, 1995) advocated that multiple, but legitimate, interpretation and explanation for reality were possible in the public arena. The bases for these different voices were educational background (personal and family), age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, and cultural background. In addition, Taylor and Bogdon (1998) advocated qualitative research for its ability to bring meaning to “people in the context of their pasts and the situations in which they find themselves” (p. 8). The diversity of the research population mandated the use of a qualitative case study research method to investigate the preparedness of the adult education students for college-level education. More precisely, the case study design answered the following questions:

1. Did the adult education program at the technical college prepare its case study students for college-level education?

2. Did the case study participants perceive a link between their demographics (lack of educational attainment by family members, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) and their performance in the college-level coursework?

The Role of the Researcher

The researcher approached this study through both personal and justice lenses (Glesne, 1999). As a lifetime resident of CC, the researcher was well acquainted with the problems found in rural CC and South Carolina as well. Moreover, with more than 30 years in the field of education, including 11 years as an adult education instructor/director, the researcher was aware of the needs and weaknesses of CC including poverty, educational attainments, and workplace skills. Since the county supported an adult education program, as well as a two-year postsecondary institution branch housed on the same campus, a natural transition between the two programs was feasible.

The researcher examined the adult education program “from the participant’s perspectives, not the researcher’s” (Merriam, p. 7). Upon examining adult education students’ surveys indicating postsecondary education as their education goal, this researcher realized that the adult education program could no longer only provide its students with a minimum high school credential, but also must provide the educational foundations for the students to enter postsecondary education at the college level. As an inquirer in this study, the researcher chose a semi-structured inductive approach to alleviate interview bias “which occurs when the researcher’s own feelings and attitudes or the researcher’s gender, race, age, and other characteristics influence the way questions are asked or interpreted” (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002, p. 382).

From a justice lens, the researcher assumed a pivotal role in the case study. Not only is the interviewer a researcher but also an educator, collecting the data and interpreting the data. In the dual role of the researcher, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 41) acknowledge that the researcher and participant influenced each other. However, the researcher used several strategies to control for bias (e.g., member check/respondent validation, thick description, and participants' direct quotes). Ultimately, the qualitative case study would be credible and feasible for other rural programs to duplicate a similar paradigm.

Research Design

Interview Questions

For clarification and validity, a panel of colleagues provided 8 to 10 interview questions. From these questions, the researcher comprised the 15-question interview to be included in the study (see Appendix B). These colleagues were adult education directors from surrounding counties (Berkley, Kershaw, and Florence) who have worked with similar but not identical non-high school completers. Following the interview process, the researcher provided the colleagues the interviewing transcripts along with the researcher's interpretation. The panel analyzed the answers provided by the interview subjects. Each member of the panel acted as a peer reviewer. A teleconference among the researcher and colleagues determined whether additional data needed to be collected and/or if problems in the interpretation of the interview questions had occurred.

The selection of the panel was a purposeful, unique sample because each colleague has participated in the adult education program as an administrator as well as an instructor. Therefore, their information was highly valued. Panel members were

1. Lillie M. Caldwell, Ed. D., Director of Berkeley County Adult Education, Moncks Corner, South Carolina, was unique to the study because she had seventeen years of experience in adult education. Dr. Caldwell's honors included South Carolina Adult Education Director of the Year (2007), South Carolina Correctional Education Association Teacher of the Year (1994), and Dorchester 2 Adult Education Teacher of the Year (1991). Her specialized trainings include WorkKeys Assessment, Adult Education Assessment Policy Training, Special Education: Confidentiality Requirement, Best Practices: Instructional Strategies/Curriculum, GED Teacher Academy, GED Integrated On-Line Solutions, Interactive Literacy: Language and Literacy in the Lives of Even Start Families, ADEPT Evaluator/Mentor Training, and English Literacy Resource Guide Training (ESL). In addition to her adult education background, Dr. Caldwell has served as Adjunct Professor at Charleston Southern University, Charleston, SC.
2. Tilda W. Freeman was unique since she was the Director of Florence Districts 1, 4, & 5 Adult and Community Education located in Florence, South Carolina. Her degrees and certifications included an M. Ed. in Community and Occupational Programs in Education (COPE) and secondary principal certification from the University of South Carolina. Ms. Freeman's program was one of the largest adult education programs in South Carolina with an average enrollment of 1900. She was honored with the South Carolina Adult Education Directors Hall of Fame (2006), Rookie Director of the Year (2003/2004), and South Carolina Adult Education Teacher of the Year (1993-

94). Ms. Freeman served as President (2002 - 2003) and Membership Chairmen of the South Carolina Association for Adult and Continuing Education. In addition, she has presented at numerous conferences throughout the state as well as the nation (i.e., College of Charleston, SC, and ICEA Conference, Oxford, England).

3. Carolyn H. Ham, Ed. D., Director of Kershaw County Adult Education, Kershaw, South Carolina, was unique because she has 35 years of experience in adult education. Her responsibilities included teaching, planning adult programs, public relations, conducting parenting programs, supervising staff, and administration. Dr. Ham has held several official positions in the South Carolina Adult and Community Association (SCAACE) and South Carolina Association of Adult Education Directors (SCAAED). She has presented at several conferences (e.g., Adult Education Winter Conference, Adult Learning labs at national Conference in Nashville, Tennessee). Her program has averaged approximately 1000 students per year.

Participants

The purpose of the research was to study four technical college students who completed an adult education high school credential program and entered postsecondary education. Following the advice of Merriam (2001), the researcher interviewed four purposeful typical samples. The subjects were selected by the researcher and assisted by a two-year college admissions counselor to meet the following criteria: college admission dates (2004, 2005, and 2006), admission's placement (college level/developmental), adult education high school credential (HSD/GED), and availability of the student. The

subjects consisted of the following composition: one high school diploma graduate who placed in college-level education (HSDCL); one high school diploma graduate who placed in remediation (HSDR); one GED graduate who placed in college-level (GEDCL); and one GED graduate who placed in remediation (GEDR).

The Rationale for Data Collection

The researcher followed three principles of data collection: semi-structured interviews, the examination of participants' college records, and the examination of adult education student records. The researcher chose purposeful sampling to reveal differences and identified commonalities across the unit. Guba and Lincoln (1981, p. 276) stated, "Sampling is almost never representative or random but purposive, intended to exploit competing views and fresh perspective as fully as possible." The sample selection for the subjects in this study was classified as purposeful, unique samples because the subjects had participated in adult education in a student role, making their information highly valued.

Merriam stated, "What is needed is an adequate number of participants, sites, or activities to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the research" (p. 64). The researcher relied on archival records and in-depth interviews of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, the present researcher conducted interviews with four adult education graduates with four different classifications (HSDCL, HSDR, GEDCL, and GEDR).

A letter of invitation (see Appendix C) to each participant stated that the participants' anonymity would be protected by the use of the following acronyms:

HSDCL, HSDR, GEDCL, and GEDR. The researcher believed that this sample size would lead to data saturation, where no new information was forthcoming.

In-Depth Interviews

Before interviewing began, the researcher informed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Liberty University of her intentions to use interviewing in her investigation. The researcher followed an interview protocol (see Appendix D) and submitted a title and written description of the proposed investigation. The IRB informed the researcher through the Office of Research Compliance the study was granted and the interviewing could begin.

Recruitment of Subjects and Obtaining Informed Consent

Prior to the time of interview, the researcher made phone calls followed by letters of invitation to all the potential participants. The letters stated that participation in the study was voluntary, and confidentiality would be ensured. In addition, the participant could refuse to answer any one or more question(s) and/or could decide to exit the process at any time. Both forms of communication explained the purpose of the study and asked the subjects' permission to be interviewed. If the subject agreed to participate in the research, an available time to conduct the interview was set.

Although the subjects' information gave was handled confidentially, due to the nature of the study and the sample size, the researcher could not assure confidentiality. To protect the subject's anonymity, the information in the study records was kept strictly confidential. Pseudonyms (HSDCL, HSDR, GEDCL, and GEDR) were used in any write-up of this study. Data were stored in a locked school vault and were made available only to the researcher conducting the research unless the subject specifically

gave permission in writing to do otherwise. No references, which could link the subject to the study, were made in oral or written reports. In addition, the transcriber who recorded interviews signed a pledge of confidentiality (see Appendix J) to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

The researcher followed the Interview Protocol that began with an introduction, a “thank you”, and a description of the interview process. In addition, the researcher explained the study’s purpose and procedures. Each subject read and signed the informed consent form (see Appendix E) before the focused face-to-face heuristic interview began. In the semi-structured interview, the researcher presented a list of questions to each participant in advance. However, the researcher had the flexibility to explore additional information if needed to explain or understand an event. The purpose of the personal interview was to encourage the participant to relate to the research event (Walker, 1988). Interviews were essential when the case study addressed social problems (Yin, 1994). The researcher wanted to find out what was on the subject’s mind. Interviewing, or telling the story, was essential as a meaning-making process (Seidman, 1998, p. 143).

The researcher explored topics related to the research questions. To retrieve accurate information, the researcher relied on a tape recorder. This method was less distracting than taking notes. Patton (1990, p. 348) said that the tape recorder was “indispensable.” The tape recorder helped the researcher focus on the interview and observe body language during the in-depth interview. Heritage (1984) suggested the advantages of recording and transcribing:

- It helped to correct the natural limitations of our memories and of the intrusive glosses that we might place on what people say in interviews;

- It allowed more thorough examination of what people say;
- It permitted repeated examinations of the interviewees' answers;
- It opened up the data to public scrutiny by other researchers, who can evaluate the analysis that is carried out by the original researchers of the data (that is, a secondary analysis);
- It therefore helped to counter accusations that an analysis might have been influenced by a researcher's values or biases;
- It allowed the data to be reused in other ways from those intended by the original researcher—for example, in the light of new theoretical ideas or analytic strategies. (p. 238)

However, Merriam (2001) recognized that the tape recording process was tedious and time consuming.

After the interview had been transcribed, all the subjects received a letter containing a transcript of their interview followed by a phone call from the researcher. At this time, the subject had the opportunity to add, expand, and/or delete information, which validated the truthfulness of the interview process.

Field Notes

The researcher organized the data in the field while collecting data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). To alleviate the daunting pile of transcribed data, the researcher adopted the use of field notes throughout the interview process noting recurring regularities or patterns in the investigation. These field notes offered the means of capturing observations during the interviews; they supplemented the audiotape, which were used to clarify inaudible passages on the tape. The researcher sequenced the notes, starting with

vital demographic information taken from the student's school records and followed up with general open-ended questions. More in-depth questions followed. The researcher recorded key words, phrases, and sentences in entirety with the tape recorder counter number for each entry. To address the issue of the inquiry being value bound, the researcher followed the methods of Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh (2002) by providing additional room in the margins for the researcher's thoughts and feelings.

Student Records

Additional data collected from the participant's CCAE Registration Form, added important information. These forms provided demographic data such as ethnicity, years of completion in traditional high school, age at time of enrollment into adult education, marital status, birthplace, and gender. After the transcription, the researcher categorized the data from the recorded interview and the student's initial adult education registration form and then analyzed the recurrent themes and phrases.

Information or data were sorted in common groups or units (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Within the groups, similarities and recurring themes were noted and compiled. The data taken from the transcriptions, field notes, student adult education records, and student college records were organized into a descriptive narrative. From these descriptions, the researcher would be able to "summarize by trying to find relationships among the categories" (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002, p. 470).

Data Analysis

In interpretive research, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) explained that the process of the data analysis was what most distinguished qualitative from quantitative research. The purpose of the data analysis was to organize the interview into a narrative that

included a thick description (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) of the technical college student who graduated from the adult education program. The researcher organized descriptive accounts, themes, or categories that cut across the data or were in the forms of models and theories that explained the data (Merriam, p. 197). Finally, the researcher summarized and interpreted the data (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002).

Qualitative researchers have attempted to use a variety of terms to address the term “validity” as used in quantitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Merriam (1995) (who preferred the term trustworthiness) asserted that establishing validity in qualitative research depends on three concepts: (a) internal validity, (b) reliability, and (c) external validity. In this study, internal validity was ensured by using several methods: member checks, triangulation, and peer reviewer on several occasions. In addition, reliability was enhanced through triangulation and the use of an audit trail. Finally, external validity was ensured through thick description of the participants’ interviews. Hence, the researcher included several validity components that produced “truth value” for the study (Newman & Benz, 1998, p. 56).

Trustworthiness and Definitions

The basic question addressed by the notion of trustworthiness was simple: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?"(Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). If research methods were not truthful, the outcomes were of no value. Through the interpretation of oral interviews, the common truths emerged as the technical college students shared their stories. The researcher utilized several strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the

study: triangulation of data collection, member checks, audit trails, thick description, and peer reviewer.

Triangulation

Triangulation allowed the researcher to explore perceptions from different avenues. The researcher used many data sources to form the data triangulation to check for consistency of findings. Data were collected through several means in this study: participants' interviews, student records (adult education and college), and field notes. These sources of information were used as cross-checks on the interpretations, thereby adding depth to the data.

Member Checks

In member check, the researcher asked feedback from the participant who gave the testimony (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). Member-checking referred to the accuracy of the data and offered a filter for researcher and participant bias, further enhancing credibility (Erlandson et al., 1993, Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At the end of the transcription process, the research subjects received a letter containing their transcripts and translations of their interview followed by a phone call from the researcher. At this time, each subject reviewed the documents and had the opportunity to add, expand, and/or delete information, which validated the truthfulness of the interview process. The exact transcript used in the member checking process was on file and available upon request.

Audit Trail

To enhance the dependability and confirmability of the study, the researcher maintained an audit trail of materials that documented how the study was conducted,

including raw data of interviews and field notes (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). The audit trail provided a guideline for the replication of the study. In addition, the audit trail validated that the results of the research truly reflected the research problem and not the biases of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All data were accessible for verification by others.

Thick Description

Since external validity usually cannot be applied to qualitative study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that researchers should think about the transferability of the results obtained from qualitative data. Through a naturalistic qualitative study, the researcher built a thick description of the personal experiences of the technical college students. In the report, many interview passages were reported verbatim.

Peer Reviewer

Each member of the panel of colleagues acted as a peer reviewer. The purpose of peer reviewer was twofold: to provide support to the researcher and to provide an oversight role in minimizing research bias (Erlandson et al. 1993; Padgett, 1998). Thus, the researcher increased trustworthiness by working with peer reviewers (panel of colleagues) to comment on the findings. Following the interview process, the researcher provided the colleagues the interviewing transcripts along with the researcher's interpretation. The panel analyzed the answers provided by the interview subjects. To address the validity issues based on consensus, agreement among the colleagues that the description, interpretation, and evaluation would be addressed (Eisener, 1998, p. 112). A teleconference among the researcher and colleagues determined whether additional data

needed to be collected and/or problems in the interpretation of the interview questions have occurred.

The researcher outlined evidence in trustworthiness in order to make necessary comparisons and judgments about the similarities, replications, and interpretations of the study. Mischler (1990) suggested that the ultimate test of the worth of qualitative study was whether people believed the findings strongly enough to act on them. The methods of data collection and data analysis selected validated the trustworthiness of this study.

Summary

This study was grounded in the belief that the best way to extract both reliable and valid testimony from the study group was through a descriptive qualitative case study investigation. However, experts in the field of qualitative investigations including Sharron Merriam and Robert K. Yin, strongly advised that such descriptive studies at best could be challenging even for experienced researchers. With this advice in mind, the present researcher explained in detail not only the rationale for the methodology used in conducting interviews, selecting subjects, controlling for bias, and other topics but also spelled-out the underlying theory behind conducting qualitative research as well. By carrying out a systematic approach, the researcher has proven trustworthiness in Chapter 4: Findings.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

The case study design is based on the humanistic approach. An interview process allowed the participants to talk freely regarding the effects of the adult education program and their decision to enter postsecondary education. Possible benefits of the study included the improvement of poor rural economics through local adult education classes in CC. The research questions were as follows:

1. Did the adult education program at the technical college prepare its case study students for college-level education?
2. Did the case study participants perceive a link between their demographics (lack of educational attainment by family members, ethnicity, gender, and age) and their performance in the college-level coursework?

Overview of Study

The research thus far was completed with cited literature that revealed the scope and breadth of the problems in CC related to high school dropouts (lack of educational credentialing, economic disadvantage, and perpetual cycle of poverty). As stated by TC President T. Hardee (Personal communication, January 28, 2008), “The importance of economic development to CC, Lee, Kershaw, and Sumter counties is enhanced through the collaborative efforts of TC and its adult education programs.”

Current literature (Henderson & Kesson, 2004; Greene, 1995) documented that the narrative design allowed the subjects to talk freely about their educational experiences

in K-12 education, adult education, and postsecondary education. The different voices came from their educational background (personal and family), age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, and cultural background. As results of in-depth interviews, document analysis, and the use of a reflective journal, the subjects' profiles emerged. The profiles represented the characteristics of those adult education graduates who entered postsecondary education and revealed how the experience prepared them for postsecondary education.

Methods

The researcher used open-ended questions during the interview, which yielded valuable information for this report. However, Merriam (2001) stated, "The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis" (p. 42). Therefore, interviews could be subject to errors made by the researcher intentionally or unintentionally. To eliminate transcription error, the researcher used tape recordings that produced verbatim transcriptions. These documents provided the best database for analysis. The researcher found the use of tape recordings and interview logs not only helped to recall and examine what was said during the interview but also to document the subjects' behavioral (verbal and nonverbal) expressions. Finally, triangulation allowed the researcher to explore perceptions from different avenues: subjects' interviews, subjects' records (adult education and college), and field notes. These sources of information were used as cross-checks on the interpretation, adding depth to the data.

The researcher, assisted by a TC admissions counselor, selected four subjects from a population of 78 CCAE graduates who entered TC. See Appendix K. In addition, the demographics of the population are shown in Figure 6.

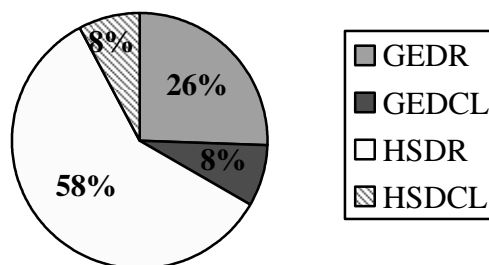


Figure 6. TC High School Graduates from CCAE (2004-2006)

According to Guba and Lincoln (1981), “Sampling is almost never representative or random but purposive, intended to exploit competing views and fresh perspective as fully as possible” (p. 276). Therefore, the researcher’s selection (a purposeful typical sample) was based on the college admission dates (2004, 2005, and 2006), the admission’s placement (college level/developmental), the subject’s adult education high school credential (HSD/GED), and the availability of the student.

For clarification and validity, a panel of colleagues from the field of adult education provided 8 – 10 interview questions for the study. The researcher selected 12 questions from this list and added an additional 3 questions to complete the 15-question interview. These colleagues were adult education directors from surrounding counties (Lillie M. Caldwell, Ed. D., Director of Berkeley County Adult Education; Tilda W. Freeman, Director of Florence Districts 1, 4, & 5 Adult and Community Education; and Carolyn H. Ham, Ed. D., Director of Kershaw County Adult Education) who worked with similar but not identical non-high school completers. Each member of the panel acted as a peer reviewer.

Prior to the interviews, the colleagues received a copy of the compiled interview questions submitted to each subject. After the interview process, each colleague received

the interview transcripts along with the researcher's interpretation of the interviews. A teleconference among the researcher and colleagues determined whether additional data needed to be collected and/or problems in the interpretation had occurred.

This chapter presented the subjects of the study according to their high school credential and college placement. The first two cases are GED graduates who were placed in remedial courses (GEDR) and college-level courses (GEDCL). The last two cases represented the HSDR and HSDCL subjects who completed a high school diploma through adult education and were placed in remediation courses and college-level courses, respectively.

Profiles of Participants

Case GEDR

The 35-year-old white male GEDR graduate was the oldest of the TC students. He was married to an elementary school teacher and had a 10-year-old daughter. He dropped out of high school after completing the 9th grade. Because his employer moved to Mexico, GEDR was classified as a displaced worker. He enrolled in adult education at 32 years of age through the Workforce Investment Act, Trade Act Assistance (WIA/TAA) which assisted employees who had lost their jobs due to a shift of production to a foreign country. After receiving his GED credential through his studies in CCAE, the graduate entered TC. He planned to complete an Associate Degree in Public Service, majoring in Criminal Justice (CRJS), a 69-semester hour program.

In fall 2008, GEDR was not enrolled in TC; however, he reported satisfaction in his current employment at Garnay Industrial Farms. The subject's COMPASS scores

were Reading 84, English 52, Pre-Algebra 40, Algebra 18, and Technology 24. GEDR attempted 42 hours of coursework and passed 33 hours. His most recent GPA was 2.2.

The Item's article entitled, "WorkKeys Makes Adults Employable" (Haley, 2006), featured GEDR. The article stated:

"I was hardheaded. I knew it all. I didn't need a high school diploma. Everywhere I went, they wanted a high school diploma or a GED," he said. "Someone recommended it [CCAIE] and I went. This is what I need to do," he said, "if you're willing to learn, they'll teach you. [GEDR] said he was leery at first [entering adult education] but the students and teachers made him feel welcome and offered him an opportunity to learn and build his self-esteem along the way. With a GED in hand, [GEDR] said, "If I can do it, anyone can."

Although he confided that he was nervous about returning to school, he later began to like it, and spoke favorably about his classes. He used such phrases as ". . . there was nothing that I did not like about it (adult education). Everything was good" and "They (adult education teachers) made sure I was up to the level that I needed to be before I entered the college field." He made several comments regarding his respect for the adult education instructors:

"I had a fear of tests until, like I say, I entered adult ed, and they (teachers) assured me that it was no use to fear (tests)."

"Well, instructors, like I say, they really showed me, and helped me out in my weak levels and without them I couldn't do it."

"I would say that all of the teachers are doing a fine job."

“They (the teachers) were concerned and wanted to make sure that I got my GED and helped me out.”

“. . . I was very prepared and I was very confident.”

“Without adult ed, I would not be where I am today.”

According to GEDR, the adult education program prepared him for postsecondary college through addressing his weaknesses, giving him study skills including test-taking skills, and giving him confidence through his coursework. During registration into adult education, students are assessed with the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE). The TestMate TABE software program integrates an optical scanning utility, which performs data management with the scanned TABE tests (Bookette Software Company, 2001). The software produces prescription modules that provide a database of study-based products correlated to TABE. This module gave a detailed student study plan. GEDR said,

Those little tests [TABE] that you [gave] when I first started, helped to find out what our weaknesses were. Then they started from there to give us study guides [prescriptions] for whatever we needed. Instructions [prescription sheets], I was one who never followed instructions as far as any kind of guide or anything, but now I have seen that if you do it [prescriptions], you will come out on top.

As he entered adult education, he admitted, “I was afraid of tests. Until I entered adult ed and they [instructors] assured me that, it was no use to fear tests.” In reference to the TABE assessments and practice GED tests, GEDR stated, “They [adult education instructors] gave me practice tests and tests. They made sure I was up to the level that I

needed to be before I entered the college field. The more I went over and over it [practice test], the easier it got to take a test.”

Case GEDCL

This subject was a 29-year-old, white female. She was married and a mother of two children [8- and 10-year-old]. She stated she did not enjoy attending classes with teenagers (in traditional high school and adult education). She left high school during 9th grade without receiving any high school units. Not only did this subject receive her GED through the adult education program; she also ranked in the top 5% in the South Carolina GED tests and received an Honorary GED Certificate. After receiving her GED, she entered TC pursuing an associate degree in Engineering Technology, majoring in Environmental Engineering Technology (ENVR), a 72-semester hour program. GEDCL attends college part-time, and her GPA was 3.69.

Times Extra's article entitled “CSD2 and Adult Ed offer CC parents an Even Start” (Gellatly, 2005) featured GEDCL. Highlights of the article were as follows:

Parents who did not have the chance to finish their high school education are offered a second chance to excel. [GEDCL], a 26-year-old mother of two, finished last semester and passed with distinction. [GEDCL] received her GED in the top 5 % in the state. She received special recognition for her score. A non-traditional student, [GEDCL] won a scholarship and is now juggling children, a husband, and a home. “I knew I could do it, but I was shocked when I saw my score,” she said. “I hope I can complete my [associate’s] degree, get a good job and then come back to complete a bachelor’s degree.

GEDCL worked approximately 20 miles from CCAE where the interview took place. Whenever the interview was scheduled, GEDCL insisted on meeting at CCAE. Asked if traveling so far would present a problem, GEDCL commented, “No problem.” Although the first scheduled interview was cancelled due to her work schedule, GEDCL kept the interview assignment the next week even though it required her to drive through inclement weather conditions.

In fall 2007, GEDCL was employed as a lab technician for an environmental waste management company, Giant Resource Recovery. She stated, “Actually I got into that [lab technician] based on my grades at the college. We sample it [hazardous waste]. I work in the actual lab where we actually run all the nasty samples. I actually had to change my clothes before I came here because I had spilled a sample. They bring it [hazardous waste] to us, and we run the analysis to see if it is going to go into the fuel program or you know into the land field or waste water.” She stated that this job has given her experience in a laboratory environment. After receiving her associate degree, she wants to continue her education in field of chemistry.

As the interview began, GEDCL talked about her reasons for dropping out of high school. GEDCL said,

Well, the top reason I dropped out was important to me then, but now I look back on it and it was really stupid and a stupid reason, but I just didn't like school. I did not like getting up in the morning. I know that sounds terrible. But I was only 14 years old [beginning of the 9th grade] when I dropped out. Back then that was the most important thing. You know, I wanted to sleep in; I didn't want to get up and go to school. I was lazy. I made good grades when I was in school, I

just didn't want to go. I would be (on the) A-B Honor Roll. I was in advanced math. I was really shy in school. I did not like to talk. I mean, I got along good with everybody. Nobody picked on me or anything like that. I was just a quiet, shy person, one of the bookworms. I did my work and, you know, I just wasn't very sociable with other people. I would talk to them if they spoke to me.

My mom enrolled me in adult education back then. I was there a few months and then I dropped out of that too. My best friend dropped out [of high school] with me. (She entered adult education). She [my friend] is doing real good. She actually stuck with it [adult education] and went straight out of adult education to TC and got her nursing degrees.

GEDCL wanted to attend postsecondary education; she said it would never have happened without the adult education program. During the interview, GEDCL replied what she liked the best about adult education was, "The people. I liked coming in talking to everybody. I actually got over my shyness." She stated, "[GED instructor] was pretty cool. He made it easy to learn." In addition, GEDCL had a cousin who attended the classes with her and gave her moral support. She stated, "That kind of helped me a lot, too, having somebody (in class) that I knew. I think we kind of helped each other out, as far as doing the whole school thing. You know she graduated the same time I did."

GEDCL smiled and stated that when she entered college, she did not have to take developmental courses. She responded, "I went straight into the 101 levels. I think that I got an A in Math 101 and B in Math 155." GEDCL added, "Since I have been in college, I have not made anything less than a B in any of my classes." GEDCL planned to complete her Environmental Engineering Technology Associate Degree in August 2008.

Her plans included attaining a bachelor's degree in chemistry. She stated, "Where I am working now, once you have been there for a year, they will help pay 80 or 90% of the tuition." She added that she did not think that she would have any financial problems in continuing her education since she had qualified for three scholarships while attending TC.

Reflecting on her learning style, GEDCL said, "Well, I think I personally did good self-pace. I mean, [my instructor] was there if I had questions, I would ask him and he would come over." In addition, she reflected on the bond between the adult education students and the instructor. "We were all adults and [the instructor] felt like we did not come there for him to tell us what to do. If I needed help, he would help us." Her memories of her instructor included not only caring for his students but a genuine concern for the community. GEDCL concluded, "He [the instructor] even told me whenever I left, if I could get my sister to come, that he would help her as much as he could - get her motivated to do what she needed to do."

As far as the COMPASS test (TC placement test), GEDCL thought "it was kind of easy. But, I mean, I had just come straight out of adult education. I would recommend that if you [graduate from] adult education, that you go. . . and take the COMPASS." (See Table 8 for result of the COMPASS placement scores.)

Case HSDR

This subject was a 29-year-old white female. She was a single parent with a 4-year-old child and a lifetime resident of CC. HSDR received her high school diploma through CCAE. After graduation, she entered TC to pursue a degree in the medical field. HSDR's postsecondary background at TC was one semester in medical assistant and

three semesters in early childhood development. After two years of remediation courses, she withdrew from TC. She commented, “It was too much on me raising a child and trying to work and to go school. It was too much and I just could not continue.” When asked if she planned to return to college, she replied, “Maybe once she [her daughter] gets in school. And the only reason that I would really go back then is to keep up with her as far as all the new technology. I wouldn’t go back really for a degree.” Her GPA was .75 at the time of withdrawal.

HSDR began her interview with reasons for withdrawing from her traditional high school. She stated, “My number one reason for dropping out of high school was because I thought I was smarter than my parents.” She continued by saying, “And I knew it all! I knew it all! I decided that I was going to take on the world by myself without a high school diploma, GED, or anything else for that matter. That is probably the number one reason, and then it just got too tough at home, and I thought that I was going to survive on my own without my parents at 18 years old.” Then she said, “I was an A-B student. I was not failing anything. I was doing good in school.” HSDR continued to emphasize that her home life played a major role in her leaving high school. “It was just my home life wasn’t at the time what I wanted it to be.” She added, “But to look back on it now, it was what it needed to be in order to make me the person I am now. But, at 18-years-old, you don’t see it like that. Mama and Daddy are wrong.”

As the interview shifted to what she liked best about adult education, HSDR said, “I would honestly have to say the best thing that helped me was not only the one-on-one with my fellow teachers, but it was the emotional thing as well. I mean it was like it seemed that they were more attached to me than in high school.” She continued, “In high

school, I felt like I was a number. Adult ed. was, you know, if you are not there, they are calling to find out where you are and why you are not in [class]. They cared! Y'all cared!" Unfortunately, HSDR did not like the fact that the adult education classes began at the same time as the K-12 schools (8:00 am). What she disliked the most about adult education was, "Getting up at 8:00 in the morning!"

Gellatly (*The Manning Times*, 2004) quoted HSDR at her CCAE graduation, "You need to have your diploma to get a quality job today. The teachers here are very thorough and if you put forth the effort, they will help you a great deal." HSDR stated, "Adult Ed. strived on making sure you knew what you were doing before you could move on to something else. And that the quality I thought was just really good." She continued, "I wish there had been some type of typing class involved [in the adult education program]. I think that everybody needs to at least have one [typing] unit of it. Even in the world today, everything is going into computers. (HSDR's transcript indicates that she received a word processing unit in 1998-99 school year. South Carolina Department of Education requires a minimum of one unit in computer science to receive a high school diploma.)

Case HSDCL

This case study was unique because the adult education program suspended HSDCL for disciplinary actions. However, she did re-enroll the next year in order to complete her high school requirements. Even though her opinion of the adult education program was not favorable, she did recognize that the program gave her a second chance to receive a high school diploma and motivated her to enter postsecondary education. After a broken interview appointment and several missed phone calls, the single, 21-year-

old subject called the researcher to schedule an appointment for the interview. The participant was the youngest of the study group. She was the first in her family to enter postsecondary education.

In the interview, HSDCL explained to the researcher the reasons for choosing CCAE:

The number 1 [reason] - I didn't have enough credits to graduate at my regular school. I knew that ahead of time. I was going ahead and go my senior year. But I was like there was no use. I could come to adult ed. and get the same amount of credits in a shorter amount of time and I could get done faster. But I knew I was not going to graduate, I knew that ahead of time.

Number 2 [reason] was that I just could not make myself go to school. It was like I was forcing myself to be there. I did not have a problem learning the material once I got there, it was getting there. I don't know. It was so boring to me. Actually, I would go to the parking lot, sit in the parking lot at school and be on time to go to class in the morning and not go to school. I was already there, but I could not make myself go in the building. Like I would get there and say, 'Na! I don't feel like it today' and just leave.

Honestly, I stayed in a lot of trouble when I was in high school. I am real talkative and loud, and stuff. I was the one always cracking jokes and cutting up and stuff. I don't know. High school was just a bore to me. It was not that I felt it was difficult to learn the material they were trying to teach me. It was just boring to be there. I just really did not care about school. You know when people

are younger, they make mistakes and everything. But honestly, I did not care about learning then. I guess because it was never really a challenge for me.

In addition, HSDCL stated that she needed additional 2 or 3 credits to graduate with her class, so she opted to complete her requirements through the adult education program. She admitted that in high school, “I can sit back and coast through classes and still pull a ‘C’ without even trying. I never really had to try too hard.” HSDCL revealed about her academic achievements in high school, “I never failed a grade. I was in the top of my class up until my 10th grade year and then I don’t know! You know you start hanging out with your friends and partying!”

As a comparison of the two programs, adult education and traditional high school, HSDCL reported negative experiences with the curriculum at the adult education program, “I am going to be honest. Adult ed. [curriculum] is so watered down.” She expressed that the science units were comparable to an 8th grade unit. Conversely, she admitted that her placement test (COMPASS) qualified for a college-level algebra course. In reference to her TC algebra course, she added, “I think I did fairly good on it.”

I had more of a personal relationship with them [high school teachers]. Whereas here, it was just mainly they teach you what they want to teach you. They really didn’t care to know anything other than that [not] like your teachers in high school. Like I was at ECHS [high school]. I have never gone to any other high school so they were like they knew me, and they knew my face, and they knew my brothers that had gone to school there, and it was just more of a personal relationship that you had with them. And if I came to them with a problem, and

they really felt like it was legit, after I explained myself, they would probably be more understanding and be more willing to help me.

In reference to the instructors, HSDCL expressed her frustration in the adult education program. She described the learning lab as follows:

It was math people [students], English people [students], science people [students], all in the same room. And really you can't blame the instructors because they were going around helping an English student and then helping a science student and then a math student. And you know that we are all human and they might not have been strong in that area as much as they were in another one.

She continued to explain,

Yes, that is what I am [a self-learner]. I don't [think my learning style was provided at adult education]. Because mainly it was just so hurried, I don't want anybody pushing work on me. I like to learn about stuff that I am interested in. And if you are a good teacher you will establish some form of interest for most of your students. I feel like if you [teacher] have a passion about it [subject], it will transfer over [to the student].

When asked if the adult education program prepared her for postsecondary education, HSDCL had mixed opinions. HSDCL commented favorably that the technology and online courses offered at the adult education program helped to prepare her for postsecondary education. She added,

Honestly, in that aspect, it [adult education online courses] did help because you get used to learning that way. Like for some people it is actually difficult to take

an online class and have them like to do so much work on the computer. Like when I got here to college, I had to take an online class, and I was familiar with having to learn that way. So, it did help me. Everything is technological now. A kid would rather work on a computer than pencil or paper now because that is what they do whenever they get home. You know they spend hours in front of the computer anyway.

At other times in the interview, she said, “Adult ed. made me more motivated to want to go to college. Because I saw people in there like old people [trying to receive their GED].” Another positive factor about CCAE was its location on the TC campus. HSDCL noted that the familiarity of the campus helped in her decision to attend postsecondary. Because of her decision to enroll in college, she said,

I was already here. With it being at the same site that the college classes were actually taken at. . . .I was already familiar with the school, familiar the people involved with it here. . . .I was already coming here to take the adult ed. classes. Why not come and take some other classes. It was just convenient. It was not like a new world that I had to venture out into. I was already here.

HSDCL has changed her major several times since entering TC. She shared that she does not know her career direction or education goals. “Whenever I first started [TC], I was going into business and then I changed my major to Associate in Science. I feel like I am here working on [a degree] and I don’t know what direction I am headed.” She added that her plans include receiving an associate’s degrees from TC and a bachelor’s degree from a 4-year university, probably the University of South Carolina.

She shared that her twin brother is in the Air Force, and she may consider the military as a career option.

Summary of Interview Responses

In interpretive research, Merriam (2001) explained that understanding the interviewing process as well as the multiple realities and truths that were generated would lead to theories about the phenomenon itself. Therefore, neutrality and uniformity in the interview process were essential. Merriam explained, “These findings can be in the form of organized descriptive accounts, themes, or categories that cut across the data, or in the forms of models and theories that explain the data” (p. 178). To create categories, the researcher employed the constant comparative method of data analysis. For example, the researcher examined each case for comparative groups or units. Next, she compared the units for recurring keywords, phrases, and descriptions. The researcher named categories that the data were placed under with the categories reflecting the purpose of the study and making sense of the research. These categories included the following: choices for withdrawing from school, the decision to enroll, educational background, quality of instruction, learning style, choices for entering postsecondary education, best experiences, least satisfying experiences, high degree of camaraderie, and quality of technology. The main themes that surfaced throughout the interviews were sacrifice, willingness to talk, redemption, fulfilled dreams, and appreciation for the adult education program/teachers. Finally, the researcher organized data into a descriptive narrative from which inferences were drawn to explain the adult education graduates’ experiences in adult education while completing a high school credential and preparing for postsecondary education.

Choices for Withdrawing from Traditional School

Withdrawing from traditional high school was a critical problem in a county where over 40% of its students are dropouts (Education Week, 2008). This problem contributed to economic and social burdens of the county's citizens where the per capita income in 1999 was 60% of the United States average (S. C. Young Adult Count, 2002). Since the level of parents' educational attainment significantly influenced their children's academic success, a vicious cycle of illiterate adults needed to be addressed by the school systems, both traditional and adult education providers (Annie Casey Foundation, 2005).

This study revealed various factors contributing to the choice to withdraw from high school. Two students, GEDCL and HSDR, disliked going to school at 8:00 am. In addition, HSDR had problems at home with her parents and left home. GEDR and HSDCL did not see the importance of education. As GEDR stated, "I was young and dumb." HSDCL added that she could not make herself go to class. She would drive to school, sit in the parking lot prior to class, and then decide not to go to class. These actions resulted in HSDCL not graduating with her classmates.

The Decision to Enroll

The income levels of the citizens of CC strongly correlated with the educational levels and skills of its people. With 40% of its citizens classified as illiterate adults (Annie Casey Foundation, 2001), many companies found that it is difficult to hire new employees who possessed the basic education or workplace skills needed for the job. In order to find employment and/or remain employed, many of the county's workers and school dropouts chose to return to school through the adult education program.

The subjects' decisions to enroll in adult education varied. GEDR experienced job loss from a local factory. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) provided the funds for GEDR to enroll into adult education and complete his GED. With a loss of income, GEDR realized that adult education "helped [him] get better prepared for today's society as far as finding a job and as far as a career." GEDCL was working full-time and was a mother of two children. She returned to school to receive a degree so that she would qualify for a higher paying job. The younger subjects, HSDR and HSDCL, did not have a break in their educational process but transferred from the traditional high school program to the adult education program. Their decision to enroll in adult education was socially motivated; they wanted to receive their high school diploma as their classmates and friends had done.

Educational Background

The subjects' withdrawals from school were not due to their academic inability. For example, none of the subjects had to repeat a grade while attending high school. GEDCL and HSDR stated that they were honor students (A/B) and HSDCL said that she was in the top of her class through the 10th grade. In addition, GEDR noted that he was the first in his family to withdraw from school. All of the subjects were the first in their families to enter postsecondary education; however, both GEDR and HSDR have withdrawn from college.

Quality of Instruction

The CCAE staff of two full-time and twenty part-time instructors met South Carolina Department of Education certification requirements and possessed training and education relevant to the area of adult education. These highly qualified individuals were

diverse in cultural, racial, economic, and social backgrounds. Since the program operated year-round, they instructed on a 12-month basis.

Regarding the quality of instruction, GEDR, GEDCL, and HSDR agreed that the instruction which included test-taking tips, practice tests, study guides, one-on-one, and group instruction prepared them for college-level education. These subjects benefited from learning how to follow study guides and instructions. GEDR stated, "I had a fear of tests." He stated that the practice tests with study guides gave him the skills to prepare for tests. GEDR added that he could not have passed the GED without the instructors helping him in his weak areas. GEDCL praised the Even Start coordinator and her GED instructor. Their approach to the adult education program was not one of seeking a terminal degree but a stepping-stone to postsecondary education. As GEDCL stated, [the instructor taught] "as if we actually went to college." HSDR stated, "Adult ed. strives on making sure you know what you are doing before you could move to the next step. The quality, I thought, was absolutely fabulous." Contrary to these positive remarks about the quality of instruction, HSDCL asserted that the instructors were in too much of a hurry to get students in and out of the program. In addition, she stated that the instructors spent most of their time dealing with discipline problems and not instructing.

Learning Style

All four of the subjects agreed that the self-paced learning lab met their educational learning style. When asked how they would describe their learning style, GEDR mentioned, "I would be self-paced," and said, "I think I personally did good self-paced." HSDR responded, "I think self-paced was excellent." She enjoyed controlling how fast she could complete the assignments and courses. She added, "I finished 10

credits and 3 exits in 2 years.” In reference to self-paced, HSDCL stated, “Yes definitely!” She explained that she liked to learn on her own.

Choices for Entering Postsecondary Education

To enter postsecondary education was a first for all four subjects. They were the first in their families to continue to college. All the subjects agreed that the instructors encouraged them to take the placement test (COMPASS) with TC whenever they completed their program of study. Not only did the instructors make the appointments for COMPASS tests, they escorted the students to the TC admission counselor’s office for testing.

Various factors contributed to the choice to enter postsecondary education. One individual, GEDR, admitted that the adult education program gave him the confidence to enter postsecondary education. He stated that he was encouraged by his wife, a teacher who has a bachelor’s degree. GEDCL, another student, gained the confidence to continue to postsecondary education after receiving special recognition on her GED scores (top 5%) and a scholarship to TC. Her GED teacher, a former college professor, was an encourager. He would say, “When you go to college. . .” GEDCL said that her teacher helped her prepare for the college courses while waiting for the results of her GED tests. HSDCL chose to attend TC because she was familiar with the campus that housed the adult education program. She admitted that she loves to learn but does not have a direction for a career choice.

Best Experiences

The subjects’ favorite experiences at adult education are varied. GEDCL and HSDR indicated their relationship with their instructor(s) and the classroom atmosphere

were their best experiences at adult education. One participant liked the one-on-one relationship with her teacher. She stated, “It [adult education] was the emotional thing!” GEDR appreciated the curriculum that helped him “refresh [his] memory.” In addition, he stated that the program returned his confidence in himself after he lost his job. Although HSDCL did not enjoy the school climate, she did enjoy the option of open enrollment: “You could come and go as you please. [The work] is done at your own pace.” In addition, being involved with the adult education population (all ages) inspired and motivated HSDCL to continue her educational journey. She explained that adult education made her more motivated to want to go to college. When she saw an 80-year-old student attending the GED classes, HSDCL stated, “I would sit there and look at her. It is not like I had some grand epiphany while watching her roll by with her book bag. But she motivated me to want to come back to college.” HSDCL added, “There is still a chance for redemption. I am definitely glad that I came to adult ed.”

Least Satisfying Experiences

The responses from the interview questions about what they liked least about adult education were varied. GEDR expressed that his experience in adult education created such camaraderie with his classmates that he hated to leave them after he received his GED. In reference to combining two sections (17 – 20 year olds and 21 year olds and older) for group classes, GEDCL said, “[She] would feel uncomfortable when I would go to the other classroom with the 17 – 21 year olds.” HSDR laughed and said that getting up in the morning to attend class was her worst thing about returning to school because as she stated, “I am not a morning person and 8:00 in the morning just did not set with me.” HSDCL did not like the classroom environment. She stated that there were many

disciplinary problems at the adult education program and many students came to class unprepared. The researcher notes that HSDCL was suspended from class for 6 months for not following the classroom rules.

Although two of the subjects stated that they did not like to go to class in adult education and/or traditional high school at 8:00 in the morning and did not consider themselves as “morning people,” CCAE addressed this issue by providing classes through a variety of flexible schedules (morning and evening classes). Transportation was a critical factor in the rural county where there is little or no public transportation; however, transportation was available at five sites throughout the county. In addition, the Official GED testing is administered at TC/CCAЕ campus 3 times per year. Therefore, the subjects completed all of their requirements (coursework and testing) at CCAE’s main site.

High Degree of Camaraderie

GEDR stated that his instructors were very concerned about his educational goals; they provided the instructions and guidance that he needed to earn his GED and proceed to postsecondary education. GEDCL referred to her instructors and Even Start coordinator as the ones that she could talk with about her problems (i.e., transportation and childcare). She stated whenever she dropped out of high school, not one of her teachers tried to get in touch with her. HSDR best described her experience and closeness to her instructor and classmates: “Well, let’s put it this way. I cried my graduation day. I cried. It was just emotional. We were more attached to each other and that means a bunch.”

Unfortunately, due to HSDCL's suspension from adult education for 6 months, her experiences at adult education were not memorable. She did not bond to the other classmates nor with her instructors. She stated she did not want to consider her classmates as, ". . . troubled, because I have been referred to as that." However, her classmates motivated her, and she was glad that she completed her high school diploma program through the adult education program.

Quality of Technology

All CCAE sites were equipped with computer labs. The adult education program integrated technology into 90% of its curriculum. CCAE found that a computer-based program sustained adult learners when they were able to learn at their own pace. The adult learners often found mastering computer skills while mastering content skills an exciting method of learning. The computer programs were customized so that the adult learner's individual needs and interests were met.

CCAЕ encouraged learners to improve their academic skills and computer skills outside the classroom via the Internet. The program provided research-based Internet software: WIN, KeyTrain, GED online, MySkillsTutor.com, and Kuder assessment. In addition, some high school diploma units were web-based, including Physics, Botany, and Astronomy.

All of the subjects unanimously agreed that computer skills learned in adult education benefited them when they enrolled in TC. Consequently, these students passed the technology portion of the COMPASS tests (see Table 8). GEDR stated, "Well, back when I was going to school, they did not have all of these computers and basically everything was handwritten. Now, as far as technology, I didn't really know much about

computers until I started adult ed.” HSDCL reiterated the benefits of working in the adult education computer lab: “For some people, it is actually difficult to take an online class. When I got to college, I had to take an online class and I was familiar with having to learn that way. So, it did help me.”

Common Themes

The common themes in this study deepened the understanding of what led students to enter adult education and proceed to postsecondary education. The researcher identified the following themes: sacrifice, willingness to talk, redeemed, fulfilling dreams, and appreciation of the adult education program/teachers.

Sacrifice

There was indeed a theme of sacrifice throughout this study. While the participants welcomed the opportunity to talk and share their stories, they all made sacrifices. They made sacrifices from the time they entered the adult education program to their entry into postsecondary education. These hardships included time from their families, travel expenses, and loss of income. A careful reading of each case reflected the disappointments and the hardships felt from withdrawing from high school and the loss of their teenage cohorts. However, adult education offered them a second chance: a chance to get a better job, a chance to support their family, a chance to seek a career not a job, a chance to have the educational ability to help their children, a chance to enter postsecondary education, and a chance to be a role model for their children.

Willingness to Talk

Another theme that emerged during the interview was the willingness to share their stories. Each subject volunteered to drive to the CCAE for the interview, which was

an inconvenience since all of the subjects had to arrive after their workday. GEDCL stated, "I drove from actually downtown Sumter with the rain. One of the tires on my car was messed up, so I was scared to go really fast and I had to stop and get gas." HSDCL volunteered, "I have been [putting] you off. I am not taking any classes here this summer and I really did not want to even look at this place." GEDCL hoped that more people knew about the adult education program. She added, "I think that if more people realize that it is not as complicated as it is, they would actually come to school and try to do better for themselves."

Redeemed

"Redeemed" was the overarching theme of the present study. Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary (2001) defined "redeemed" as "to free from what distresses or harms; to change for the betterment." The subjects expressed the theme of redemption as an agent of change. These graduates expressed redemption through the belief that education would increase their choices of jobs and their income. For example, GEDCL stated that before receiving her GED credential, "I was actually working as an assistant manager at a local department store. I had less money than I do now, and the job was harder. It is amazing what an education can do for you. You can get a good job." GEDCL stated that she got despondent when she could not attend school fulltime because of her employment and family obligations, but she said, "I am sticking with it." GEDR, the unemployed industry worker, needed adult education to fulfill the need for a career change. He repeatedly said that he did not want to go back to the assembly line, and he wanted a job outdoors.

Since HSDR and HSDCL remained in traditional high school until their senior year, their primary goal for returning to school was to receive their high school diploma as did their high school classmates. These subjects were the younger of the two groups and did not want to be associated with adult education students who were portrayed as troubled students with discipline/behavioral problems. When HSDCL was asked if her parents would be proud of her when she finishes TC, she responded, “Yes, they will be. I think they are just scared now though because I have a tendency to want to give up on things. I think that as long as you are still living that there is a chance at redeeming yourself. So maybe this is what I am doing here [TC].” Through the adult education program, as HSDCL stated, “[they] were redeemed;” changed for the better.

Fulfilling Dreams

The researcher felt many dreams were not being fulfilled when South Carolina’s dropout rate for the class of 2005 was over 40% (ranked 48th) (Diplomas Count, 2008) and over 20% of the people in the research area lived in poverty (South Carolina Community Profiles, 1999). However, the researcher was impressed with the non-traditional students, especially the older subjects in the study, who were willing to return to school for a change in their lives (i.e., employment, increase in income, or eligibility to advance to postsecondary education). The four subjects were the first in their families to enter postsecondary education. This was a considerable feat considering CC had approximately a 40% dropout rate with only 20% of its population entering postsecondary education (Education Week, 2008; U. S. Census, 2000).

GEDCL related how uncomplicated it was to return to school. She said that having children and a job made the return more difficult; however, the adult education

offered classes during the day and/or night. Proudly, GEDCL stated that since she received her GED credential, she increased her hourly wage. From stocking shelves at a department store to chemically testing at waste management, GEDCL made a change in careers that has increased her income.

GEDR stated that he had apprehensions about returning to school and earning his GED credential. He stated that the change from factory work to schoolwork was a difficult one. He added, "I was scared to take that step." As soon as he received his GED credential, he did not hesitate to enter TC. GEDR stated that the encouragement he received while working on his GED helped him to realize the need for a postsecondary education. Within two years, GEDR, with a 9th grade education, left the assembly line, entered adult education, received his GED, and enrolled in TC.

HSDR is a devoted mother who spoke of her child several times during the interview. She wanted to be a role model and needed a high school diploma to fulfill her educational goal. She was a dedicated student. In order to complete her high school requirements, she passed her Exit Exam two days after giving birth to her first and only child. She said, "Everyone said, 'What are you doing here [taking an Exit Examination]?' Well, I had to get this done." However, her determination did not proceed throughout postsecondary education. She withdrew from TC but was employed with the South Carolina Water Fowl Association. HSDR boasted that her employment provided her an income, health benefits, and a retirement plan. She spoke, "I enjoy it [her job]. I am my own boss. I go and come as I please. It is a good job. It is a 40-hours a week job."

Appreciation of the Adult Education Program/Teachers

GEDR, GEDCL, and HSDR showed their appreciation to the teachers by attending their adult education graduation with their family and friends. After the ceremonies, these graduates introduced their families to their teachers. During their interviews, they reiterated how much they appreciated the adult education program and the face-to-face instruction.

One subject said that his computer skills learned through the adult education program were equal to the traditional K-12 graduates. In addition, he stated the adult education teachers were very concerned and wanted to make sure that his educational goals were met. GEDCL mentioned that her teacher provided support, encouragement, and educational guidance. In addition, the Even Start coordinator, a mentor, provided GEDCL more than financial funding to attend class. GEDCL stated, "I would talk to her [Even Start coordinator] if there was a problem. If I had a problem getting to class, she would work around that. You can't really go to your teachers in high school and talk about anything." Referring to her graduation ceremony, HSDR said, "I cried. It was just emotional, we [she and her teachers] were more attached to each other – that means a bunch."

In contrast to the other subjects, HSDCL only attended adult education a few months to complete her high school requirements. Her experience at the adult education program was not comparable to the personal relationships that she had acquired at her traditional high school. HSDCL stated, "They [traditional K-12 teachers] would probably be more understanding and be more willing to help me." However, HSDCL

was appreciative of the adult education program for providing a high school diploma program.

Summary of TC Statistics / Demographic Characteristics

Data from the subjects' TC statistics and adult education registration forms allowed the researcher to examine relationships between the subjects' TC statistics with their demographic characteristics as documented in Tables 8 and 9. Some of the issues emerged from the findings related specifically to college placement, ethnicity, and program of study.

Table 8

Subjects' Statistics at TC

		GEDR	GEDCL	HSDR	HSDCL
COMPASS					
	Reading	84	99	49*	96
	English	52*	98	58*	81
	Pre-Algebra	40*	51	29*	54
	Algebra	18*	29	15*	21
	Technology	24	27	25	25
Hours					
	Attempted	42	58	39	56
	Passed	33	49	12	47
GPA		2.2	3.69	.75	2.42
Status					
	Enrolled (E)		E		E
	Withdrawn (W)	W		W	

* Developmental/remedial placement

TABLE 9
Demographic Characteristics of Sample- Registration Form

Demographic of Population	GEDR	GEDCL	HSDR	HSDCL
Age at Enrollment (years)	32	24	18	17
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity	White	White	White	White
Status	Married	Single	Divorced	Single
Number of Dependents	1	2	1	0
Last School Attended	Public	Public	Private	Public
Social Support	Employment Preparation	Homemaker/ Single Parent	None	None
Length of time in program	6.5 months	15 months	42 months	12 months
Grade Completion	9th	8th	11 th without exit exams	11 th w/ exit exams

College Placement

One of the issues that emerged from these statistics was the subjects (GEDCL and HSDCL) who scored college-level on five of the COMPASS categories (see Table 8) and had the higher GPAs. However, the subjects who were placed in developmental/remedial courses due to their COMPASS scores had the lower GPAs and had withdrawn from TC. Due to the small sample size, more research was needed before the college placement could be a predictor for the completion rate at postsecondary education.

Ethnicity

Due to the small sample size, ethnic diversity was not presented in this study; whites were the only race represented. This was not the researcher's intent, as there is no bias. However, in the rural community, the availability of subjects was a concern. Many of the students in the population could not be located due to a change in address and/or phone numbers.

Program of Study

Another issue in the study was the comparison of the two programs in the study, HSD and GED. The study needed to ask whether one of these programs was superior to the other in student preparation for entering at college-level coursework. As shown in Table 8, one of the GED students was placed in remediation (GEDR); and one was placed in college-level (GEDCL) courses. GEDCL had re-enrolled at TC for fall 2008 and had passed with an “A” or “B” in all coursework. She has a 3.69 GPA. From the two high school diploma students, the student who was placed in remediation (HSDR) has withdrawn. However, HSDCL continued her enrollment at TC with a 2.42 GPA. Although this was a small sample size, the findings indicated there was not a distinction between programs of study but in the preparedness for college-level coursework.

Demographic of Sample

This study has been unable to demonstrate which demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, status, number of dependents, last school attended, social support, length in adult education, and grade completion) better prepared the subject for college-level education. Therefore, further studies are needed to address these variables.

Mission Statement of CCAE

CCAЕ has been a comprehensive, public adult education program dedicated to providing a positive learning environment that fostered student success, encouraged life-long education, and met changing community needs. The program served primarily the regions of CC School Districts 1, 2, and 3 and conferred high school diplomas. The adult education programs and student-supported services provided CC citizens, businesses, industries, and communities with quality, affordable, accessible, customer-responsive

high school diploma credentials, workforce training, literacy, and skills upgrade specifically designed to develop the foundation of personal growth, economic development, and an improved quality of life.

What Was Important but Not Stated by Subjects

What was not stated in the study was equally as important to the study as what was stated. The researcher found that only the associate degree program and courses were presented to the subjects during the TC orientation. None of the subjects received information about the Career Training and Development Program (continuing education or short-term certificate programs). As an example, Gray (2007) had an interesting insight into the public's lack of understanding concerning the role of the two-year technical college. The researcher found this interesting because it limited what courses and programs of study were available to incoming students. P. Gray stated (personal communication, June 24, 2008):

During my investigation, a truth surfaced that people do not understand the role of the two-year technical college. That is, they see the two-year colleges as places that grant associate degrees only. However, through questioning and asking participants who were associated with TC, it offers over fifty programs classified as continuing education, certificate and diploma programs as well. These programs are less in duration than degree programs, with some as short as three weeks in length such as truck driving, and six- to thirteen-weeks as in welding.

However, what I found most important from the participant's testimony is that the beginning pay scale for the continuing education completers is more than double the per capita income from CC. I found the entry level for Michael to be

\$1000 per week as a truck driver and \$1200 per week for Chad as a welder. All the graduates are placed in a program of study. Admission to continuing education programs does not require a high school diploma, meaning all are eligible. However, this fact concerning an open enrollment policy is not known or understood by the public in a poor county with a high school dropout rate; and unfortunately and for unknown reasons, the open-enrollment policy is not publicized by TC. The only option for potential students at two-year colleges is the academic degree track. The potentially rewarding, continuing education choices are not considered since students are not aware they exist. Not all students are alike in ability or interests and would be better served if they were informed of these other classes.

Finally, this type of truth finding (the role of the technical colleges) is typical of what is possible in qualitative, narrative studies. After all, many answers are possible but when all participants' input come to the same conclusions, validity and reliability cannot be ignored. (P. Gray, 2008).

This chapter presented an overview of the study, a detailed account of how the research data were gathered and recorded, a review of the interview questions, and the researcher's own experience of the adult education program. This case study attempted to relate the adult learners' experiences from their withdrawal from traditional high school to their personal experiences in adult education. In addition, the subjects shared their thoughts and feelings on relevant issues pertaining to their transition to postsecondary education. A discussion of the results in Chapter 4, along with conclusions and recommendations for future research, has been provided in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Results, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of the qualitative research was to study four technical college students who completed an adult education high school credential program and entered postsecondary education. The following themes are summarized and discussed: findings, implications, limitations, and recommendations. Gersten (2001) summarized the value of qualitative research accurately when he said that “despite the rich insights they often provide, descriptive studies cannot be used as evidence for an intervention’s efficacy. . .descriptive research can only suggest innovative strategies to teach students and lay the groundwork for development of such strategies” (p. 47). Hence, this case study helped to identify the directions for future experimental studies.

Approximately 30% of CCAE graduates stated they were interested in attending postsecondary education, but only a limited number of graduates enrolled at TC. The findings of this study highlighted the challenges adult learners faced as they return to school to complete their high school credentials and prepare for postsecondary education. This study focused on the experiences of the subjects while they attended the adult education program and the technical college located on the same campus.

Overview of the Study

In reviewing the literature, very limited data focused on the association between postsecondary education and adult education. The researcher’s intent was that this study

would show whether the adult education graduates truly received a second chance (eligibility) to enroll in college-level education. However, with a small sample size, the results of the study could not be generalized, as the findings could not be transferable.

The study took place in a rural county that has experienced economic and educational underperformance. The present researcher compiled evidence to determine if the adult education program helped reverse the economic and educational deterioration of the local area. The researcher used the qualitative techniques of interviewing four TC students for common themes and phrases to explain their experiences in their adult education programs. The research questions were as follows:

1. Did the adult education program at the technical college prepare its case study students for college-level education?
2. Did the case study participants perceive a link between their demographics (lack of education attainment by family members, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) and their performance in the college-level coursework?

Methods

The researcher conducted the qualitative research with a cross-case analysis of four purposefully selected cases. The researcher, assisted by a TC admissions counselor, provided answers to the research questions by identifying four purposefully selected TC students that represented each group: GED credential holder who was placed in remedial courses (GEDR); GED credential holder who was placed in college-level courses (GEDCL); high school diploma student who was placed in remedial courses (HSDR); and high school diploma student who was placed in college-level courses (HSDCL).

The testimony of each member given through the face-to-face interview was the primary source for this investigation. To ensure a high degree of trustworthiness in the interview, transcripts and a data analysis of responses to open-ended and focused questions were organized into a narrative that contained a description (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) of the technical college student who graduated from the adult education program. The analysis revealed key phrases and words to compare or triangulate with other testimony within the group or with cited experts in the literature review.

In addition to triangulation, member checks provided an accurate interpretation of what each subject related to during the interview. To provide validity, the peer reviewers via teleconference evaluated and validated the study. The subjects in the study form a diverse group from a variety of backgrounds and ages. However, ethnic diversity was not present; Whites were the only ethnicity represented. This was not the researcher's intent, as there was no bias. Because Blacks comprised approximately a 51% majority in the rural county (CC) in South Carolina (U. S. Census, 2000), ethnic diversity was important. With over 20 years in the adult education program, peer reviewer T. W. Freeman (personal communication, July 10, 2008) added that since this group was representative of only one race, one would have to assume that cultural overtones could affect the results of the study.

The purposefully selected TC students were as follows:

GEDR

This thirty-five year old, white male, GEDR graduate was the oldest of the TC students. He has been married to an elementary school teacher for many years and had a 10-year old daughter. He dropped out of high school after completing

9th grade. Because his employer moved to Mexico, GEDR was classified as a displaced worker. He enrolled in adult education at 32 years of age through the Workforce Investment Act, Trade Act Assistance (WIA/TAA), which assisted employees who had lost their jobs due to a shift of production to a foreign country. After receiving his GED credential through his studies in CCAE, the graduate entered TC. He planned to complete an Associate Degree in Public Service, majoring in Criminal Justice (CRJS), a 69-semester hour program.

GEDCL

This subject was a twenty-nine-year old white female. She was married and a mother of two children [8 and 10 years of age]. She stated that she does like attending classes with teenagers (in traditional high school and adult education). She left high school during 9th grade without receiving any high school units. Not only did this subject receive her GED through the adult education program, but she also ranked in the top 5% in the South Carolina GED tests and received an Honorary GED Certificate. After receiving her GED, she entered TC pursuing an associate degree in Engineering Technology, majoring in Environmental Engineering Technology (ENVR), a 72- semester hour program. In fall 2007, she was employed with Giant Resource Recovery where she tested hazardous waste materials. GEDCL attended college part-time, and her GPA was 3.69.

HSDR

This subject, a twenty-nine year old white female, was a single parent with a four-year old child. HSDR was a lifetime resident of CC and received her high school diploma through CCAE. After graduation, she entered TC to pursue a degree in

the medical field. HSDR's postsecondary background at TC was one semester in medical assistant and three semesters in early childhood development. After two years of remediation courses, she withdrew from TC. She commented, "It was too much on me raising a child and trying to work and to go school. It was too much and I just could not continue." When asked if she planned to return to college, she replied, "Maybe once she [her daughter] gets in school. And the only reason that I would really go back then is to keep up with her as far as all the new technology. I wouldn't go back really for a degree."

HSDCL

This case study was unique because the adult education program suspended HSDCL for disciplinary actions. However, she re-enrolled the next year in order to complete her high school requirements. Even though her opinion of the adult education program was not favorable, she recognized that the program gave her a second chance to receive a high school diploma and motivated her to enter postsecondary education. After a broken interview appointment and several missed phone calls, the single, 21-year old subject called the researcher to schedule an appointment for the interview. The participant was the youngest of the study group. In fall 2008, she continued her degree at TC. In addition, HSDCL was the first in her family to enter postsecondary education.

Discussion

As a lifetime resident of CC, the researcher was well acquainted with the problems found in rural CC and South Carolina as well. The researcher has been employed in the field of education for more than 30 years. This experience included

tenures in both secondary and adult education, and employment as an instructor in a community college and a university. The researcher had the opportunity to observe the subjects in the study as they worked on their high school credentials in the adult education program, as well as observe their progress in the technical college program. In addition, the researcher was confident that the subjects provided valid and reliable responses to answer the study's research questions.

Research Question 1: Did the adult education program at the technical college prepare its case study students for college-level education? The researcher answered the question from two different perspectives. The first was whether the CCAE prepared its case study students academically for college-level education, and the second was whether the CCAE prepared its case study students motivationally for college-level education.

Academically

To serve the academic needs of the adult learners, each instructor received training to address the adult education population of voluntary learners. All adult education high school subject-area teachers were properly certified and were "highly qualified" as specified in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. The South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Adult Education, offered adult education specialized training. These courses included GED Academy, Best Practices, Integrating Technology, and ESL Academy. In addition, the Office of Adult Education created four regional adult education technical assistance centers (RAETAC) to serve the technical and training needs of adult educators across the state. Training and workshops included the following topics: GED Math Teachers, Science Teachers, ESL Teachers, Social Studies Teachers, Transition Specialist, and WorkKeys.

The South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Adult Education highly recommended individualized instruction offered in the learning lab. As documented in the study, the CCAE learning lab provided self-paced and individualized instruction. All of the subjects unanimously agreed that their learning style was self-paced. GEDR stated, “I would be self-paced. I could work at my own pace and anytime I needed help with anything, all I had to do was to let them [instructors] know.” In addition, HSDR added, “Adult Ed. strives on making sure you know what you’re doing before you move to something else.” The findings in this study were in agreement with Knowles (1980) who stated that the learning lab was not only desirable but also essential in adult education.

The study found that the graduates improved their mathematics skills for the GED mathematics portion; reading skills for the reading, science, and social studies portions; and writing skills for the GED essay portion of the GED tests. For example, GEDR increased his reading skills by 6.1 grade equivalent (from 4.4 to 10.5) in a 20-month span.

The HSD graduates were prepared in reading, writing, and mathematics skills to take the English Language Arts and Mathematics Exit Examinations for their high school diploma requirements. In addition, HSDR and HSDCL completed their English IV and mathematics units for their high school diploma requirements. During their attendance in the adult education program, TABE test results confirmed that all subjects improved both their basic skills in reading and mathematics. See Appendix L.

The students revealed their appreciation and benefit of the technology component of the adult education curricula. On their college placement tests, the subjects scored

college-level on the technology portion of the COMPASS test as documented on Table 8. One GED graduate stated, “I didn’t really know much about computers until I started adult ed., and I got where I could use them [computers] just like reading and writing.” TC was increasingly incorporating online courses, and the benefits of the technology skills preparation were essential. One HSD graduate stated, “When I got here to college, I had to take an online class, and I was familiar with having to learn that way. So, it [technology in adult education] did help me.”

Motivationally

From the perspectives that CCAE prepared their graduates motivationally for college-level education, the subjects were more vocal about the adult education environment and relationships. Most of these key relationships applied to the subject’s internal motivation such as job satisfaction, self-esteem, and a quality of life (Merriam et al., p. 83). The interviews revealed that their relationship with their instructors, the curriculum, the self-paced learning lab, and the face-to-face instructions played a critical role in motivating the students to complete their high school credential and enroll in postsecondary education.

According to Rogers (1969), the facilitation of significant learning rested upon certain attitudinal qualities that existed in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner. As noted in the interviews, each subject reflected a positive relationship with their instructors with phrases such as “They [adult education instructors] really took up the time with me. The quality was absolutely fabulous.” It was encouraging to compare these findings by Tough (1979) who found that the successful adult education

facilitator has empathy (non-judgmental understanding, both intellectual and emotional) for the learner's perspectives.

Other ways the program produced motivation was through its curriculum. Prior studies (Cross, 1981; Imel, 1995; Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Tough, 1979) indicated how important it was for the adult education program to adapt a course to fit the adult learner. According to the CCAE syllabi, ninety percent of the CCAE curriculum was integrated with technology. As mentioned in case study interviews, all subjects expressed their appreciation of the technology component of the curriculum and all interviewed students demonstrated mastery on the technology portion of the COMPASS tests.

Summary of Research Question One

It was interesting to note that all four subjects of this study were the first in their family to attend postsecondary education. The research found that the academic preparation (including technology skills) utilizing the learning lab enhanced self-esteem and motivated the subjects to proceed to postsecondary education. This was a milestone where 40% of the county's population lacked a high school diploma (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). As GEDR stated, "They [adult education] helped me get better prepared for today's society as far as finding a job as a career and going back to school to better myself as far as higher education."

However, there was a concern for the placement of these students who entered TC. In fall 2008, the subjects who were placed in college-level courses, were enrolled at TC; however, the subjects placed in developmental courses (GEDR and HSDR) have withdrawn from school. Although this was a 50% success rate, it was important to note

that the GEDR and HSDR students were employed in jobs that they enjoyed and were able to support their families.

According to Wolfgramm (1994), at-risk students needed an educational environment that encouraged academic success, promoted self-worth, and prepared for postsecondary education if the individual desired to continue the education process. As documented, CCAE offered CC dropouts this type of learning environment to pursue their educational goals. While CCAE provided the basic skills needed to receive a high school diploma or GED credential and the motivation and self-esteem to pursue postsecondary education, other factors helped determine whether the adult learners were prepared for college-level education.

These other possible explanations for the subjects' preparedness for college-level education were not evident in their interviews nor their demographics found on their adult education registration forms. The researcher found that both subjects who placed in college-level courses (GEDCL and HSDCL) entered the adult education program with reading levels of 12.9 grade equivalents. In addition, their TABE mathematics levels were 7.8 and 9.4 grade equivalent, respectively. In contrast, GEDR and HSDR who had withdrawn from TC, entered CCAE with a TABE reading score of 4.4-grade equivalent and 6.2 grade equivalents, respectively. However, it was interesting to note that these two adult learners, who entered the adult education program with a reading level below 7.0 grade equivalence, achieved their goals with instructors' efforts. All received their high school credentials, high school diploma or GED.

The researcher concluded that this study had not shown whether CCAE prepared its graduates for college-level education for the period of 2004-2006. It was likely that

the success of students who enter postsecondary at college-level was linked to their academic ability prior to entering adult education and not necessarily their experiences in the adult education program. However, the researcher found that CCAE increased each student's self-esteem and motivation. By receiving a second chance through the adult education program, the subjects became the first in their families to enter postsecondary education.

Research Question Two: Did the case study participants perceive a link between their demographics (lack of education attainment by family members, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) and their performance in the college-level coursework? This study has been unable to demonstrate which demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, status, number of dependents, last school attended, social support, length in adult education, and grade completion) better prepare the subject for college-level education. Therefore, future studies needed to address these variables.

Implications

At this point, the researcher made recommendations based on the results of the study. The topics covered relevant to this study were communication, transition specialist, and budget.

Communication

Three of the four subjects in the study revealed a close relationship with their instructors. The researcher disclosed that the faculty and transition specialist are trained in creating relationships with the adult learners. These trainings helped in the understanding of at-risk high school student who eventually returned to adult education to complete their high school requirements. Ultimately, CCAE gave these returning high

school dropouts a chance to make a choice. That choice was to receive their high school credentials and continue to postsecondary education. Without adult education, that choice may not have existed.

According to TC admissions counselor (M. Davis, personal communication, September 28, 2008), the TC orientation process for new students included information about the two-year degree programs and the financial aid (i.e., Pell grants) application process for qualified students. Therefore, many students were not aware of the continuing education program provided by the technical college in which financial aid does not apply. The public, including the adult education program, needed to be aware of the many educational and career advancement opportunities that existed at TC. The study did not indicate whether the subjects received incorrect information as far as their career choices. However, TC admissions counselor M. Davis (personal communication, September 28, 2008) indicated that these subjects may not have been aware of diploma and certificate programs offered at TC unless the enrollees specifically inquired about the continuing education program (i.e. welding, truck driving, certified nurse assistant).

By 2020, the South Carolina Personal Pathways to Success (October, 2001) projected that 65% of the jobs would require a two-year degree or advanced training. To prepare for these future jobs, TC offered degree and advanced training through its 15 associate degree majors, 8 diploma majors and 32 certificates (see Appendix I). Therefore, all students who entered TC need to be aware of the differences between the Associate Degree programs and Career Training and Development Division (continuing education). In this study, GEDR and HSDR who enrolled in remedial/developmental courses have since withdrawn from TC. After a minimum of two semesters, neither

student had earned any college credit units toward an associate's degree nor had attained any advanced training (diploma/certificate). Communication about the two different programs was essential when adult learners had sacrificed financially to attend college. According to P. B. Gray (personal communication, June 24, 2008),

A truth surfaced that people do not understand the role of the two-year technical colleges. TC offers over thirty programs classified as continuing education, certificate and diploma programs as well. These programs are less in duration than degree programs, with some as short as three weeks in length such as truck driving, and six- to thirteen-weeks as in welding. The admission to continuing education programs does not require a high school diploma; meaning all are eligible. The potentially rewarding, continuing education choices are not considered since students are not aware they exist.

Not all students were alike in ability, interests, and work ethics. Therefore, the students would possibly have benefitted if they had been informed about all the programs available through the technical school system.

Transition Specialist

In 2006, South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Adult Education began providing each adult education program a part-time transition (career) specialist through its Young Adult Population (YAP) fundings. Following the guidelines of the Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA), this position was created to recruit, coordinate, and collaborate with school community and local agencies (DSS, One-Stop, Armed Forces, local technical colleges, and the business community) as well as to guide and counsel students. Prior to this date, the adult education instructors were responsible

for not only providing academic preparation instruction toward a high school credential but also providing career counseling. Appropriate placement of students who completed their goal in adult education was the result of this initiative (S. C. Department of Education, 2006).

The transition specialist's responsibilities included scheduling with the technical college the student administration of the COMPASS/ASSET test at the local adult education site and providing student assistance with financial aid information and forms to be completed (S. C. Department of Education, 2006). Although this position was not in place at the time of the study, the subjects did indicate the need for services of a transition specialist. In her interview, HSDR reported, "For your first two semesters maybe even your third semester at TC, I think that you should be able to revert back to your adult ed. counselor. Do I really need this course?"

As a twenty-one-year CCAE (financial secretary) employee and a parent of an adult education high school diploma graduate, S. L. Coker was knowledgeable about the financial operations and needs of the CCAE. Coker stated (personal communication, July 8, 2008):

Adult education is mainly funded with state [South Carolina Department of Education] grants. Most adult education teachers are part-time teachers who are underpaid for their services. Teachers are contracted on a limited time because of limited funding. It is not what it once was; now there are younger students ranging in age of 16- or 17-year-olds and older. These younger students not only need a teacher; they need guidance. Teachers for adult education do not have adequate time to teach the students and perform guidance duties.

Keeping all this in mind, I think there should be a transition specialist on a full-time basis in every adult education program in South Carolina. I know there are programs like One Stop that help people find jobs. Most of the clients from One Stop are referred to adult education programs for more education. The referral process would be a good time for guidance on a daily basis with the students.

In CC, many older adults have lost their jobs and are seeking training for new jobs. They are not as young as they used to be. I am 50 years old and I would hate to think that I would have to start over in my training for a new job. That would be a very scary change in anyone's life, and people need to know that there is help for them. They need to know that someone is going to help them not only get their diploma but go one step further to help with college placement or job placement.

College is not for everyone; some are just thankful to be out of high school. These students also need a job. There needs to be occupational training through adult education for them, so if they are not college material they can have a job and be productive citizens. The state spends money on things that I think are not all that worth while; I don't see why the state cannot fund one transition specialist for each of the adult education programs in the state. Their guidance would make for better citizens of our state. They would not only have guidance to receive a diploma but would also choose either college or an occupational training through continuing education for a job. Some people find themselves in adult education programs because they did not receive the guidance that they

desperately needed in high school. These young people would certainly benefit from a transition specialist in adult education.

Because of S. L. Coker's interview and case study interviews, the researcher has recommended that future studies examine whether or not a full-time adult education transition specialist was a determining factor for secondary and postsecondary completion rates. If the results of the studies showed a need for a full-time position, a transition specialist would be employed to guide adult education students through TC's application and orientation process as well as discuss the difference between a TC diploma program and a continuing education program.

Budget

The findings in the study indicated that additional guidance and counseling services would be beneficial. All of the subjects indicated that they received career counseling through the services of the CCAE instructor. Since the subjects graduated from CCAE, the State Department of Education, Office of Adult Education, provided all adult education programs a part-time transition specialist to guide and counsel students for appropriate placement in postsecondary education or training. GEDCL stated that it probably would help students to have a transition specialist tell them about college in general. In addition, HSDR stated that during her first and second semesters at TC she would have benefitted from the services of an adult education counselor (transition specialist). In order to provide the extra guidance services that adult education students need, the part-time transition specialist position must expand to a full-time position.

The subjects in the study did not receive the services of a career or vocational education offered in traditional high school (i.e., welding, nursing, automotive, and

childcare, cosmetology, food services). TC offered these continuing education courses at their main campus that is 20 miles from CCAE. However, transportation was a problem in CC, especially for students who are returning to school with little income. Therefore, CCAE began offering community (continuing) education courses at the TC/CCAECampus. In the 2007-2008 school year, CCAE offered the following: certified nursing assistant (CNA), WorkKeys training, keyboarding, substitute teacher training, and computer classes.

CCAEC needed to seek additional funding for a full-time counselor to help those graduates who plan to continue to postsecondary education or advanced training. CCAEC's budget for the 2007-08 school year was approximately \$500,000. This program served approximately 1,000 students. CCAEC received funding through the following programs/grants: S. C. Department of Education, S. C. Department of Education grants, U. S. Department of Education, U. S. Department of Education grants, local funds from the school districts, and local fees. The state and federal grants that equal 13% of the budget (see Figure 7) were competitive grants awarded bi-annually. CCAEC program was generally allotted \$400 to \$500 per student.

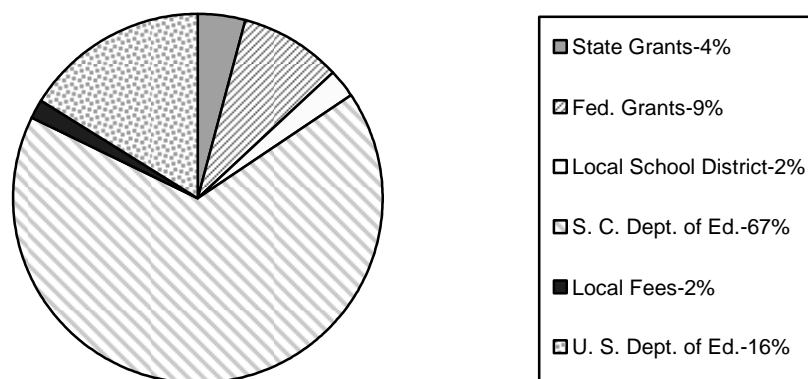


Figure 7. CCAE Budget (2007-2008)

The cycle of poverty, the lack of communication, the need for a full-time transition specialist, and the constraints of the budget were issues that negatively affect the ability of CCAE to prepare its graduates for postsecondary education (college-level/remedial) or continuing education. The research revealed that through adequate funding at CCAE, students would possibly increase in their academic achievement, which in return will lead to economic improvements.

Limitations

The study examined four students who completed an adult education high school credential program and entered postsecondary education. The limitations were as follows:

1. The study was limited to a comprehensive public, two-year technical college. No private colleges or universities were included for study.
2. The study was limited to first-time-entering high school diploma and GED graduates at TC/F. E. DuBose Campus.
3. The study was limited to the CCAE HSD/GED graduates from 2004-2006.
4. The study was limited to the exploration of the Adult Basic Education HSD program and GED graduates' demographic variables: HSD/GED, male/female, course placement for mathematics, English, and reading based on Computer Adaptive Placement Assessment and Support System (COMPASS) placement test scores, ethnicity, age, and the number of years in a traditional secondary school prior to attending adult education.

5. This study was limited to a small purposeful sampling and multi-case study design.

Recommendations for Further Research

South Carolina has long ranked among the lowest states in academic achievement and overall low socioeconomic attainment. According to South Carolina Kids Count (2006), South Carolina median family income ranked 40th (\$45,000) in the nation with the dropout rate over 40%. According to CC MapStats (2006), the 2002 per capita income for CC was \$21,266 as compared to South Carolina, which reported \$28,285. Therefore, the per capita income within CC ranked among the lowest 25% in the United States (Santee-Lynches Community Development Corporation, 2002).

According to data, these CC statistics were profound. With the urgency of the problems associated with the economic decline caused by job loss, the increase in consumer prices, such as food and gasoline, and the increase in the dropout rate in CC, there was a clear need for immediate solutions. While the present qualitative study sought to answer questions regarding four adult education students who enrolled in a technical college, further studies were recommended to be conducted on this adult education population:

1. A study to examine if poverty is a determining factor with the post-secondary education completion rate of adult education graduates.
2. A study to examine if a full-time adult education transition specialist is a determining factor for secondary and/or postsecondary education completion rate.
3. A longitudinal study of the CCAE cohorts who elected to continue their postsecondary education and those who chose to withdraw from the program.

Clearly, there were challenges to improve the economic and educational levels of the returning high school dropouts. Future studies would help CCAE increase their number of graduates entering TC and would help in the program placement of these students through effective guidance and counseling. Other areas may hold information that would be valuable for CC's educational and economic development, and this study could offer solutions to their problems as well.

Conclusion

The researcher started with the hope that adult education programs in America, in general, and CC, in particular, follow CCAE's slogan *Making a Difference*. Central to this study was the fact that adult education programs helped adult learners make choices to stop the cycle of poverty. The study area was located in a rural county (CC) in South Carolina along Interstate 95, the corridor between Florida and New York. This so-called corridor, *The Corridor of Shame*, was plagued by decades of poverty, unemployment, and low academic and literacy rates.

The researcher learned from this study some needs that must be met to prepare adult learners for postsecondary education. Many of the CCAE graduates did not have the motivation or time to complete a two-year associate program due to financial and family obligations. Further, the research showed that the students were not aware of the TC diploma and certificate programs, which may have benefitted those who did not place in college-level courses and/or did not have the time or the income to seek an associate degree.

The findings of the present study revealed that the TC students who are CCAE graduates improved their academic ability and were motivationally prepared for

postsecondary education. All of the participants in the study were the first in their families to enter postsecondary education. However, only two of the participants (GEDCL and HSDCL) who placed in college-level courses had been successful with a 3.69 GPA and 2.42 GPA, respectively. The students who were placed in remedial courses (GEDR and HSDR) have withdrawn from college. These findings were very important to this study, indicating that 50% of the study group withdrew from college.

According to TC admissions counselor (M. Davis, personal communication, September, 29, 2008), the intake process did not indicate or record whether a college enrollee was a traditional high school graduate or an adult education graduate. The data only indicated the type of high school credential (GED or HSD) the student received. In the state of South Carolina, an adult education high school diploma graduate received a traditional school district issued diploma. In other words, there was no difference in documentation whether the student graduated from the adult education program or traditional high school program. Therefore, data were needed to track the CCAE graduates and to calculate whether the percentage (50%) of dropouts was indicative of all of the adult education population enrolled in postsecondary degrees. If these statistics were true, assisting these students in career direction in which their interests match their capabilities would be critical to their successful use of their postsecondary education possibilities.

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Appendix A

Date	Author(s) / Title / Site	# GED	# HSD	results
1995 - 2001	Dobbs, Barbara. <i>A Comparative Study of Academic Performance by Students with GED Credentials and Non-GED Students.</i> Indiana University & Purdue University	1,686	20,520	GED student's GPA is less than HSD students' GPA the 1 st year and their GPAs are equal the 2 nd year & 3 rd year.
1998	Boesel, Alsamean, and Smith (1998)			The GED student's GPA is slightly less than the HSD (2.58:2.71)
1998	Hamilton, John. <i>First-Time Students Entering a Two-Year Public College with a GED. Fall 1991 to Fall 1996.</i> Gainesville, Georgia.			GED students' GPAs were lower than high school graduates' GPAs (2.14 : 2.6)
1996	Soltz, Donald. <i>The Achievement of Community College Students with GED Certificates: A Longitudinal Perspective.</i>			"Review outcomes related to credit hours attempted and earned, grades, graduation rates, and courses taken at the college, indicating that GED holders' achievement was comparable to that of high school graduates."
1990	McElroy, Claire. <i>GED Certification and College Success.</i> Kankakee Community College, Illinois.	50	50	"The analysis revealed that a significant difference existed between the two groups with the GED graduates having, on average, a higher GPA".
1989	Owen, Diane K. S. <i>First Semester College Performance of GED Graduates at the University of Alaska Anchorage.</i> University of Alaska Anchorage.			"A comparison of frequent distributions suggested that, although the level of GED scores is not a significant factor, age is a significant factor in successful course completion" (Owens)
1989	Schillo, Paula A. <i>A Comparison of the Academic Success of GED Certificate Students and High School Graduates at Lorain County Community College.</i> Lorain Community College, Ohio	40	40	Diploma produced significantly higher GPA's and attempted and completed more credit hours than did the GED student.
1988	Klein, James D. & Grise, Philip J. <i>Examining the Success of GED Diploma Holders in Florida's Community Colleges.</i> Florida's Community Colleges.			"Indicates that GED holders have a slightly lower grade point averages and graduation rates than traditional students."

1985 - 1986	Clark, Renee Smith. <i>Academic Achievement of GED Graduates of the Community College of Allegheny County</i> . Community College of Allegheny County (Pennsylvania).	56	56	“No significant difference was found to exist between the mean cumulative GPAs of GED and HSD graduates; Both GED and HSD students perceived the importance of obtaining the degree as a passport to the world of employment and college; Employers also perceived the HSD as the minimum credential necessary for employees” (Author)
1982 -83	Colert, Sherril. <i>A Study of the Academic Achievement, Attrition and Group Reactions Of High School Equivalency Students Attending Brandon University</i> . Brandon University, Manitoba, Canada.	26	27	“No significant difference was found between the distribution of grade point average scores or average ratios of credit hours passed to credit hours attempted of the two groups of students” ()
1982	Wilson, Sue. <i>A Comparison of the Academic Performance of High School Graduate Certificate Holders at Tulsa Junior College (Oklahoma)</i> .	32- Full-Time; 115- Part-Time	528: Full-Time; 1,338- Part-Time	“There is no significant difference in GPA of full-time students admitted on the basis of a high school diploma and full-time students admitted on the basis of GED certificates” (author)
1980	Wolfe, John C. <i>The Tests of General Educational Development in Differential Prediction of Two-Year College Academic Performance</i> .			“There were no significant differences between academic performance of high school graduates and non-high school graduate GED recipients in the study.”
1973	Byrd, Fay. <i>A Comparison of the Educational success of GED Recipients and Traditional High School Graduates in Selected Areas at Wilkes community College (North Carolina)</i> . Wilkes Community College, NC.	30	50	GED & HSD graduates scored equally on the Reading placement tests and grade point averages in English and Mathematics. “The data indicates that the traditional high school graduate needs skill reinforcement at the same level as the GED recipient (Byrd).

Appendix B
Interview Questions

Dissertation: A Case Study: The Preparedness of Adult Education Students for College-level Education

By: Julie G. Griffin

Interview Questions-

1. What were your top three reasons for dropping out of high school? Put them in the order of importance, with the most important reason listed first.
2. Which was more difficult for you—adult education or high school?
3. What did you like best about adult education?
4. What did you like least about adult education?
5. Were you in Special Education when you were in high school?
6. If you were a diploma student, how many courses did you complete with adult education before receiving your high school diploma?
7. If you were a GED student, how many high school credits did you have before entering the adult education program?
8. Do you feel that the high school or the adult program prepared you better academically?
9. What was done by either the high school or the adult education program to prepare you for college?
10. How has the quality of instruction and instructors at CCAE prepared you for college-level education?
11. How has the inclusion and quality of technology at CCAE prepared you for college-level education?
12. Would you recommend a transition specialist (adult education career counselor) to help prepare you for college-level education?
13. How was the relationship between you and your teachers different in adult education as compared to K-12?
14. Are you the 1st high school graduate in your family?
15. How would you describe your learning style (self-paced or highly structured)? Was your learning style provided by the adult education program?

Appendix C
Letter of Invitation

P. O. Box 1249
Manning, SC 29102
November 8, 2008

[**Street Address**]
[**City, ST ZIP Code**]

Dear [**Recipient Name**]:

Congratulations! You have accomplished one of CCAE's goals, to enter postsecondary education. This is a major accomplishment, and I would like to commend you on your success. I am involved in a research study on former CCAE completers (high school diploma and GED graduates) who entered TC, and I would like you to participate. This research will allow you to share your experiences and tell whether CCAE assisted you in preparation for postsecondary education. Participation in this study is voluntary, and your confidentiality will be ensured. At any time, you feel uncomfortable about answering a question; you do not have to respond.

This study involves graduates from the CCAE program who entered TC in the Fall 2005 semester. The data will be used to determine the preparation of adult education graduates for postsecondary coursework and their perceptions of the link between their demographic background and their performance. The topic of the research is "A Case Study: The Preparedness of Adult Education Students for College-Level Education." This research is for the partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree.

The data will be collected during a 45-minute interview session. Please check the best time for you to meet during the week of Jan. 21 – Jan. 25, 2008. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at (803) 473-2531 (work).

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Julie G. Griffin
Director
Adult Education

Appendix D

Interviewee: _____

A Case Study: The Preparedness of Adult Education Graduates
for College-Level Education

Interview Protocol

Interviewee: _____

Organization: _____

Date: _____

Opening Statement of Letter:

“Thank you for agreeing to the interview. The purpose is to gather information from TC students who completed CCAE and entered postsecondary education. I would like you to read the questions, and if there is anything that makes you uncomfortable or anything that you prefer not to answer for any reasons, feel free to ask me to omit it. Also, you may stop the interview at any time. I may also ask a few questions that develop as part of the interview. Later, I will share with you a written transcript of this recorded interview. At that time you can alter the information in any way you choose. Do you have questions before we begin?”

You will be referred to as **(HSDCL, HSDR, GEDCL, or GEDR)** to protect your anonymity. Please read and sign the consent form to begin the interviewing process.”

Appendix E
CONSENT FORM

A Case Study: The Preparedness of Adult Education Students for College-level Education
Julie G. Griffin
Liberty University/ Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study concerning the academic preparedness of the CCAE graduates who enter into postsecondary education... You were selected as a possible participant because you are an adult education graduate who entered TC in Fall 2005. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Julie G. Griffin, Department of Education, Liberty University

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. In the case study examples, did the adult education program at TC prepare its students for college-level education?
2. Did the student participants perceive a link between their demographics (lack of educational attainment by family members, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) and their performance in their college placement?

The purpose is specifically to study four TC students who completed CCAE high school credential program and entered postsecondary education.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will agree to the following procedure:

I will tape record an interview with you at a time when you have ample time to say what you would like on the topic. The purpose of the tape recorder is to ensure an accurate transcript. I will share a list of the questions with you prior to the interview. Additional questions may arise during the interview. If a question makes you feel uncomfortable, you may decline to answer that question, and you may stop the interview at any time. Later, I will share with you the written transcript and you may change, delete, or add additional information. The recorded transcript and tapes will be kept private and confidential in a locked vault located at the college. To protect your anonymity, you will be referred to as an acronym (HRDCL, HR, GEDCL, or GEDR). At the end of the study, the tapes will be destroyed. There will be nothing that can identify you in any way.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has several risks: The interview questions are not designed to cause you risk or discomfort. If you intend to ask me to serve as a reference or provide a letter of recommendation for you, you should not participate in the study.

The benefits of the study will be the sharing of information regarding the adult education subject's preparation for postsecondary coursework and their perception of a link between their demographic backgrounds and their performance. The findings may provide insight that can help the adult education program provide future services that improve the academic placement of the adult education high school diploma and GED graduates.

Confidentiality:

Although the information that you give will be handled confidentially, due to the small sample size, confidentiality cannot be assured. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. All transcripts and research data will be stored in a locked vault. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link you (the subject) to the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or with TC. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Julie G. Griffin. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at TC. F. E. DuBose Campus, Manning, SC, 803-473-2531, GriffinJG@cctech.edu, or Liberty University Advisor Dr. Beth Ackerman, 434-582-2709, mackerman@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Human Subject Office, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F

CC ADULT EDUCATION REGISTRATION FORM

Enrollment Date: _____ **Site Location:** _____ **AM PM**

Have you attended Adult Education before? (circle) Yes No If Yes, where? _____

Title(Circle): Mr. Mrs. Miss Ms. Dr. _____
First **Middle** **Maiden** **Last**

Social Security # _____ - _____ - _____

Mailing Address _____
City **State** **Zip Code**

Physical (911) Address (if not the same) _____

(____) _____ (____) _____ (____) _____
Home Phone **Work Phone** **Other Phone**

Gender (circle): Male Female **Birthplace:** _____ **Ethnicity (circle):** Asian Black Hispanic Native Pacific Islander White

Date of Birth _____ **Age** _____ **Status (circle):** Single Married Divorced Widowed

Number of Dependents: _____

Work Status: (circle) Employed Full Time Employed Part Time Unemployed

Are you currently seeking employment? Yes No

Appendix G Local Program Review Process (LPRP) Report

The LPR team wishes to commend (the researcher) for her inspired leadership of the CCAE Program. The partnership between Adult Education and TC at the F.E. DuBose Career Center is a model of interagency cooperation. The DuBose facility provides a state-of-the-art venue for adult learning that is accessible and underscores the high value placed on adult learning by the Center Director, Mr. John Roveri, and other community leaders. The three county school districts also provide direct support to adult education that enables the program to have a presence in Manning, Summerton, and Turbeville. Each site has a computer lab with an internet connection in each classroom.

- The CCAE (Adult Education) Mission Statement is found in the Staff Handbook and is prominently posted in the entrance area to the Adult Education wing.
- An on-line student and staff survey is available. Students are encouraged to engage the survey at about the time they are post-testing. The completed surveys are tallied and used by the director and staff to review program practices.
- Each staff member receives a staff handbook that has all of the program's policies procedures. Staff members sign a form that indicates they have "...received, read, and understand the CCAE (Adult Education) Handbook."
- The director observes each instructor once a semester. A teacher observation form is used to insure consistency.
- The director develops a 4-page informational tabloid that is mailed twice a year to every household and post office box in the county. Specialty brochures are also created to promote specific programs and services. ESL flyers are printed in both Spanish and English and are delivered to the Wateree Migrant Headstart Center. The director attends the CC Interagency Council meetings each month and distributes flyers. A special summer flyer is distributed at each high school (public and private) in the county.

- The program has a well-conceived GED tracking process. The OPT scores are recorded, and then the actual GED test score is added to the file.
- All students must sign a form that states they agree to the program “student Rules and Regulations.” Seventeen-year-old students must also bring a parent or guardian to orientation, and they both sign a student management contract.
- The program surveys teachers’ staff development needs. The director summarizes and analyzes the survey data and uses the results to help drive staff development decision-making. There are two faculty/staff meetings each semester. The director remains in touch with all staff using electronic and traditional communication tools to insure that everyone is fully aware of changing needs and requirements.
- A process for monitoring staff participation in professional development has been established. The director maintains a file that contains completion certificates and sign-in sheets for all professional development activities attended by staff.
- The Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES) person provides reports at least once every six weeks to the faculty to help remind them of post-testing requirements and other data related activities. Data are disaggregated by class.
- Table IV data for current year (all students) and previous year (all students) is shared with faculty along with individual current year class Table IV reports. All staff members are frequently reminded of the standards that have been set for the program.
- A process has been developed to address all of the procedures for inputting and applying disaggregated data to instructional program decision-making.
- The director has created an orientation PowerPoint presentation, which provides an overview of each component of the adult education program as well as student rules and regulations.
- The director keeps a record of all those who have participated in a structured intake.
- The program has a well-designed, comprehensive assessment procedure. TABE Prescription has been purchased and is extensively used.
- Five instructional staff members have completed at least one assessment course provided by Regional Adult Education Technical Assistance Centers (RAETAC)

for Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) 9/10. Two staff members have completed the BEST Plus training.

- Testing procedure produces a well-controlled testing environment. The testing administrator had all those to be assessed near the front of the room, gave precise instructions, and monitored progress and testing integrity. The room was adequately lighted and comfortable. There was a “Testing in Progress” sign at each door.
- Program has developed procedures for recapturing students who have stopped attending. Some of the strategies include the use of postcards, letters, and phone calls. The transition person keeps a log (on the attendance) of their capturing efforts.
- The transition specialist follows a procedure to track student achievements. She prepares a quarterly progress report. She also creates an email account for the Rural Economic Workforce Alliance for Resource Development (REWARD) graduates to insure that they are aware of job opportunities and/or additional educational opportunities. (Rupert, 2008)

Appendix H
Transition Specialist – Job Description

- Present information about local postsecondary/other training opportunities to student and their availability.
- Coordinate on-site visits with the technical college admissions counselors to include EOC, TRIO and traditional technical College admissions program for the purpose of sharing program information with adult education students highlighting certificate, diploma, and degree programs.
- Arrange on-site campus visits.
- Schedule with the technical college the student administration of the COMPASS/ASSET test at the local adult education site.
- Provide student assistance with financial aid information and forms to be completed.
- Guide adult education students through the application process. (S. C. Department of Education, 2006)

Appendix I
TC Programs
Certificates and Degrees

Agriculture

- Associate in Agriculture • Major in Natural Resources Management
- Associate in Arts and Science
- Associate in Arts • Major in Associate in Arts
- Associate in Science • Major in Associate in Science
- Certificate in General Education
- Certificate in College Studies

Business

- Associate in Business • Major in Accounting
- Certificate in Accounting Specialist
- Associate in Business • Major in Management
- Associate in Business • Major in Office Systems Technology
- Diploma in Automated Office
- Certificate in Information Processing

Computer Technology

- Associate in Computer Technology • Major in Computer Technology
- Certificate in Computer Specialist
- Certificate in Internetworking - Cisco

Engineering Technology

- Associate in Engineering Technology • Major in Civil Engineering Technology
- Associate in Engineering Technology • Major in Engineering Graphics Technology
- Diploma in Engineering Graphics
- Associate in Engineering Technology • Major in Environmental Engineering Technology

Health Sciences

- Associate in Health Science • Major in Nursing (ADN)
- LPN to ADN Option
- Diploma in Medical Assisting
- Diploma in Nursing (PN)
- Diploma in Surgical Technology
- Certificate in Health Science Prep
- Certificate in Phlebotomy
- Certificate in Pre-Dental Hygiene
- Certificate in Pre-Occupational/Pre-Physical Therapy Assistant
- Certificate in Pre-Pharmacy Technician

Industrial Technology

- Associate in Industrial Technology • Major in Electronics Technology
- Diploma in Automotive Mechanics
- Diploma in Machine Tool

Certificate in Advanced Heating and Air Conditioning
Certificate in Advanced Tool Making
Certificate in Automotive Repair
Certificate in Basic Air Conditioning and Heating
Certificate in Electro-Mechanical Workforce
Certificate in Electro-Mechanical Workforce II
Certificate in Industrial Electricity/Electronics
Certificate in Industrial Maintenance
Certificate in Industrial Maintenance Workforce I
Certificate in Industrial Maintenance Workforce II
Certificate in Machine Tool Operator
Certificate in Welding
Certificate in Welding Workforce Initiative Level I
Certificate in Welding Workforce Initiative Level II

Occupational Technology

Associate in Occupational Technology • Major in General Technology

Public Service

Associate in Public Service • Major in Criminal Justice Technology

Associate in Public Service • Major in Early Care and Education

Diploma in Early Childhood Development

Certificate in Early Childhood Development

Certificate in Infant and Toddler Care

Associate in Public Service • Major in Paralegal

Appendix J

Transcriber's Pledge of Confidentiality

I will be participating in the dissertation research project entitled

A Case Study: The Preparedness of Adult Education Students for
College-Level Education

I will be transcribing audio-recorded interviews into text. I will not know the names of the informants, but if I should recognize information that enables me to identify any of the participants, I agree to maintain their confidentiality. By signing this agreement, I pledge to keep all information strictly confidential. I will not discuss the information I transcribe with any person for any reason. I understand that to violate this agreement would constitute a serious and an unethical infringement on the informant's right to privacy.

Signature of Transcriptionist

Date

Signature of Principle Researcher

Date

Appendix K

TC/ CCAE Graduates (2004 - 2006) Characteristics-Demographics of Population				
Demographic of Population	GEDR	GEDCL	HSDR	HSDCL
Age at Enrollment (years)	32	24	18	17
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity	White	White	White	White
Status	Married	Single	Divorced	Single
Number of Dependents	1	2	1	0
Last School Attended	Public	Public	Private	Public
Social Support	Employment Preparation	Homemaker/single Parent	None	None
Preferred Learning Style	Self-paced Lab	Self-paced Lab	Self-paced Lab	Self-paced Lab
Grade Completion	9th	8th	11 th w/ no exit exams	11 th w/ exit exams

Appendix L

Name	Pre-test TABE Scores*				Post-test TABE Scores*						
	Reading	Applied Math	Math Computation	Total Math	Reading	Change in Reading	Applied Math	Math Computation	Change in Math	Total Math	Change in Total Math
GEDR	4.4	5.9	5.0	5.3	10.5	(+) 6.1	NA	8.1	(+) 3.1	NA	NA
GEDCL	12.9	11.0	5.8	7.8	12.9	-----	NA	NA	NA	10.4	(+) 2.6
HSDR	11.2	NA	NA	9.8	8.5	(-)2.7	NA	NA	NA	11.3	(+) 1.5
HSDCL	12.9	10.2	8.6	9.4	NA		NA	NA		NA	

* Grade Equivalent Scores