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# An Analysis of Adult Educators' Experiences with Professional Development Activities

Robbie Scott Cornelius  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

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An Analysis of Adult Educators' Experiences with Professional Development Activities

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

by

Robbie Scott Cornelius  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in Music, 1998  
University of Arkansas  
Master of Arts in Teaching, 2003

May 2018  
University of Arkansas

This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

---

Kenda S. Grover, Ed.D.  
Dissertation Director

---

David M. Deggs, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Kit Kacirek, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

---

Gary W. Udouj, Ed.D.  
Ex-officio Member

## **Abstract**

This study was designed to explore Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers' experiences with professional development. The study sought to determine whether adult learning principles were evident in the facilitation of professional development activities. The study instrument was administered online to members of the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE), with a total of  $n=348$  respondents to the survey. The survey consisted of demographic questions, questions related to professional development experiences, and an open response question. The majority of respondents were teachers/instructors ( $n=232$ , 66.7%), held a master's degree ( $n=187$ , 54.4%), and did not have adult education certification/licensure ( $n=205$ , 59.1%).

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was utilized to identify adult learning principles that were perceived by ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who attended professional development. Seven factors emerged to explain 67.11% of the total variance among 32 items on the instrument. The first factor in the exploratory factor analysis indicated that during professional development, ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers learned new skills and strategies for working with adult learners that were applicable to their classroom instruction. The other factors had fewer items and were less defined.

To describe how the learning environment impacted ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' professional development experiences, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Results indicated no statistically significant difference among the groups. To compare perceptions of facilitator skills and abilities that impacted ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' professional development experiences, a one-way between-groups analysis of

variance (ANOVA) was used. Data analysis indicated differences existed between ASE and ESL groups on two items.

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## **Dedication**

For my grandmother, Bettye Frances Burch Davidson.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

#### Status of the Issue

It is estimated that over 36 million Americans lack the basic reading and writing skills that are necessary to complete a job application and understand written instructions and sixty million Americans are deficient in the basic math skills that are necessary to operate a cash register or interpret a bus schedule (“What is Adult Education?”, n.d.). English as a Second Language (ESL) learners made up the largest percentage, 45 percent, of adults enrolled in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs during the program year 2015-2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). In addition to learning English, “ESL literacy students face the challenge of developing the knowledge, skills, and strategies associated with decoding, comprehending, and producing print” (“The What Works Study for Adult ESL Literacy Students,” 2017). Adult education programs address these issues and help students reach their educational goals.

In the United States, Adult Basic Education programs exist “to provide ‘second chance’ educational services to adults 18 and older who test below a twelfth-grade level in reading, language, or math” (Udoudj, 2015, p. 1). The Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE), an organization that advocates for and advances adult education at the national and international levels, states:

Adult education serves adults aged 16 and above who are not in school, who lack basic reading and math skills, and who do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. Federal funds support state and local efforts to assist adults in becoming literate and in obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency. Efforts are also made to assist adults who are parents in obtaining the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the education of their children. (What is Adult Education section, n.d., para. 1)

The likelihood of an adult gaining these skills is partly dependent upon the qualifications and competencies of the adult education teacher. Adult education teachers include those teachers who work in Adult Basic Education programs that offer Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Sherman, Tibbetts, Woodruff, and Weidler (1999) identified a set of competencies and performance indicators for adult education teachers. Instructor competency categories are as follows:

1. Maintains knowledge and pursues professional development
2. Organizes and delivers instruction
3. Manages instructional resources
4. Continually assesses and monitors learning
5. Manages program responsibilities and enhances program organization
6. Provides learner guidance and referral (p. 17).

According to Sherman et al. (1999), effective adult instruction is based on three instructor overarching characteristics:

- **Keeping current in content area and in instructional strategies.** Instructors need to engage in a variety of ongoing professional development activities to keep abreast of new developments in curriculum content and related areas as well as instructional approaches.
- **Communicating and collaborating with colleagues and learners to facilitate learning.** The educational process involves a range of collaborative activities both within the organization and the community. Instructors require a variety of communication methods as they collaborate with diverse audiences and develop skills in problem solving, negotiation, and decision making.



- **Working positively and nonjudgmentally with diverse populations.**

Instructors must be persistent in incorporating instructional materials and strategies that are inclusive and free of bias. (p. 16)

Both the competencies and characteristics identified by the authors highlight the importance of continued professional development for adult education teachers, so they can maintain and enhance their skills.

Like other teachers, such as elementary and secondary teachers, adult education teachers are expected and required to participate in professional development that enhances their capabilities in becoming a more effective adult education teacher. The primary purpose of professional development is to increase student achievement (Cooper, 2017; Guskey, 1986; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Smith & Gillespie, 2007). Guskey (2000) claims that “demonstrable gains in student learning outcomes always can be traced to the involvement of educators in some form of professional development” (p. 208). The success of a student often hinges on the professional training of the teacher. The influence professional development has on students is often determined by the effect professional development has on a teacher’s knowledge and practice (Guskey, 2000).

With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which was signed into law by President Obama in 2014, measurable student achievement is now a more important outcome than ever for Adult Basic Education programs. While the main purpose of these programs includes the attainment of a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or the acquisition of the ability to read, write, and speak English, WIOA implemented several impactful reforms for adult education. One of these reforms is an attempt to strengthen the alignment between adult education, post-secondary education, and employers (U.S. Department of

Education, 2014). According to WIOA, the purpose of adult education is “to prepare individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce”

(p. 2). For adult education programs to achieve this stated purpose, WIOA does the following:

- Expands the purpose of adult education to emphasize that activities should increase an individual’s ability to transition to postsecondary education and obtain employment.
- Promotes the integration of adult education with occupational education and training, as well as development of career pathways systems; authorizes the use of funds for “integrated education and training” and “workforce preparation activities”; and clarifies that integrated English literacy and civics education programs may provide workforce training.
- Encourages activities provided in collaboration with employers. (p. 2)

Adult education programs that fail to achieve student outcomes by meeting these performance indicators, in addition to the other adult education reforms set forth in WIOA, run the risk of being placed on a performance improvement plan and/or losing funding (“WIOA State Plan for the State of Arkansas,” n.d.).

While classes offered by Adult Basic Education programs are typically free to adult learners, programs still depend upon financial resources that support their maintenance and operation. In the United States, funding for Adult Basic Education programs is provided through both federal and state grants. Adult Basic Education programs were initially funded by Title IIB of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (Rose, 1991). During the 2015-2016 program year, 1,525,878 adults were enrolled in adult education classes that included Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English as a Second Language (ESL) (“Adult

Education Basic Grant Program,” 2017). For the fiscal year 2014, the federal and non-federal expenditures for adult education totaled \$1,870,416,779.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a fixed percentage of federal discretionary funds was set aside for teacher training. Teacher training would continue to be funded and required through various iterations of the original Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to the current Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. Although federal requirements for teacher training afford states flexibility in regard to professional development requirements for adult education teachers, research shows that policies that govern professional development, as well as teaching licensure for adult education teachers, vary greatly from state to state (Belzer & Darkenwald-DeCola, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

Adult education has been defined as “a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills” (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 9). Correspondingly, Merriam and Brockett (2007) define adult education as “activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception, define them as adults” (p. 8). Best practices for working with adult learners have long been established and include approaches and strategies that respect the adult learner’s experience and recognize their problem-centered orientation to learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Like the adult learners they work with on a daily basis, adult education teachers are adult learners. However, it is unclear whether the required learning adult education instructors participate in, namely professional development, is based on adult learning principles and best practices (Gardner, 1996).

The ultimate goal of professional development in education, including adult education, is improvement in student learning (Guskey, 2000). Therefore, student learning outcomes should be one goal of professional development efforts. Knowles, Holton III, and Swanson (2015) suggested that most teachers would probably teach as they themselves were taught. However, the majority of professional development models are based on K-12 research (Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe, 2003), and K-12 education is based on the pedagogical model. In the pedagogical model, education is teacher-directed with the learner playing a submissive role to the teacher's instructions (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2015). Adult learning theory and principles propose that adults learn differently from children. Professional development for adult educators might be most impactful if it is based on established best practices for adult learners. For student achievement to be maximized in the adult education setting, state officials, adult education program directors, and professional development facilitators should consider the implications of professional development for adult education teachers that is based on best practices that represent adult learning theory and principles.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' experiences with professional development. This study sought to determine whether adult learning principles were evident in the facilitation of professional development activities.

### **Research Objectives**

The following objectives will be used to address the central research question:

- Describe the ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who participated in this study on selected demographic variables.

- Identify the dimensions of the experiences that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers have with professional development activities.
- Compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the learning environment of the professional development in which they participate.
- Compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the skillsets of those who facilitate their professional development activities.

### **Significance of Study**

Kutner, Sherman, Tibbetts, and Condelli (1997) define professional development for adult educators as “a process in which instructors gradually acquire a body of knowledge and skills to improve the quality of teaching for learners and, ultimately, to enhance learner outcomes” (p. 1). The authors characterize adult education professional development as meeting the “happiness quotient” due to instructors’ immediate reaction to professional development upon its completion. Because little is known about teacher quality and the impact of professional development and certification standards on student outcomes, Kutner et al. (1997) argue that evaluations of adult education professional development are needed to assess an instructor’s competencies due to an increase in competition for funding and program effectiveness.

However, professional development and licensure requirements for adult education teachers vary from state to state. Like their students, adult education teachers are adult learners, and as such, the quality of their experiences with professional development activities depends in part on whether they are based on adult learning principles. Lawler (2003) wrote, “When we view teachers of adults as adult learners, and their professional development as adult education, we have at our disposal the research and literature from the field of adult education, adult

learning and development, and program development” (p. 15). While it is difficult to measure, the development of adult educators into better facilitators potentially improves student outcomes. Improved performance by adult education students may be achieved through the enhancement of the effectiveness of adult education teachers (Gardner, 1996). However, little research has been conducted on professional development for adult education teachers (Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe, 2003).

Therefore, it is important that those who are responsible for professional development for adult educators understand the characteristics of the adult education teacher as an adult learner. Incorporating best practices for adult learners into the delivery of professional development programs has the potential to enhance the experience of participants and as a result, improve students’ experiences in the classroom. A consideration for those responsible for providing professional development for adult education teachers should include the context in which the learning is occurring; it will also facilitate the process in which the delivery of training is conducted when professional development is approached (Lawler, 2003). The results of this study should be useful to state officials, adult education program directors, professional development facilitators, and perhaps most of all, adult education teachers. This study will also add to the limited literature on professional development for adult education teachers.

### **Delimitations and/or Assumptions**

This study includes only ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who are members of the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE). The selection of participants for this study was not randomized. Each subject who participated in the study, however, did have an equal and independent chance to respond to the survey instrument. ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who are not members of COABE are not included in the survey instrument used for data collection.

## Definitions

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

*Adult Basic Education (ABE)*: Udouj (2015) defines Adult Basic Education as a “component of adult education in which instruction in reading, language, and math is geared toward basic skills below the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level (0-8.9)” (p. 6).

*Adult Secondary Education (ASE)*: Udouj (2015) defines Adult Secondary Education as a “component of adult education in which instruction in reading, language and math is geared toward basic skills above the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level (9.0-12.9)” (p. 6).

*English as a Second Language (ESL)*: English as a Second Language is a “component of adult education focused on improving English reading, writing, listening, and speaking” (Udouj, 2015, p. 7).

*Professional Development*: Guskey (2000) defines professional development “as those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students” (p. 16). Professional development is sometimes also referred to as staff development, in-service training, etc.

## Conceptual Framework

The early adult learning theorist, Eduard Christian Lindeman (1926), believed that the purpose of adult education “is to put meaning into the whole of life” (p. 7). Lindeman was one of the earliest leaders of the adult education movement in the United States (“In Memoriam: Eduard Christian Lindeman,” 1953). He viewed adult education as a means to “provide opportunities for mature adults to continue their intellectual growth and social understanding” (Lindeman, 1944, p. 122). Lindeman identified five key assumptions about adult learners:

1. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy.
2. Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered.
3. Experience is the richest source for adult's learning.
4. Adults have a deep need to be self-directing.
5. Individual differences among people increase with age. (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 22)

These assumptions provided a new way of thinking about adult learning.

How adults learn is based on various models, principles, assumptions, and theories and it has been said that there is no single theory to explain adult learning (Corley, 2008; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The complexity of the adult learning process prevents a single theory from being applied to all adult learners (Corley, 2008). Knowles, Holton III, and Swanson (2015) define a theory as “a comprehensive, coherent, and internally consistent system of ideas about a set of phenomena” (p. 11). They suggest that explanations of phenomena and guidelines for action are provided by a good theory.

One of the best-known frameworks, or theories, that explains how adults learn is that of andragogy. The concept of andragogy can be traced back to Europe in 1833 and it first appeared in the United States in 1927. In the United States, it is most associated with the work of Malcolm Knowles, who wrote extensively about andragogy during the 1960s and 1970s. Knowles held that adults learned differently than children. Knowles differentiated between the teaching of children, or “pedagogy,” and helping adults learn, or “andragogy.” Through his research, Knowles began to see evidence that an andragogical approach made a difference in the organization and operations of adult education programs, the way in which adult education



teachers were trained, and the ways adults were taught (Knowles et al., 2015). An adult educator is someone “who has some responsibility for helping adults to learn” (Knowles, 1980, p. 26).

The functions of an adult educator include:

1. Helping the learners diagnose their needs for particular learnings within the scope of the given situation.
2. Planning with the learners a sequence of experiences that will produce the desired learnings.
3. Creating conditions that will cause the learners to want to learn.
4. Selecting the most effective methods and techniques for producing the desired learning.
5. Providing the human and material resources necessary to produce the desired learning.
6. Helping the learners measure the outcomes of the learning. (pp. 26-27)

Knowles et al. (2015) viewed the andragogical model as a process model instead of the contrast model that is typically used in education. In the contrast model, the teacher is responsible for the planning of the lesson as well as the transmission of the content. The andragogical model, or process model, allows for collaboration between the teacher and the learner on what should be learned and how it should be learned. This process involves the following eight elements:

1. Preparing the learner: When preparing the learner, the teacher provides information to the learner, prepares the learner for participation, and helps the learner set realistic expectations for learning.

2. Climate: The teacher creates an environment that is conducive to learning. This includes setting conditions that are based on trust, respect, support, and collaboration. Resources should be rich in nature and readily available to the learner.
3. Planning: Mutual planning should include all parties (e.g. teacher and learner) who are involved in the learning endeavor.
4. Diagnosis of needs: Learner outcomes can be determined by constructing a model that identifies the learner's desired behavior, performance, and competencies as a result of participating in the learning.
5. Setting of objectives: Learning objectives are identified through the mutual negotiation between the teacher and the learner.
6. Designing learning plans: Learning plans should be based on self-diagnostic procedures that help the learner select the appropriate learning format, design the unit of learning, and arrange the sequence of activities based on the student's readiness to learn.
7. Learning activities: Learning activities should be based on experiential techniques that provide the learner with ample opportunity for inquiry.
8. Evaluation: Evaluation should be a mutual re-diagnosis of needs, in addition to measuring the effectiveness of the overall program.

The eight elements of the andragogical model provide a foundation from which those responsible for professional development activities for adult education teachers can organize and develop curriculum.

From his andragogical model, Knowles et al. (2015) proposed six assumptions about the adult learner. The six assumptions of the adult learner are as follows:

1. Adult learners have a need to know. Adults want to know why they must learn something before learning it.
2. Adult learners have a self-concept. The self-concept of an adult is influenced by the responsibility for making decisions for one's own life.
3. Adult learners are influenced by previous experience. Unlike children, adults bring a plethora of experience to their learning.
4. Adult learners demonstrate a readiness to learn. Adults tend to be ready to learn when the learning is related to real-life situations.
5. Adult learners demonstrate orientation to learning. Orientation to learning for adults is life-centered or problem-centered.
6. Adult learners are motivated to learn. Adults are motivated to learn by both external and internal motivators.

Professional development for adult education teachers that is based on Knowles' andragogical model and his six assumptions will perhaps lead to ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers being more effective when working with adult learners, and thus, help students achieve their goals.

## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

#### **A History of Professional Development Requirements for Adult Education as Required by Federal Law**

In the United States, adult education can trace its earliest roots to Colonial America (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Over the years, the purpose of adult education has been to address the educational needs of the nation and to provide opportunities for adults to improve their lives. Because of economic growth and increased immigration in the United States during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Federal Government began to take a more active role in adult education to ensure the United States was equipped with a workforce that could maintain economic growth and stability (Eyre & Pawloski, 2013). Today, the purpose of adult education is shifted to educating “and retraining adults to keep the United States competitive in a global economic market” (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 9).

Although the Federal Government would become more involved in education throughout the years, such as through the creation of the Bureau of Education in 1867, an Adult Education Section would not be officially added to the U.S. Office of Education’s organizational chart until 1955 (Eyre & Pawloski, 2013). The purpose of the Adult Education Section was to:

- Help Americans become more aware of the importance of lifelong learning and how it can aid in solving many of their problems.
- Assist in identifying national trends and problems that have implications for adult education.
- Encourage educators and the public generally to accept adult education as an integral part of regular education programs.

- Help bring about greater clarity of purpose and policies, more communication and cooperation among adult education groups, and better coordination among public and private agencies in the use of resources. (p. 4)

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Adult Education Section was tasked with developing programs of research, providing consulting services, and creating a clearinghouse of information.

According to Eyre and Pawloski (2013), “The Adult Education Section gave special attention to statistics, education of the aging, literacy, adult basic education, community development, education for public affairs, leisure time education, and human relations education” (p. 4).

The Adult Basic Education program, which was part of Title IIB of the Economic Opportunity Act, was passed in 1964 (Rose, 1991). Authorized by the Office of Economic Opportunity, the program was administered by the U.S. Office of Education (USOE). Finally, in 1966 the Federal Government’s responsibilities for adult education were outlined with the passage of the Adult Education Act. At that time, the ABE program was officially moved to the USOE. Section 309 of the Act allocated funds for teacher training (Rose, 1991).

Based on federal funding requirements for adult education, funding for teacher training was provided by a fixed percentage of federal discretionary funds. The allocations of these funds for teacher training and special programs came from Sections 309b and 309c of the Adult Education Act and were considered imperative to the field of adult education. At the time, it was believed the success of adult education programs, and the Adult Education Act itself, depended on teacher training and the development of materials for use in adult education programs.

The first ABE teacher training programs were developed in 1965 (Rose, 1991). These programs consisted of summer institutes and weekend workshops (Leahy, 1986). During the 1960s, the USOE was divided into nine regions. Each of the nine USOE regions held teacher

training institutes in 1966, and even more were offered in 1967 (Rose, 1991). These teacher training institutes continued to be offered as summer institutes from 1966-1971. It would be these summer institutes, along with weekend workshops, that provided training for teachers (Leahy, 1986).

These institutes were funded by such entities as the Ford Foundation in coordination with the U.S. Office of Education and sponsored by colleges and universities (Leahy, 1986). From 1964-1968, some 4,300 teachers, administrators, and counselors were trained during short-term workshops, summer institutes, and weekend workshops. Leahy (1986) suggests these institutes served two purposes. First, the institutes provided training to teachers. Second, by-products of these institutes resulted in “training guides, curriculum guides, guides for the evaluation of instructional materials, guides for the teaching of reading, math and English as a second language” (Leahy, 1986, p. 3).

The training techniques used for the earliest institutes were primarily based on lecture, small group discussion and group work, and case studies (Leahy, 1986). As the years passed, the training sessions incorporated more sophisticated modes of instruction including the use of demonstration and modeling, field visits, videotaping, and practicums. However, teacher training institutes were discontinued in 1971 (Belzer, Drennon, & Smith, 2001). These institutes were often criticized for being too expensive and limited in scope. Beginning in 1975, federal monies were no longer provided for teacher training (Leahy, 1986). Instead, states provided funds based on a “project-by-project” basis. It was during this period that states took over the responsibility for ABE staff training and development (Belzer et al., 2001).

Provisions in Education Amendments of 1978 made funds available to state and local agencies that were intended to cover cost for instruction, the employment and training of

qualified adult educators, and development of curriculum and teaching techniques that proved effective for adult learners (Eyre & Pawloski, 2013). While both student enrollment in adult education and congressional funding continued to increase between 1979 and the early 1990s (Eyre & Pawloski, 2013), federal funding for ABE teacher training did not increase until 1988 (Belzer et al., 2001) and occurred as a response to the federal government's initiative to address adult literacy. Belzer et al. (2001) noted that "along with the increase in funding came more specific goals for literacy education related to the employability of adults with low skills and the integration of immigrants into American society" (p. 2).

The National Literacy Act (NLA) of 1991 required states to allocate at least 15 percent of their ABE funding toward professional development and research (Quigley, 1997). To meet this requirement, states began to offer continuing educational opportunities to teachers, administrators, and other adult education staff. This led to the creation of professional development delivery systems (Belzer, Drennon, & Smith, 2001). The Act provided funds for the establishment of "a network of state or regional adult literacy resource centers" (Eyre & Pawloski, 2013, p. 61), which were used to provide professional development training to adult educators.

The National Literacy Act of 1991 was superseded by Title II – the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act – of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. WIA was meant "to consolidate, coordinate, and improve employment, training, literacy, and vocation rehabilitation programs in the United States" (Eyre & Pawloski, 2013, p. 62). The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act created a partnership between federal, state, and local agencies to provide adult education and literacy services to adults. Funding requirements for professional development and research set forth in the National Literacy Act of 1991 were eliminated in the Workforce

Investment Act (Belzer, Drennon, & Smith, 2001). In lieu of the professional development requirement, a maximum of 12.5 percent of allocations were set aside for state leadership funding. Funding for state leadership activities was to be used for one or more of the following adult education and literacy activities:

- establishment or operation of professional development programs to improve the quality of instruction provided,
- technical assistance to providers of adult education and literacy activities,
- technology assistance,
- support of state regional networks of literacy resource centers,
- monitoring and evaluation,
- incentives,
- development and dissemination of curricula,
- other activities having a statewide significance,
- coordination with existing support services,
- integration of literacy instruction and occupation training,
- linking of postsecondary education institutions. (Eyre & Pawloski, 2013, p. 64)

Belzer, Drennon, and Smith (2001) suggested “the elimination of a specific spending mandate can be construed as a devaluation of the importance of professional development systems, which had earlier been encouraged to grow and develop” (p. 153).

Adult education in the U.S. was impacted again when President Barack Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) into law on July 22, 2014 (H.R. 803, 2014). The “one-stop career center,” or American Job Center, was authorized by WIOA (“Fact Sheet,” n.d.). The core programs that make up the one-stop career center include:



- Title I – Workforce Development Activities – authorizes job training and related services to unemployed or underemployed individuals and establishes the governance and performance accountability system for WIOA;
- Title II – Adult Education and Literacy – authorizes education services to assist adults in improving their basic skills, completing secondary education, and transitioning to postsecondary education;
- Title III – Amendments to the Wagner-Peyser Act – amends the Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933 to integrate the U.S. Employment Service (ES) into the One-Stop system authorized by WIOA; and
- Title IV – Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 – authorizes employment-related vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities, to integrate vocational rehabilitation into the One-Stop system.

(Bradley, 2015, p. 1)

Jacobson (2017) notes the key changes in WIOA for adult education include student transition from ABE to post-secondary education and/or the workforce, integration of workplace training and education, and targeted services to vulnerable adult populations. In all, there are a total of 13 considerations states are required to meet when providing funds to local programs (U.S.

Department of Education, 2014). Some of the 13 considerations include:

1. An increased emphasis on alignment of activities with regional needs identified in local plans under Title I;
2. Serving individuals with disabilities;
3. Instructional activities based on rigorous research;
4. Effective use of technology;

5. Activities that promote integrated education and training; and
6. Coordination with education, training, employers, and social service providers to promote career pathways. (U.S. Department of Education, 2014, p. 2)

WIOA requires an eligible agency (an adult education program) to use no more than 12.5 percent of grant funds for state leadership activities found in Section 223 of the law (H.R. 803, 2014). Funding for permissible state leadership activities include:

1. The support of State or regional networks of literacy resource centers.
2. The development and implementation of technology applications, translation technology, or distance education, including professional development to support the use of instructional technology.
3. Developing content and models for integrated education and training and career pathways.
4. Integration of literacy and English language instruction with occupational skill training, including promoting linkages with employers.
5. Activities to promote workplace adult education and literacy activities.
6. Development and piloting of strategies for improving teacher quality and retention. (H.R. 803, 2014, pp. 191-192)

Adult education programs are also required to establish or operate professional development programs that are of high quality and that lead to improvements in adult education and literacy activities (H.R. 803, 2014). These activities should be delivered “by well-trained instructors, counselors, and administrators who meet any minimum qualifications established by the State, where applicable, and who have access to high quality professional development, including through electronic means” (H.R. 803, 2014, p. 195).

Jacobson (2017) presents possible challenges that adult education programs might face when implementing the requirements of WIOA. One of the challenges identified by Jacobson is the alignment of content standards, such as the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS). Adult education content standards are to be aligned to the CCRS, which were developed by the U.S. Department of Education. The CCRS are supposed to help students transition to college and career training. This is to be accomplished by “communicating clearer expectations for students, using content standards to improve curriculum and instruction, and creating professional development to help staff develop the expertise to implement standards” (Pimentel, 2013, p. 1). If the CCRS standards are to be effective in preparing students for their intended outcomes of college and career training, Jacobson (2017) believes adult education teachers must understand the importance of CCRS as they relate to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. If teachers are to be successful in implementing and incorporating these academic standards within adult education settings, Jacobson suggests that “states will need to build and sustain robust professional development systems to support their implementation in practice” (p. 23). This could prove problematic, as Smith and Gillespie (2007) have found there to be challenges with states providing adequate professional development for such important endeavors.

### **State Requirements for Professional Development and Teacher Licensure**

Among other issues, such as adult education teachers leaving the education field sooner than K-12 teachers and having to teach multi subject areas, professional development and licensure requirement are somewhat challenging since the majority of adult education teachers work only part-time (Smith & Gillespie, 2007). More recently, the National Association for Public Continuing and Adult Education reported that there were 18,165 full-time adult education teachers and 127,139 part-time adult education teachers employed as instructional personnel

during the early 1980s (Eyre & Pawloski, 2013). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimated that there were approximately 68,200 “adult literacy and high school equivalency diploma teachers” jobs reported in 2016 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017, Quick Facts section). However, the BLS did not indicate whether these 68,200 jobs were full-time, part-time, or a combination of both. Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, and Morgan (1995) conducted a study that involved more than 2,600 ABE programs. The researchers found that 59 percent of the programs reported to have no full-time instructional staff, with a ratio of 4 to 1 part-time to full-time teachers.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics describes “adult literacy and high school equivalency diploma teachers” as teachers who “instruct adults in basic skills, such as reading, writing, and speaking English” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017, What Adult Literacy and High School Equivalency Diploma Teachers Do section). The BLS indicates that most adult education teachers must hold a bachelor’s degree, with employers preferring those teachers who possess a license or certification. Comings, Soricone, and Santos (2006) suggest that quality adult education programs must ensure that “staff members are qualified, committed, and well trained” (p. 28). In addition, instructional staff must possess the required skills, knowledge, and life experiences that will enable them to meet the needs of adult learners. Professional development and teacher qualifications are tied to these attributes. However, there appears to be great inconsistency in both professional development and teacher qualification requirements for adult education teachers across the United States.

In a comprehensive review of professional development for adult education instructors across the United States, Belzer and Darkenwald-DeCola (2014) prepared a report for the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium that focused on “policies

regarding the preparation and professional development requirements for instructional staff in adult basic, literacy, and GED education” (p. 4). The authors noted that the need for such a report indicated a disconnect between policy regulation, federal funding, and professional development. Because of these inconsistencies, professional development policies vary from state to state.

The organization of the report is structured around the following research question (Belzer & Darkenwald-DeCola, 2014): What requirements do states have for entry into the field, early professional development, and ongoing professional development? How do they enact and evaluate them? Subquestions the report sought to answer included:

1. What modes and methods of delivery are states using to provide early and ongoing professional development?
2. What are the key areas of focus for early and ongoing professional development?
3. Do states have teacher competencies or standards that guide their training and professional development curriculum and their teacher evaluation?
4. In what ways have states studied the effectiveness of their professional development requirements in leading to high-quality instruction in terms of methods, modes and content? (Belzer & Darkenwald-DeCola, 2014, p. 5)

Data for the report were collected from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Because collecting data related to the research question and subquestions became problematic, data collection was done in stages and included a scan of state agency websites, phone interviews, and email correspondence. The authors noted the “general difficulty of doing national, cross state research” (p. 7), in addition to making sense of the data due to the “sheer

quantity of data and the difficulty of understanding all the variation within and across state policies” (p. 7).

**Entry qualifications.** Belzer and Darkenwald-DeCola (2014) defined entry qualification as the “minimum requirements for an instructor to be hired” (p. 7). Thirty states have state-mandated requirements, such as a bachelor’s degree or a teaching license for entry into the adult education profession. Twenty-one states do not have any entry-level requirements for adult education teachers; sixteen states accept a bachelor’s degree from any field of study; ten states require a teaching certificate for teachers who teach in certain adult education programs; and four states require a bachelor’s degree plus either experience or coursework above a bachelor’s degree. States that do not have entry-level qualification requirements for adult education teachers often have requirements that are “articulated at the local level or through the education agencies that house adult education programs” (p. 10).

**Early service professional development requirements.** Belzer and Darkenwald-DeCola (2014) define “pre or early service professional development as any professional development that instructors are required to complete either before they begin working with students or within one year of hire” (p. 11). Pre- or early in-service training for instructors is required in twenty-five states. This in-service training includes new teacher orientation as well. Their review of orientation programs revealed that nine states provide face-to-face teacher orientation, seven states deliver it online, and six states deliver the training in a blended format of face-to-face and online training. The local education agency (LEA) determines the delivery method in two states. One state requires an orientation, but this requirement is not “systematic or enforced” (p. 11). Another state requires new instructors to participate in new teacher orientation in addition to earning an adult education credential within one year of employment as an adult

education teacher. In addition to new teacher orientation programs, some states require new adult education teachers to participate in mentoring, observation, and other projects. The authors note that “early service professional development seems aimed at addressing most states’ rather nonspecific requirements for hire, as they tend to focus on the particulars of working with adults and in adult education programs” (p. 11).

**Ongoing professional development requirements.** Ongoing professional development is defined as “any training or professional development activities that are required at the state level beyond the instructor’s first year of teaching” (Belzer & Darkenwald-DeCola, 2014, pp. 15-16). Regarding ongoing professional development, data indicated that thirty-two states had some type of ongoing professional development requirements. To meet this requirement, instructors who work in twelve of these states must acquire a set number of professional development hours within a set period of time. Teachers must participate in specific courses and/or training in five states, while five other states require a blended format of professional development that is “free choice,” attendance at professional development institutes, or the establishment of a professional development plan by each instructor. A professional development plan helps provide structure for teachers in designing their personal learning goals and plans of action to achieve those goals (Janssen, Kreijns, Bastiaens, Stijnen, & Vermeulen, 2013). Four states require teachers to complete a professional development plan, and in another four states, teachers must earn an adult education certification within a set period of time. These teachers must attain the number of professional development hours associated with the status and level of their adult education certification. For example, adult education teachers in Arizona must earn a Standard Adult Education Certificate within three years of being hired to teach adult education classes. In addition, teachers who hold the Standard Certificate must complete 10 hours of professional

development each year. One state requires teachers to attend a professional development institute throughout the year. Finally, at the time of this study, one state was going through a transition period and was not enforcing its professional development requirements.

Belzer and Darkenwald-DeCola (2014) found two common characteristics for states that had well-developed professional development policies. First, professional development in these states was based on best practices as identified in professional development research, was collaborative in nature, and was job-embedded. Second, these states had professional development systems that differentiated “between the needs of new and more experienced teachers” (p. 16). Teachers who went above the regular professional development by engaging in more advanced and comprehensive training were presented with opportunities for advancement.

Currently, nineteen states do not have any ongoing professional development requirements. While some states do not require ongoing professional development, they do offer it. In three other states, there is a high level of participation in professional development despite there being no requirements. To maintain their teaching license, two states require teachers to participate in professional development at the local level. One state receives financial support for professional development through a grant system. At the time of the report, seven states were in a state of transition and professional development requirements were to be enacted at a later date. Finally, of the seven remaining states, some type of non-specified professional development was offered to adult education teachers.

**The adult education credential.** An adult education credential or endorsement is required in fourteen states (Belzer & Darkenwald-DeCola, 2014). Of these fourteen states, five states require an adult education teacher to have a credential either at the time of or after hiring.



While the requirements for earning an adult education credential or endorsement varies from state to state, “most include some combination of teaching experience and coursework provided by the state agency or through an institution of higher learning” (p. 24).

**Evaluation of training and professional development requirements.** Belzer and Darkenwald-DeCola (2014) found that every state has some type of evaluation for professional development offered to adult education teachers. Although professional development evaluations varied by state, data collected from evaluations include paper and/or online evaluations, satisfaction surveys, self-reported learning, action planning, formative and summative assessments, and follow-up surveys. It is proposed that these activities were “carried out as a way to understand impact and improve offerings, but the extent to which this data is consistently, systematically, and effectively utilized to accomplish this is highly variable and somewhat limited” (p. 26).

**Frameworks to guide professional development and teacher evaluation.** Belzer and Darkenwald-DeCola (2014) found that seventeen states have professional development for adult education teachers that was guided by “some kind” of frameworks. These frameworks identified teacher competencies or standards. The states hoped that frameworks would increase the quality of instruction provided by adult education teachers and enhance their professionalism. Of the seventeen states that have frameworks, nine states posted the competencies/standards online and three states were in the process of drafting or revising their competencies/standards for adult education teachers. One state had published competencies, but the competencies were not used in any systematic way. Another state had different standards that were based on different levels of experience of adult education teachers.

**Current practices in adult education professional development and licensure.** As found in the study conducted by Belzer and Darkenwald-DeCola (2014), professional development and teacher licensure requirements for adult educators varied greatly among states. To illustrate the current practices for professional development and teaching licensure in adult education across the U.S., four states were chosen to highlight their current requirements for both professional development and licensure requirements. Two states from the central part of the United States, Arkansas and Kentucky, and two states from the northeastern part of the United States, New York and Pennsylvania, were chosen to illustrate the differences in certain aspects of professional development and licensure requirements that currently exist.

**Arkansas.** The Arkansas Department of Career Education, Adult Education Division, requires both full-time and part-time adult education teachers to hold a current Arkansas Department of Education teacher's license (Arkansas Department of Career Education, 2015). While part-time adult education teachers are not required to be licensed in adult education, full-time teachers are required to obtain adult education licensure within four years of their initial employment as a full-time adult education teacher.

The State of Arkansas mandates that educators, including adult education teachers, obtain at least thirty-six hours of professional development each year for the renewal of a teacher's license. The *Arkansas Department of Education Rules Governing Professional Development* (2016) defines professional development as "a set of coordinated planned learning activities for educators" (p. 4). Professional development activities may include, but are not limited to an activity that:

- Improves the knowledge, skills, and effectiveness of teachers, including the ability to apply what is learned;

- Improves the knowledge and skills of administrators and paraprofessionals concerning effective instructional strategies, methods, and skills, including the ability to apply what is learned;
- Leads to improved student academic achievement;
- Is research-based and standards-based;
- May incorporate educational technology as a component of the professional development, including without limitation taking or teaching an online or blended course; and
- May provide educators with knowledge and skills needed to teach:
  - Students with intellectual disabilities, including without limitation Autism Spectrum Disorder;
  - Students with specific learning disorders, including without limitation dyslexia;
  - Culturally and linguistically diverse students; and
  - Gifted students. (p. 4)

In 2012, the Arkansas State Department of Career Education, Adult Education Division, published *Standards of a Quality Adult Education Program*. This document provided a general overview for the standards of a quality adult education program in Arkansas. Professional development was addressed in Standard Five: Staffing and Staff Development Quality Indicator. More specifically, the goals of professional development are outlined as follows:

Goal 5.3: The program implements its staff development plan. Examples of appropriate measures are as follows:

- Each employee must have an annual staff development plan.

- Program provides staff with a variety of opportunities for professional development (e.g., distance learning; action research; cross training among teachers, staff, and other agencies; peer coaching; learning circles).
- Staff participates in staff development activities. Staff includes paid and unpaid, full-time and part-time instructional, support, and administrative staff.
- Staff development activities result in the incorporation of improved practices in the program.
- Program conducts systematic follow up and ongoing evaluations of staff development to determine whether it is effective and whether the contents are applied and incorporated into the program.
- Number and percent of instructional, support, and administrative staff who participate in staff development activities. (Smith, 2012, p. 15)

WIOA required the governor of each state to submit a Unified or Combined State Plan to the U.S. Secretary of Labor. The plan was to outline the state's four-year workforce development strategy for its workforce development system. The planning process for a state's Unified or Combined State Plan was to lead to better coordination of services and partnerships among service agencies and other entities. In addition to including program-specific requirements for the other WIOA core programs, the WIOA State Plan for the State of Arkansas (n.d.) included the "Program-Specific Requirements for Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Programs."

Professional development is addressed in "Section F: Assessing Quality" of the "Program-Specific Requirements for Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Programs". Professional development opportunities are made available to program directors, faculty, and

staff through the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC). When planning professional development, the AALRC is supposed to conduct a state-wide assessment to determine the professional development needs of adult educators across the state. Through the AALRC, the Arkansas Department of Career Education, the Adult Education Division “will include ongoing and systematic needs assessment and evaluation processes to not only provide information about the impact of professional development, but to provide data for refining and adjusting professional development activities” (p. 163). Local programs determine the effectiveness of the professional development provided by the AALRC through classroom observations, educational gains made by the students of participating instructors, focus groups, etc. As a result, the AALRC will be implementing Guskey’s model for the Five Critical Levels of Professional Development Evaluation to determine the quality and effectiveness of professional development activities as well as the impact on student learning.

**Kentucky.** In the State of Kentucky, professional development requirements can be found in the *2017-2018 Kentucky Adult Education Skills U Professional Development Handbook*. The handbook provides adult education directors, teachers, and staff with information concerning professional development offerings, course registration, and tuition reimbursement, among other topics. For the 2017-2018 professional development model, Kentucky “provides opportunities for the state’s teachers to perfect their craft as practitioners through trainings based on the latest research in their content areas and by stretching their skills set and strategies in the classroom” (Kentucky Adult Education Skills U, 2017, p. 1).

Instructors must attend and complete all required professional development, which is provided by Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE) Skills U, to fulfill the state’s professional development requirements (Kentucky Adult Education Skills U, 2017). Professional

development requirements for ABE/GED and English Language Learner (ELL) teachers vary by experience and the number of hours worked. For instance, teachers who work less than 200 hours per year have no professional development requirement. Teachers working more than 1,000 hours per year must complete three 12-hour courses; teachers working 500-999 hours per year must complete two 12-hour courses; and teachers working 200-499 hours per year must complete at least one online or blended course.

**New York.** In the State of New York, adult education programs are supported by the Employment Preparation Education Program (EPE) (New York State Education Department, 2017). The EPE provides more than \$90 million dollars in supporting funds for adult education programs offered by the New York public schools and the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES).

EPE policy requires that adult literacy instruction be taught by a certified adult education teacher. In order to receive an adult education instructor certificate, an individual is recommended by the superintendent of a school district along with a school district recommendation letter (“New York Adult Education Program Teacher Requirements,” n.d.). Five titles have been developed to distinguish adult education instructors from pre-kindergarten, elementary, and secondary teachers (New York State Education Department, 2017). The titles are: (a) Adult Education Instructor/Literacy and HSE Preparation Instructor; (b) Adult Education Instructor/English Language Acquisition Instructor; (c) Adult Education Instructor/Assessment; (d) Adult Education Career and Technical Education (CTE) Instructor; and (e) Adult Education Instructor/Work Experience Instructor.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) requires agencies receiving EPE funds to provide all staff (professional, clerical, and data) with a minimum of 12 hours of

professional development per year (New York State Education Department, 2017). The minimum 12 hours of professional development is provided by the Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN), which is made up of seven regional centers. Training offered by the RAEN includes: accountability, network building, digital literacy and distance learning, and activities aimed at assisting practitioners with meeting or exceeding benchmarks on core indicators (“Regional Adult Education Network,” n.d.).

**Pennsylvania.** According to the *Adult Education and Family Literacy Guidelines for Program Year 2017-2018* (2017), published by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Pennsylvania Department of Education requires an “in-house” professional development specialist for each adult education program (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2017). The professional development specialist must have experience in adult education and is tasked with working with other staff members to develop and implement individual professional development plans. The duties of the professional development specialist include “coordinating professional development activities within the program, supporting staff in implementing new skills and knowledge, and working closely with the professional development system and the program director around instructional quality” (p. 10).

The Division of Adult Education’s professional development system provides support for professional development (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2017). The staff of the professional development system works with program staff and the in-house professional development specialist. An in-house professional development specialist has several job responsibilities including working with the program director on professional development, supporting staff with meeting their professional development goals, and ensuring that professional development opportunities are offered in a variety of formats. In turn, the

instructional staff are expected to work with the in-house professional development specialist by identifying their needs for providing quality instruction and participating in professional development that supports their individual professional development needs.

In Pennsylvania, Act 48 outlines the continuing professional development requirements for all educators who hold a Pennsylvania public school certification. To comply with Act 48, educators are expected to earn six credits of collegiate study, six credits of continuing professional education courses, 180 hours from continuing professional education programs, or a combination of credits and hours every five years to preserve active certification status (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016).

In summary, professional development and teacher licensure requirements for adult education programs vary greatly from state to state. As long as states follow the requirements set forth by WIOA, they are given with the flexibility to develop and implement policies and procedures for professional development and teacher licensure that meet the needs of their constituents.

### **Professional Development**

In addition to adult basic education, professional development is found in a variety of other settings such as K-12 education, higher education, and the workplace. Professional development in the workplace is often driven by globalization, advances in technology, and the ever-changing nature of the work required by today's employees (Meyer & Marsick, 2003). In higher education, for example, demands made by society and students has forced institutions to transform professional development in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of the instructors (Brancato, 2003). In K-12 education, "every proposal for education reform and every



plan for school improvement emphasizes the need for high-quality professional development” (Guskey, 2000, p. 3).

Thomas Guskey is known throughout the world for not only his work in student assessment and educational change, but also his expertise in professional learning (“About Tom,” n.d). Guskey (2000) suggests that professional development is sometimes perceived to be a series of workshops and presentations that are unrelated to practice and provide little follow-up opportunity for implementation. Instead, professional development should be central to advancing education as a profession. He defines professional development “as those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students” (p. 16). Guskey (2000) believes effective professional development is defined by three key characteristics:

- Professional development is intentional.
- Professional development is ongoing.
- Professional development is systemic.

Professional development that can be considered intentional is based on a deliberate process that offers a clear vision and goals that are planned out in advance (Guskey, 2000). Having a clear vision and goals allows for information to be gathered so that it can be determined if the professional development program met its intended goals. Guskey (2000) recommends using the following steps to ensure the professional development process is intentional:

1. Begin with a clear statement of purposes and goals.
2. Ensure that the goals are worthwhile.
3. Determine how the goals can be assessed. (pp. 17-18)

By following these steps, professional development may no longer be a disconnected and chaotic process that fails to produce positive outcomes for both the teacher and the student.

When viewed as an ongoing process, professional development provides teachers with a variety of opportunities to be continuous learners throughout their careers (Guskey, 2000). Professional development should be an entrenched process with learning opportunities presented on a daily basis. “The challenge is to take advantage of these opportunities, to make them available, to make them purposeful, and to use them appropriately” (Guskey, 2000, p. 19).

Finally, for professional development to be a systemic process, it should include both individual and organizational development for improvement (Guskey, 2000). Because both the individual and organization are recognized as important components for successful professional development, everyone who is responsible for student learning is included in the process. Viewing professional development as a systemic process is a paradigm shift from the more traditional views of professional development.

**Professional development and adult education.** According to Smith et. al (2003), very little research has been conducted related to professional development for adult education teachers. Most of the research that addresses professional development and the resulting teacher change is focused on that of the K-12 environment. The authors offer two reasons why K-12 research is limited in its application to adult education professional development. First, the professional development models that have been studied in K-12 research are not replicable in adult education due to differences in funding and teacher status. Second, there are limitations in K-12 professional development research in its applicability to adult education because of the differences in contexts and structures in which K-12 education and adult education operate.

Smith et al. (2003) conducted research for the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) that examined how adult education teachers change as a result of participating in one of three models of professional development. The research question for the study was: “How do practitioners change as a result of participating in one of three different models of professional development, and what are the most important factors that influence (support or hinder) this change?” (Smith et al., 2003, p. 1). The study included 100 adult education teachers from the states of Maine, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. The teachers participated in up to 18 hours of professional development in one of three professional development models. The three models that were deemed appropriate for adult education were:

1. Multisession workshops – a traditional professional development activity, but organized in multiple sessions and including experiential, active learning activities.
2. Mentor teacher groups – a “reform” type of professional development activity, blending features of study circles with features of peer coaching and observation.
3. Practitioner research groups – a “reform” type of professional development activity where teachers investigate their own classroom practice by collecting and analyzing data to answer a question of concern to them. (Smith et al., 2003, p. 5)

Data were collected through a series of questionnaires at three points in time: (1) before the professional development started, (2) immediately after the completion of the professional development, and (3) one year after the professional development had been completed. Data collection was based on three categories of factors: (1) individual factors, (2) professional development factors, and (3) program and system factors. Results from the study conducted by Smith et al. (2003) indicated:

1. Most teachers experienced at least a minimal amount of change due to an increase in knowledge or actions.
2. Almost all the participants gained some knowledge from the topic, but it was limited to only one or two concepts from the professional development.
3. The majority of teachers took at least some minimum form of action that was related to the topic of the professional development.

Overall, the researchers found that teacher change as a result of professional development fell within four types of change: integrated, acting, thinking, and no or minimal change.

Based on their findings, Smith et al., (2003) made the following recommendations for program directors and states in regard to professional development offered to adult education teachers:

- Improve teachers' working conditions, including access to decision-making in the program.
- Pay teachers to attend professional development.
- Increase access to colleagues and directors during and after professional development.
- Establish expectations at the state and the program level that all teachers must continue to learn. (Smith et al., 2003, pp. 120-121)

Based on their findings, Smith et al., (2003) made the following recommendations for professional developers in regard to professional development offered to adult education teachers:

- Ensure that professional development is of high quality.
- Offer a variety of professional development models for teachers to attend.

- Be clear during recruitment for “reform” models of professional development what participation will be like for teachers.
- Help teachers acquire skills to build theories of good teaching and student success.
- Add activities to professional development that help teachers strategize how to deal with the forces that affect their ability to take action. (Smith et al., 2003, pp. 123-125)

### **Professional Development and Adult Learning Theory**

Cranton (1996) suggested that “adult learning takes place in all the contexts within which people work and live” (p. 15). Lawler and King (2003) have written and coauthored articles on professional development for adult educators as well as the book, *Planning for Effective Faculty Development: Using Adult Learning Strategies*. They suggested that when adult education teachers are viewed as adult learners and professional development is considered a type of adult education, the focus of professional development can be shifted to the teacher’s needs at the individual, organizational, and personal levels (King & Lawler, 2003). Using adult learning principles and strategies can provide practitioners with a firm foundation from which to frame professional development that integrates both theory and practice in approaching old problems (Lawler & King, 2003). Lawler (2003) writes, “When we view teachers of adult learners, and their professional development as adult education, we have at our disposal the research and literature from the fields of adult education, adult learning and development, and program development” (p. 15).

Because of the demand in accountability by lawmakers and stakeholders, King and Lawler (2003) found adult educators are expected to teach in such a manner that will guarantee

positive outcomes for the adult learners in their classes. Professional development is one way to ensure that teachers of adult learners continue to grow in their practice and profession, thus leading to positive outcomes from their students. Unfortunately, many professional development facilitators are not trained in adult learning.

King and Lawler (2003) also offer their perspectives on the current context for professional development, trends for professional development, and issues in professional development. The current context for professional development requires professional developers to be astute in diversity, academics, finance, and changing dynamics both locally and globally. Professional developers are constantly having to address both expected and unexpected challenges to delivery as a result of changes in technology, economics, politics, and business just to name a few. Emerging trends in professional development include an increased demand for technology, challenges in funding, diversity, and the propagation of teaching and learning centers. Since technology is constantly changing, King and Lawler (2003) believe teachers of adults must learn to cope with the ever-changing aspects of technology since teachers are not only educators, but also users and learners, like their students, and face similar challenges. Like their students, adult education teachers come from diverse backgrounds. The diversity of both their life and educational experiences greatly impacts the teachers' current learning experiences (King & Lawler, 2003). Regardless of the context, trends, and issues surrounding professional development, it is important for professional developers to view teachers as adult learners. Professional development should also be recognized as adult education, which allows the focus to be placed on the adult educator's personal and organizational needs (Lawler & King, 2003).

By becoming familiar with the various adult learning theories and principles, practitioners can be equipped with the necessary tools to work with adult learners. Trotter

(2006) proffers that adult learning theories should be used as a framework to understand the adult learner. An understanding of adult learning theories allows for professional development activities that are effective and sustainable. Trotter identifies four adult learning theories: Age Theory, Stage Theory, Cognitive Development Theory, and Functional Theory. Age Theory contends that adults change how they confront issues based on chronological age. The aging process requires an adult to reflect on his or her life and career. Because of this, professional development activities should be designed with consideration for “the practical knowledge of the educators” (p. 9). Professional development should allow for time for reflection through discussion and journaling. Stage Theory is based on the work of Piaget. Stage-theorists believe adults move through different stages of development. The various stages focus on survival, acceptance, and reflection. Professional development activities should be structured so that they enable educators to move to higher levels of stage development. Cognitive Development Theory suggest that adults move through stages from concrete to abstract. In the most advanced stage, adults operate from internal standards instead of external standards. So that educators can transfer their learning to the classroom, professional development activities should be targeted for its intended audience. Finally, Functional Theory holds that adult education teachers should provide their students with learning activities that are relevant to learners’ experiences as well as being applicable to their current role as an adult.

Gregson and Sturko (2007) conducted a case study that examined a professional development session for career and technical education (CTE) teachers. This professional development course reflected adult learning principles and was intended to facilitate the integration of academics and career and technical education. This course focused on the collaboration of career and technical teachers and regular academic teachers. Part of the learning

process focused on teaching experimentation and reflection. Preliminary data were collected through the administration of a survey completed by teachers who participated in the course. The survey gathered data about the learning and collaboration experiences of the teachers. Teachers were also asked to write a reflection paper on their experiences in the course. Results indicated the design and delivery of the course allowed teachers to reflect on their practice, construct knowledge with peers, and build collaborative relationships with those peers. Based on these findings, the authors recommend using adult learning principles as the foundation for professional development when designing and developing integration courses, which include components of math, reading and writing within the career and technical education curriculum.

Beavers (2009) states that teacher professional development (TPD) is required if teachers are to maintain a highly qualified teacher status. To address the challenges associated with maintaining highly qualified teacher status, professional development should be offered as a “means of collaborative support and training” (Beavers, 2009, p. 25). The author found, in general, teachers are disappointed in certain aspects of professional development such as the style of the presenter and the format of the lesson. Beavers believes professional development deficiencies can be alleviated and the effectiveness of the program can be increased by including basic principles and concepts from the field of adult education.

These principles and concepts include the characteristics of adult learners, Self-Directed Learning (SDL), transformative learning, and critical reflection (Beavers, 2009). When discussing the characteristics of adult learners, Beavers refers to Malcom Knowles and the concept of andragogy. Adult learners draw from “a variety of experiences that are crucial to their learning” (p. 26). Because of these experiences, teachers define who they are, how they address challenges, and how they approach learning. Also related to the characteristics of adult



learners, the purpose and benefits of the teacher professional development should be made clear. This allows teachers to become active participants as they see how the concepts addressed apply to their practice in the classroom. Self-Directed Learning can be effective because it allows teachers to learn from a place of personal inquiry. When included in professional development, SDL allows teachers to plan their professional development, which can be executed in various settings. Transformative learning may encourage teachers to examine their practice, and allow them to reflect on the “what,” “why,” and “how” of their teaching. Finally, Beavers suggests that to successfully educate teachers, directors of professional development must respect the individuality of the teachers as well as allowing for self-direction.

### **Professional Development Models**

Based on analysis of over 40 years of research, Cooper (2017) made the following conclusions for effective professional development:

1. What the teacher believes about teaching before becoming a teacher influences what the teacher does when teaching.
2. Teachers are positive about all opportunities to learn.
3. Professional development should be directly focused on the curriculum and programs teachers are teaching.
4. There are four critical components to help teachers learn new strategies and skills: (1) presentation of theory, (2) demonstration of the strategy or skill, (3) initial practice in the workshop, and (4) prompt feedback about their teaching.
5. In order for teachers to retain and apply new strategies, skills, and concepts, they must receive coaching while applying what they are learning.
6. Effective professional development is ongoing.

7. Initial enthusiasm on the part of teachers for the training is reassuring for the trainers, but has little influence on learning.
8. The design of the various sessions in the professional development is the most important factor influencing its success.
9. Individual teaching styles and value orientation do not usually influence teachers' abilities to learn. (pp. 2-3)

Cooper's (2017) analysis prompted him to pose the following question: "What is an appropriate model for effective professional development?" (p. 3)

In an attempt to contrast models of professional development, Smith and Gillespie (2007) found little research that focused on the effectiveness of professional development programming for ABE teachers. Instead, the authors had to rely on K-12 research to identify the two most commonly researched professional development models. These models included traditional professional development and job-embedded professional development. Traditional professional development is often comprised of "workshops, conference session, seminars, lectures, and other short-term training events" (Smith & Gillespie, 2007, pp. 213-214). Job-embedded professional development is training that is located in the school, program, or local context. Activities associated with job-embedded professional development include study circles and inquiry groups. While the workshop format is also a common method for providing professional development (Kerka, 2003), there are other forms of professional development that might prove effective within the context of ABE.

Guskey (1986) found that professional development for teachers and administrators is a key component of proposed improvements in education. While professional development varies in context and format, its main purpose is to increase student learning. Guskey writes, "Staff

development programs are a systematic attempt to bring about change – change in the classroom practices of teachers, change in their beliefs and attitudes, and change in the learning outcomes of students” (p. 5). Guskey proposes a professional development model he refers to as “A Model of Process of Teacher Change.” The model begins with staff development, moves to a change in teachers’ classroom practices, leads to a change in student learning outcomes, and ends with a change in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes. He suggests this model of staff development will allow teachers to see increases in student outcomes and achievement. Thus, this model provides teachers with evidence of its effectiveness, which leads to a change that impact teachers’ beliefs and attitudes toward staff development.

Hawley and Valli (1999) called for the implementation of the consensus model of professional development. The model requires a change in the delivery of professional development, the structure of schools, and the culture and belief systems that have perpetuated the continued education processes, including the low status of professional development. The consensus model is based on four converging developments:

- Research on school improvement that links change to professional development
- Growing agreement that students should be expected to achieve much higher standards of performance, which include a capacity for complex and collaborative problem solving
- Research on learning and teaching that reaches substantially different conclusions about how people learn from those that have shaped contemporary strategies for instruction and assessment
- Research that confirms the widespread belief among educators that conventional strategies for professional development are ineffective and wasteful and that

provides support for the adoption of different ways to facilitate professional learning. (Hawley & Valli, 1999, p. 128)

The authors found five distinct modes have been used for staff development. The models include:

1. Individually Guided Model – Learning experiences and goals are determined by the teacher.
2. Observer/Assessment Model – Peer coaches offer teachers feedback on their classroom performance.
3. Development/Improvement Process Model – Teachers design curriculum and engage in school improvement.
4. Training Model – Workshop sessions with material presented by an expert. This model is typically equated with staff development.

Hawley and Valli also present eight design principles of professional development strategies that should lead to improved student learning. The principles outlined by Hawley and Valli (1999) include:

- Principle One: Goals and Student Performance – The differences between the goals and standards for student learning and student performance are analyzed.
- Principle Two: Teacher Involvement – The needs of learners (i.e., teachers) are identified.
- Principle Three: School Based – Professional development is school based and is a key component to school operations.
- Principle Four: Collaborative Problem Solving – Professional development should allow for teacher collaboration.

- Principle Five: Continuous and Supported – Professional development should be continuous. Teachers should have support from external sources.
- Principle Six: Information Rich – Professional development should include the evaluation of various sources of information related to student outcomes and processes for implementing lessons from professional development activities.
- Principle Seven: Theoretical Understanding – Professional development should provide teachers with opportunities to form a theoretical understanding of knowledge and skills that are expected to be learned.
- Principle Eight: Part of a Comprehensive Change Process – Professional development should lead to changes in student achievement.

The Adult Learning Model for Faculty Development (Lawler & King, 2000) is based on principles of adult learning. The principles of adult learning include: (1) Create a climate of respect; (2) Encourage active participation; (3) Build on experience; (4) Employ a collaborative inquiry; (5) Learn for action; and (6) Empower participants. The four stages of the Adult Learning Model for Faculty Development incorporate these six adult learning principles. The four stages of the Adult Learning Model for Faculty Development are preplanning, planning, delivery, and follow-up. Teacher participation is a key focus of each stage of the model.

Gravani (2007) conducted an exploratory study to determine the internal dynamics of teachers and professional learning by examining the context and occasions of the professional learning. She used the participants' experiences and perceptions of professional learning to guide the study. This qualitative research study was conducted within the Greek education system, which Gravani notes is highly centralized. Twenty-two secondary teachers participated in the study. Four themes emerged from the analysis of the data collected through interviews

with the participants: professionalism, mutuality, emotionality, and formality. Gravani believes these four themes characterize professional learning in Greece. She argues that this study indicates professional development programs in Greece, and elsewhere, should move away from courses and the traditional training model of professional development. Instead, professional development programs should be based on a “systemic and complex understanding of the processes by which learning is created and shared in communities of practise [*sic*]” (p. 700). To do this, a shared sense of authority and trust must be established between professional development providers and the participants.

Stewart (2014) reviewed teacher professional development norms that have moved toward collaborative practice. The author believes professional learning communities are more effective than the traditional methods associated with professional development. Professional learning communities (PLC) can be used to improve teaching and learning in ABE programs. Learning communities are most effective when participants are engaged in their work and focused on student learning. Professional development activities derived from professional learning communities should be “job-embedded, informed by data, centered on student work and how students learn, active, and occur over a length of time that will allow for cycles of development, implementation, and evaluation” (Stewart, 2014, p. 31).

Another approach to address the professional needs of teachers is On-Demand Modules. According to Simmons and Borden (2015), On-Demand Modules are designed with a focus on student academic and social outcomes by increasing knowledge and skills of teachers. Each module is based on current research and includes survey and performance assessment data so that teachers can immediately apply their learning in the classroom. There are three main parts of each module. These parts include foundation, research, and application. Because the modules

are open-entry and open-exit, teachers are able to complete them at their own pace and/or for specific needs. Upon completion of a module, a teacher will receive a certificate of completion.

The On-Demand Modules were created based on principles associated with adult learning theory. While they discussed adult learning theory, specifically andragogy, Simmons and Borden focused on Malcolm Knowles' six assumptions of the adult learner: readiness, foundation, self-concept, orientation, motivation, and need to know. To address the readiness of the adult learner (i.e., teacher), modules focused on specific topics. Modules provided opportunities for teachers to recall previous classroom experiences, so analogies can be made between life experience and new learning, which addresses foundation. The idea of self-concept is advanced by offering open-entry and open-exit courses. The authors noted that an assumption of adult learning theory is that adults are oriented toward problem-centered learning. Each module begins with a classroom scenario that lends itself to the orientation of practice. Because the modules are designed to allow teachers to select topics that are most relevant to them, teachers have motivation to participate in professional development that is responsive to their needs. Simmons and Borden (2015) believe professional development should be designed with the adult learner's need to know as to the relevance of the new learning experience.

Cooper (2017) suggests that "effective professional development is the KEY to student success" (p. 11). Professional development should focus on a teacher's knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Throughout their careers, teachers should be continuously updating their knowledge and skills. He proposes a professional development model based on four components: theory, demonstration, practice and feedback, and coaching and follow-up. Theory allows the teacher to understand "the underlying research base and rationale for the new instructional strategy, skill, or concept being presented" (Cooper, 2017, p. 4). During the demonstration step, teachers observe

a model of the concept being taught during the professional development session. Practice and feedback provide an opportunity to practice the new skill as well as receive feedback that is both relevant and timely. Coaching and follow-up involve observation and feedback from a peer. It is hoped that a teacher will retain and use the new skills and/or strategy with the appropriate coaching and follow-up.

While Cooper (2017) found this professional development model to consider elements of adult learning theory, no specific adult learning theory is cited as the foundation for the model. He does note a school district must develop its own professional development plan. This plan should be aligned with the district's standards, goals, and objectives. Finally, all teacher training opportunities should meet the standards for effective professional development.



## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Design**

This quantitative research study was classified as nonexperimental research. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2010), “in nonexperimental quantitative research, the researcher identifies variables and may look for relationships among them but does not manipulate the variables” (p. 26). The dependent variable in this study would be the evidence of adult learning principles in the facilitation of professional development activities for adult education teachers. This study utilized the Ex Post Facto Research design. Ary et al. (2010), state that in Ex Post Facto Research “is conducted after variation in the variables of interest has already been determined in the natural course of events” and it is used “in situations that do not permit the randomization or manipulation of variables” (p. 332). This study fits the criteria for Ex Post Facto because the researcher examined the relationship between the variables of interest that occur through the normal operation of adult education programs.

Data were collected using an online survey instrument developed by the researcher. The instrument included demographic questions about respondents as well as questions about instructors’ experiences with professional development programs. The instrument also included questions about the learning environment and facilitator characteristics. This study employed some components of survey design research. In survey design research, data is collected through two basic methods including questionnaires and interviews (Creswell, 2015). This study utilized a questionnaire. Creswell (2015) defines a questionnaire as “a form used in a survey design that participants in a study complete and return to the researcher” (p. 385). Questionnaires may be mailed or web-based.

## **Description of Study Variables and Constructs**

The independent variable in this study was professional development offered to Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. The dependent variable is the evidence of adult learning principles in the facilitation of professional development activities for adult education teachers.

The purpose of this study was to explore ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' experiences with professional development. This study sought to determine whether adult learning principles were evident in the facilitation of professional development activities. The following objectives will be used to address the central research question:

1. Describe the ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who participated in this study on selected demographic variables.
2. Identify the dimensions of the experiences that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers have with professional development activities.
3. Compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the learning environment of the professional development in they participate.
4. Compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the skillsets of those who facilitate their professional development activities.

## **Population and Sample**

The population for this study was ABE, ASE and ESL teachers who were members of the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE). COABE is a national organization established for the purpose of promoting “adult education and literacy programs, including Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, English for Speakers of Other Languages, Family Literacy, Skills Development, Workforce Development, and other state, federal, and private

programs which assist undereducated and/or disadvantaged adults to function effectively” (“About COABE,” 2017, first bullet). Another stated purpose of COABE is “to advocate the development and dissemination of publications, research, methods, and materials, resources, and programs in adult education and literacy” (“About COABE,” 2017, third bullet).

COABE membership included approximately 23,000 teachers, practitioners and administrators. The target population for this study was COABE members who were classified as ABE, ASE, or ESL teachers during the spring 2018 semester. Because COABE was unable to provide the researcher with the exact number of members at the time of this study or a breakdown of members who self-identified as being a teacher, practitioner, or administrator, all members of COABE were provided with the opportunity to participate in this research study.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher worked with the professional staff members of COABE to deploy the survey to all current members in the spring of 2018. The researcher sent information about the study to professional staff members of COABE that outlined the focus of the study, including the purpose, timeframe, assistance needed from COABE personnel, possible impact on adult education programs, and how the results of the research would be shared with the COABE office.

An email message invited current members to participate in the study was sent through an email distribution listserve that is owned and managed by COABE. Given that the listserve is owned and managed by the association, the researcher opted to utilize a population sampling approach for this study. The email message inviting COABE members to participate in the study and directed members to a web-based version of the instrument utilized in this study. The web-based instrument was available via Qualtrics. A follow-up email inviting COABE members to

participate in the study was sent out by COABE personnel a week after the initial invitation to participate in this study. The web-based survey was closed after eighteen days.

### **Instrumentation**

The survey instrument was developed based on a review of the literature on adult learning, adult learning theory, assumptions of the adult learner, and professional development for adult education teachers. The survey instrument was comprised of 51 scale items and was divided into three sections. The first section contained ten questions that sought to collect demographic information about the participants. The first question asked participants which best described their current primary role: Teacher/Instructor, Coordinator, Director, or Other Administrator, and Other (Please specify). The second question asked what type of class(es) the adult education teacher teaches: ABE, ASE, or ESL. The third question asked what was the highest degree earned by the participant: Bachelor's, Master's, Education Specialist or Doctorate. The next question asked the participant to answer "yes" or "no" to whether or not he or she had adult education certification/licensure. If participants responded "no" to question four, question five asked these participants to answer "yes" or "no" as to whether they were currently working toward earning adult education certification or if they planned to add adult education certification in the near future. Question six asked for the number of years of experience the participant had working in adult education. Question seven asked if the participant worked full-time or part-time as an ABE, ASE, or ESL instructor. Question eight asked the participant if the adult education program for which he or she worked is located in a rural area or urban area. Question nine asked participants who served as their local adult education program provider: K-12 public school, Community College or Other Two-Year Institution, Career and Technical Education/Vocational School, Community-based Organization,

Volunteer Literacy Organization, or Other. Finally, question ten asked participants from whom they earned the majority of their professional development hours: Local Education Agency (LEA), State Agency Administering Adult Education Program, from attendance at state conferences, attendance at regional conferences, attendance at nation conferences, from online workshops/classes, or another way.

In the second section of the survey, participants were asked to respond to 40 questions about their professional development experiences within the last school year. Participants were asked to respond to each question using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 5 being almost always and 1 being never. The questions were structured based on adult learning principles, Knowles' six assumptions of the adult learner, professional development learning environment, and facilitator characteristics. In the third section of the survey instrument, respondents had the opportunity to answer the following open-response question: Is there anything else you would like to add about how professional development is relevant to your role as an adult educator?

A copy of the instrument is included in Appendix E.

### **Pilot Testing of Instrument**

Validity of the survey instrument was ensured through a pilot testing of the instrument. During the pilot test, the instrument was administered to an experienced group of approximately 30 ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers. The researcher asked for feedback from these teachers on the format of the questions on the instrument as well as the readability. The pilot test allowed the researcher to make the necessary modifications to the survey instrument as well as establish the content validity of the instrument (Creswell, 2014). Fink and Kosecoff (1988) believe that a pilot test should be able to answer:

- Will the survey provide the needed information?

- Are the questions appropriate?
- Will information collectors be able to use the survey forms properly?
- Are procedures standardized?
- How consistent is information obtained?

To assess the reliability of the study instrument, Cronbach's alpha was used. For the survey used in the research study, the Cronbach's alpha level was .934 for a total of n=18 ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who participated in the pilot testing of the study. Based upon the Cronbach alpha coefficient, the instrument was deemed to be valid for use in the study.

### **Study Approval**

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the proposed study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Arkansas. The proposal included a draft of the informed consent form, and the email that was sent to participants inviting them to take part in the survey. The proposal also included a letter of approval from the executive director of COABE, and the data collection instrument. The researcher received an exempt review status from the Human Subjects Committee since the proposed study met the criteria set forth in section 9.02 of the IRB policies and procedures (Policy and Procedures Governing Research with Human Subjects, 1999). All research protocols outlined in the University of Arkansas Policy and Procedures Governing Research with Human Subjects were followed.

Informed consent was obtained by participants' completion of the instrument. The informed consent form appeared at the beginning of the online instrument and participants were told that by completing and submitting the survey they were providing their implied consent to participate in the study. The form was based on the example of an informed consent form found in the University of Arkansas Policy and Procedures Governing Research with Human Subjects

(1999) and included the following elements and descriptions: title, investigator, description, risks and benefits, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and right to withdraw at any point without any negative consequences. Since the researcher used a web-based survey, the informed consent form was structured for online.

### **Data Analysis**

**Objective one.** Describe the ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who participated in this study on selected demographic variables. These demographic variables included primary role, adult education classes taught, highest degree earned, possession of adult education certification/licensure, working on or plans to add adult education certification/licensure, number of years worked in adult education, full-time or part-time teacher, area in which adult education program is located, provider of local adult education program, and who provides the majority of professional development hours in which the instructor participates. Categorical data was summarized by utilizing frequencies and percentages. Data measured on continuous variables was summarized by utilizing means and standard deviations.

**Objective two.** Identify the dimensions of the experiences that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers have with professional development activities. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was utilized to identify these dimensions, which included the first 32 items on the instrument used in this study. According to Pallant (2016), “Exploratory factor analysis is often used in the early stages of research to gather information about (explore) the interrelationships among a set of variables” (p. 182).

**Objective three.** Compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers’ impressions of the learning environment of professional development in which they participate. Questions 33 and 34 of the survey instrument related to the learning environment. Categorical

data was summarized by utilizing frequencies and percentages. Data measured on continuous variables was summarized by utilizing means and standard deviations. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to compare the variance between different groups. Regarding analysis of variance, Pallant writes:

Analysis of variance is so called because it compares the variance (variability in scores) *between* the different groups (believed to be due to the independent variable) with the variability *within* each of the groups (believed to be due to chance). An F ratio is calculated, which represents the variance between the groups divided by the variance within the groups. A large F ratio indicates that there is more variability between the groups (caused by the independent variable) than there is within each group (referred to as the error term). (p. 255)

**Objective four.** Compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the skillsets of those who facilitate their professional development activities. Questions 35-40 of the survey instrument sought to identify perceptions of facilitator skills and abilities that impacted the professional development experiences of the teachers. Categorical data was summarized by utilizing frequencies and percentages. Data measured on continuous variables was summarized by utilizing means and standard deviations. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to compare the variance between different groups.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers' experiences with professional development. Data were gathered with the use of an online survey that was created by the researcher. The study instrument was emailed to the approximately 23,000 members of the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE). The researcher utilized Qualtrics to collect the data, and data from the completed instruments were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23. The total number of COABE members to participate in the study was  $n=348$ .

#### **Summary of the Study**

This research study utilized Ex Post Facto Research design. The purpose of this study was to explore ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' experiences with professional development. This study sought to determine whether adult learning principles were evident in the facilitation of professional development activities for ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers.

#### **Study Objectives**

The following objectives were adopted to answer the central research question:

- Objective one was to describe the ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who participated in this study on selected demographic variables.
- Objective two was to identify the dimensions of the experiences that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers had with professional development activities.
- Objective three was to describe how the learning environment impacts ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' professional development experiences.

- Objective four was to identify facilitator skills and abilities that impact ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' professional development experiences.

### **Objective One**

Objective one of this study was to describe the ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who participated in this study. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Which best describes your current primary role?
2. What type of adult education classes do you teach?
3. What is the highest degree you have earned?
4. Do you have adult education certification/licensure?
5. If you answered “No” to the previous question, are you currently working on earning adult education certification or do you plan to add adult education certification in the near future?
6. How many years have you worked in adult education?
7. Are you a full-time or part-time ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher?
8. Is the adult education program for which you work located in a rural area or urban area?
9. Which of the following providers serves as your local adult education program provider?
10. From whom do you earn the majority of your professional development hours?

**Current primary role.** The first variable on which respondents were described was current primary role. Respondents were asked to identify the category which included their current teaching position. Current teaching position categories included “Teacher/Instructor,” “Coordinator, Director, or Other Administrator,” or “Other: Please specify.”

The current primary role with the largest number of respondents was “Teacher/Instructor” ( $n=232$ , 66.7%), which was followed by “Coordinator, Director, or Other Administrator” ( $n=92$ , 26.4%). The category with the smallest response was “Other: Please specify” ( $n=24$ , 6.9%). Examples of roles identified by respondents who selected “Other” included:

1. Student Advisor,
2. Counselor,
3. Instructional Specialist,
4. Curriculum Facilitator,
5. Transition Specialist, and
6. College and Career Coach

Since all these positions and roles were focused on instructional delivery or support, the researcher decided to include these respondents in the analysis of the collected data (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Current Primary Role as Reported by COABE Members*

Primary Role Category	Number	Percent
Teacher/Instructor	232	66.7
Coordinator, Director, or Other Administrator	92	26.4
Other	24	6.9
Total	348	100.0

**Type of adult education class taught.** The second variable on which respondents were described was the type of adult education classes participants currently teach. Classes included Adult Basic Education (ABE) (*Grade Level Equivalent 0 – 8.9*), Adult Secondary Education (ASE) (*Grade Level Equivalent 9.0 – 12.9*), and English as a Second Language (ESL). Respondents were asked to check all that applied to their current classes taught. The category with the largest response was a combination of ABE/ASE classes ( $\underline{n}=108$ , 32.0%), which was followed by ESL classes ( $\underline{n}=71$ , 21.1%). Fifty-nine ( $\underline{n}=59$ , 17.5%) respondents indicated that they taught a combination of ABE/ASE/ESL classes; forty-four ( $\underline{n}=44$ , 13.1%) respondents indicated they taught only ASE classes; thirty-three ( $\underline{n}=33$ , 9.8%) respondents indicated they taught only ABE classes; Nineteen ( $\underline{n}=19$ , 5.6%) respondents indicated they taught a combination of ABE/ESL classes; and three ( $\underline{n}=3$ , 0.9%) respondents indicated they taught a combination of ASE/ESL classes. Eleven of the 348 respondents who participated in the study chose not to indicate the type of adult education classes they currently teach (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Type of Adult Education Classes Taught as Reported by COABE Members*

Type of Adult Education Class Taught	Number	Percent
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	33	9.8
Adult Secondary Education (ASE)	44	13.1
English as a Second Language (ESL)	71	21.1
ABE and ASE	108	32.0
ABE and ESL	19	5.6
ASE and ESL	3	0.9
ABE, ASE, and ESL	59	17.5
Total	337	100.0

*Note.* Eleven subjects (n=11) chose not to disclose the type of adult education classes they taught.

**Highest degree earned.** The next variable on which respondents were described was the highest degree earned. Degrees earned included “Bachelor’s,” “Master’s,” “Education Specialist,” and “Doctorate.” The majority of respondents indicated they had earned at least a master’s degree ( $\underline{n}=187$ , 54.4%). This was followed by bachelor’s degree ( $\underline{n}=122$ , 35.1%), doctorate degree ( $\underline{n}=20$ , 5.8%), and education specialist degree ( $\underline{n}=15$ , 4.4%). Four respondents who participate in the study chose not to disclose their highest degree earned (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Highest Degree Earned as Reported by COABE Members*

Highest Degree Earned	Number	Percent
Bachelor's	122	35.5
Master's	187	54.4
Education Specialist	15	4.4
Doctorate	20	5.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>100.0<sup>a</sup></b>

<sup>a</sup> Total is rounded to 100%

*Note.* Four subjects (n=4) chose not to disclose their highest degree earned.

**Adult education certification/licensure.** The fourth variable on which respondents were described was if they had adult education certification/licensure. Two hundred five respondents ( $\underline{n}=205$ , 59.1%) indicated that they did not have adult education certification/licensure, while one hundred forty-two respondents ( $\underline{n}=142$ , 40.9%) indicated that they did have adult education certification/licensure. One ( $\underline{n}= 1$ ) of the 348 respondents who participated in this study chose not to disclose if he or she had adult education certification/licensure (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Adult Education Certification/Licensure as Reported by COABE Members*

<u>Adult Education Certification/Licensure</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Yes	142	40.9
No	205	59.1
Total	347	100.0

*Note.* One subject (n=1) chose not to disclose if he or she had adult education certification/licensure.

**Working on adult education certification/licensure or planning to add adult education certification/licensure.** Study respondents who answered “No” to the previous question were asked if they were currently working on earning adult education certification/licensure or had plans to add adult education certification/licensure in the near future. An overwhelming number of respondents ( $\underline{n}=159$ , 74%) indicated they were not working on earning adult education certification/licensure or had plans to add adult education certification/licensure in the near future. Fifty-six respondents ( $\underline{n}=56$ , 26%) indicated they were either working on adult education certification/licensure or had plans to add adult education certification/licensure in the near future.

**Years worked in adult education.** The sixth variable on which respondents were described was the number of years they have worked in adult education. Years worked in adult education categories included “Less than one year,” “One to five years,” “Six to ten years,” “Eleven to nineteen years,” “Twenty to thirty-four years,” and “Thirty-five years or more.” The number of years worked in adult education with the largest number of respondents was “One to five years” ( $\underline{n}=98$ , 28.5%). Eighty-five respondents ( $\underline{n}=85$ , 24.5%) indicated they had worked in

adult education “Eleven to nineteen years,” which was followed closely by “Six to ten years” ( $n=82$ , 23.6%). Fifty-nine respondents ( $n=59$ , 17.0%) indicated they had worked in adult education “Twenty to thirty-four years.” The categories with the smallest number of responses were “Thirty-five years or more” ( $n=12$ , 3.5%) and “Less than one year” ( $n=11$ , 3.2%). One ( $n=1$ ) of the 348 respondents who participated in this study chose not to indicate the number of years he or she has worked in adult education (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Number of Years Worked in Adult Education as Reported by COABE Members*

Number of Years Worked in Adult Education	Number	Percent
Less than one year	11	3.2
One to five years	98	28.2
Six to ten years	82	23.6
Eleven to nineteen years	85	24.5
Twenty to thirty-four years	59	17.0
Thirty-five years or more years	12	3.5
Total	347	100.0

*Note.* One subject ( $n=1$ ) chose not to disclose the number of years he or she has worked in adult education.

**Full-time or part-time ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher.** The seventh variable on which respondents were described was if they were a full-time or part-time ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher. One hundred eighty-one respondents ( $n=181$ , 52.8%) indicated they worked full-time as an ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher. One hundred sixty-two respondents ( $n=162$ , 47.2%) indicated they worked part-time as an ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher. Five ( $n=5$ ) of the 348 respondents who



participated in the study did not indicate if they worked full-time or part-time as an ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher.

**Adult education program located in rural or urban area.** The eighth variable on which respondents were described was if the program for which they work was located in a rural or urban area. The majority of respondents ( $n=224$ , 64.2%) indicated they work at an adult education program located in an urban area. One hundred twenty-three respondents ( $n=123$ , 35.8%) indicated they work at an adult education program located in a rural area. Four ( $n=4$ ) of the 348 respondents who participated in the study did not indicate if they work at an adult education program located in a rural or urban area.

**Local adult education providers.** Study respondents were also described by the provider who serves as their local adult education program provider. For this study, local adult education providers included “K-12 Public School,” “Career and Technical Education/Vocational School,” “Community-based Organization,” “Community College or Other Two-Year Institution,” “Volunteer Literacy Organization,” and “Other.” Respondents who selected “Other” were not asked to provide specifics on their local adult education program provider.

The category with the largest number of respondents was “Community College or Other Two-Year Institution” ( $n=123$ , 35.4%), which was followed closely by “K-12 Public School” ( $n=104$ , 30.0%). “Other” ( $n=45$ , 13.0%) and “Community-based Organization” ( $n=44$ , 12.7%) were a near tie as local adult education providers as indicated by study respondents. Twenty-five respondents ( $n=25$ , 7.2%) indicated a “Career and Technical Education/Vocational School” served as their local adult education provider and six respondents ( $n=6$ , 1.7%) selected “Volunteer Literacy Organization” as their provider. One ( $n=1$ ) of the 348 respondents who

participated in this study chose not to indicate the provider of his or her local adult education program (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Local Adult Education Providers as Reported by COABE Members*

Local Adult Education Providers	Number	Percent
K-12 Public School	104	30.0
Community College or Other Two-Year Institution	123	35.4
Career and Technical Education/Vocational School	25	7.2
Community-based Organization	44	12.7
Volunteer Literacy Organization	6	1.7
Other	45	13.0
Total	347	100.0

*Note.* One subject (n=1) chose not to disclose the provider of his or her local adult education program.

**Provider of the majority of professional development hours.** Finally, study respondents described who provided them with the majority of their professional development hours. Providers of professional development hours included “Local Education Agency (LEA),” “State Agency Administering Adult Education Program,” “Attending state conferences,” “Attending regional conferences,” “Attending national conferences,” “Online workshops/classes,” and “Other.”

A large number of respondents ( $n=108$ , 31.3%) indicated that “State Agency Administering Adult Education Program” provided them with the majority of professional development hours. Seventy-eight respondents ( $n=78$ , 22.6%) indicated that they earned the

majority of their professional development hours by “Attending state conference.” Fifty-three respondents ( $n=53$ , 15.4%) indicated that they earned the majority of their professional development hours from “Online workshops/classes,” which was followed closely by “Local Education Agency (LEA)” ( $n=47$ , 13.6%). An equal number of respondents indicated that they received professional development through “Attending regional conferences” ( $n=26$ , 7.5%) and “Other” ( $n=26$ , 7.5%). The category with the smallest response was “Attending national conference” ( $n=7$ , 2.0%). Three ( $n=3$ ) of the 348 respondents who participated in this study chose not to indicate the provider from whom they earned the majority of their professional development hours (see Table 7).

Table 7

*Provider of the Majority of Professional Development Hours as Reported by COABE Members*

Provider of the Majority of Professional Development Hours	Number	Percent
Local Education Agency (LEA)	47	13.6
State Agency Administering Adult Education Program	108	31.3
Attending state conferences	78	22.6
Attending regional conferences	26	7.5
Attending national conferences	7	2.0
Online workshops/classes	53	15.4
Other	26	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>100.0<sup>a</sup></b>

<sup>a</sup> Total is rounded to 100%

*Note.* Three subjects ( $n=3$ ) chose not to disclose who provided the majority of their professional development hours.

## Objective Two

Objective two of this study was to identify the dimensions of the experiences that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers had with professional development activities. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to analyze the first 32 items on the instrument used in this study. Pallant (2016) explained that “Exploratory factor analysis is often used in the early stages of research to gather information about (explore) the interrelationships among a set of variables” (p. 182). The first 32 items of the instrument were designed to identify the dimensions of the experiences that adult education teachers had with professional development activities.

Kaiser-Meyer, Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was calculated prior to completing the factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer, Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) is used to verify that responses to the first 32 items on the instrument were suitable for exploratory factor analysis. It was observed that the Kaiser-Meyer, Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was .939 and the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant  $\chi^2 = 6419.42$ ,  $df = 496$ ,  $p = .000$ . Pallant (2016) suggests that the KMO value is .6 or above and the significance of Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity should be .05 or less.

After further review of the Initial Eigenvalues and their cumulative percentage, the data indicated the first seven factors with Eigenvalues above one (1) explained 67.11% of the total variance among the first 32 items on the instrument. Table 8 shows the variance explained by the seven (7) factors that were extracted through the EFA (see Table 8). Qlique rotation was then conducted for the seven factors. The items corresponding to each factor are included in Table 9.

Table 8

*Variance Explained by Each Factor Extracted*

Factor Number	Variance Explained	Cumulative Variance Explained
Factor One	12.712	39.725
Factor Two	2.366	47.119
Factor Three	1.627	52.202
Factor Four	1.423	56.649
Factor Five	1.285	63.665
Factor Six	1.049	63.944
Factor Seven	1.013	67.111

**Overview of Factors**

**Factor one: New skills/strategies and application.** The first factor included items which suggested that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers learned new skills and strategies for working with adult learners that were applicable to their classroom instruction. The items which loaded with this factor indicated that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers were satisfied with the professional development they had attended within the last year. Responses also suggested that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers learned new strategies and content during the professional development sessions that helped them become better teachers. Finally, responses indicated that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers were encouraged to apply new skills and strategies learned from professional development to their teaching, which led them to change the methods and approaches to their classroom teaching.

**Factor two: Active participation and collaboration.** The second factor included items that focused on active participation and time for collaboration with peers during professional

development sessions. This factor indicated that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers recalled experiencing active participation during sessions, as well as opportunities to share and collaborate with their peers.

**Factor three: Issues with professional development.** The third factor included two items that indicated possible issues regarding the relevancy of professional development for ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers. Responses to the first item indicated that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers attended professional development that they found was not relevant to their teaching. Responses to the second item suggested that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers found the content of the professional development to be uninteresting on at least one occasion.

**Factor four: Format and presentation.** ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers reported they were treated as professional educators during the sessions they participated in within the last year and the facilitator(s) explained the purpose of the session and how the program content related to their teaching area. ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers also found that sessions were based on practical application.

**Factor five: Prior experience.** ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers reported that the professional development they participated in was linked to their previous experiences. Two of the items in factor five suggested that the facilitator(s) linked content to the teachers' college/university coursework or to previous professional development in which the teachers participated.

**Factor six: Assessment of professional development.** The sixth factor suggested that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' understanding of the content was assessed by the facilitator during the professional development in which they participated. Teachers also reported that they completed a professional development/growth plan during professional development programs,

and that they had the opportunity to provide feedback about the effectiveness of the professional development in which they participated.

**Factor seven: Content of professional development.** Finally, responses to items included in the seventh factor suggested that it was helpful to teachers when the facilitator(s) linked the material covered to their content knowledge and professional interests. This factor also included an item that suggested ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers were given the opportunity to decide on the content of the professional development session(s) by the facilitator(s).

Table 9

*Factor Loadings of the Dimensions of the Experiences that ABE, ASE, and ESL Teachers Had with Professional Development Activities*

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
New strategies to become a better teacher	.911						
New concepts applied in classroom	.899						
Learned new skills to become a better teacher	.894						
Learned new content information	.850						
Changed methods/approach to teaching	.841						
Immediately applied concepts learned	.707						
Satisfied with professional development	.539						
Opportunity to apply skills/concepts presented	.374						
Encouraged to consider new approaches to teaching	.342						
Time provided to share ideas with peers		.892					
Time provided for collaboration with peers		.888					
Facilitator(s) encouraged active participation		.689					



Table 9 (Cont.)

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6
Attended professional development not related to job			.940			
Found content/presentation uninteresting at least one time			.789			
Facilitator explained how content related to teaching area				-.638		
Content related to teaching area				-.609		
Sessions were based on practical application and not theory				-.585		
Knew the purpose of the session				-.567		
Treated as a professional educator				-.474		
Facilitator linked learning to college/university coursework					-.856	
Facilitator linked learning to previous professional development					-.661	
Content built on previous professional development					-.401	
Completed a professional development/growth plan						-.885
Understanding of content was assessed during session						-.607
Able to provide feedback about effectiveness						-.438

Table 9 (Cont.)

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Helpful when facilitator linked to content knowledge							-.652
Helpful when facilitator linked to professional interests							-.606
Facilitator(s) allowed attendees to decide on content							.448

### Objective Three

Objective three of this study was to compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the learning environment of the professional development in which they participated during the past year. Respondents for question 33 ( $n=144$ ) and question 34 ( $n=143$ ) included only those teachers who taught ABE, ASE, or ESL classes.

The overall mean scores for question 33 were compared among teachers who taught only ABE ( $n=33$ ), ASE ( $n=42$ ), or ESL ( $n=69$ ) classes. ESL teachers had the lowest mean of 3.87 ( $SD=.938$ ) for the item and ASE teachers had the highest mean of 4.26 ( $SD=.627$ ) (see Table 10).

Table 10

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Item Related to Facilitator Created an Environment Conducive to Learning as Reported by COABE Members*

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	33	3.97	.810
Adult Secondary Teachers (ASE)	42	4.26	.627
English as a Second Language (ESL)	69	3.87	.938
Total	144	4.01	.840

The overall mean scores of question 34 were compared among only those teachers who taught ABE ( $n=32$ ), ASE ( $n=42$ ), or ESL ( $n=69$ ) classes. ESL teachers had the lowest mean of 3.88 ( $SD=.883$ ) and ASE teachers had the highest mean of 4.07 ( $SD=.894$ ) (see Table 11).

Table 11

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Professional Development Sessions Were Held in a Comfortable Location as Reported by COABE Members*

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	32	4.03	.647
Adult Secondary Teachers (ASE)	42	4.07	.894
English as a Second Language (ESL)	69	3.88	.883
Total	143	3.97	.839

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to describe how the learning environment impacts ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' professional development experiences. Respondents for question thirty-three ( $n=144$ ) and question thirty-four ( $n=143$ ) included only those teachers who taught ABE, ASE, or ESL classes. There were no statistically significant differences among the groups for the items associated with this objective (see Tables 12 and 13).

Table 12

*ANOVA for Facilitator Created an Environment Conducive to Learning as Reported by COABE Members*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Between groups	2	4.08	2.97	.055
Within groups	141	96.92		
Total	143	100.99		

Table 13

*ANOVA for Professional Development Sessions Were Held in a Comfortable Location as Reported by COABE Members*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Between groups	2	1.06	.752	.473
Within groups	140	98.83		
Total	142	99.89		

#### **Objective Four**

Objective four of this study was to compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the skillsets of those who facilitate their professional development activities. Questions 35-40 of the study instrument sought to identify impressions of facilitator skills and abilities that impacted the professional development experiences of the teachers. Respondents for questions 35-40 included only those participants in the study who indicated that they taught ABE, ASE, or ESL classes.

**Facilitator invitation to attendees to share ideas.** The overall mean scores for question 35 were compared among teachers who taught only ABE ( $n=33$ ), ASE ( $n=42$ ), or ESL ( $n=69$ ) classes. ESL teachers had the lowest mean of 3.80 ( $SD=.933$ ) for the item and ASE teachers had the highest mean of 4.31 ( $SD=.715$ ) (see Table 14).

Table 14

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Item Related to Facilitator Invited Attendees to Share Ideas as Reported by COABE Members*

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	33	4.12	.696
Adult Secondary Teachers (ASE)	42	4.31	.715
English as a Second Language (ESL)	69	3.80	.933
Total	144	4.02	.848

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare perceptions of ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers as to whether or not the facilitator invited attendees to share ideas during professional development. As shown in Table 15, a significant F value,  $F=5.371 (2, 141) p=.006$  was found among groups. Anything below .05 is statistically significant. Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) test indicated that the difference existed between ASE and ESL groups (see Table 15).

Table 15

*ANOVA for Facilitator Invited Attendees to Share Ideas as Reported by COABE Members*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Between groups	2	7.29	5.37	.006
Within groups	141	95.65		
Total	143	102.94		

**Facilitator encouraged attendees to share different points of view.** The overall mean scores for question 36 were compared among teachers who taught only ABE ( $n=32$ ), ASE

( $n=42$ ), or ESL ( $n=69$ ) classes. ESL teachers had the lowest mean of 3.57 (SD=.962) for the item and ASE teachers had the highest mean of 3.81 (SD=.994) (see Table 16).

Table 16

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Item Related to Facilitator Encouraged Attendees to Share Different Points of View as Reported by COABE Members*

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	32	3.75	1.078
Adult Secondary Teachers (ASE)	42	3.81	.994
English as a Second Language (ESL)	69	3.57	.962
Total	143	3.68	.997

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare perceptions of ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers as to whether or not the facilitator encouraged attendees to express different points of view during professional development. There were no statistically significant differences among the groups for this item (see Table 17).

Table 17

*ANOVA for Facilitator Encouraged Attendees to Express Different Points of View as Reported by COABE Members*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Between groups	2	1.77	.889	.414
Within groups	140	139.43		
Total	142	141.203		

**Facilitator had direct experience with content.** The overall mean scores for question 37 were compared only among teachers who taught ABE ( $n=33$ ), ASE ( $n=42$ ), or ESL ( $n=69$ )

classes. ESL teachers had the lowest mean of 3.99 (SD=.922) for the item and ASE teachers had the highest mean of 4.36 (SD=.577) (see Table 18).

Table 18

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Item Related to Facilitator Appeared to Have Direct Experience with Content as Reported by COABE Members*

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	33	4.09	.914
Adult Secondary Teachers (ASE)	42	4.36	.577
English as a Second Language (ESL)	68	3.99	.922
Total	143	4.12	.843

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare perceptions of ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers of whether or not the facilitator had direct experience with the content presented during professional development. There were no statistically significant differences among the groups for this item (see Table 19).

Table 19

*ANOVA for Facilitator Appeared to Have Direct Experience with Content as Reported by COABE Members*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Between groups	2	3.62	2.61	.077
Within groups	140	97.36		
Total	142	100.98		

**Facilitator use of relevant examples.** The overall mean scores for question 38 were compared only among teachers who taught ABE ( $n=32$ ), ASE ( $n=42$ ), or ESL ( $n=69$ ) classes.



ABE teachers had the lowest mean of 3.97 (SD=.822) for the item and ASE teachers had the highest mean of 4.40 (SD=.544) (see Table 20).

Table 20

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Item Related to Facilitator Provided Relevant Examples about Content as Reported by COABE Members*

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	32	3.97	.822
Adult Secondary Teachers (ASE)	42	4.40	.544
English as a Second Language (ESL)	69	3.99	.866
Total	143	4.10	.794

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare perceptions of ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers as to whether or not the facilitator provided relevant examples of the content presented during professional development. As shown in Table 21, a significant F value,  $F=4.457 (2, 140) p=.013$  was found among groups. Anything below .05 is statistically significant. Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) test revealed that there was a difference between ASE and ESL teacher groups (see Table 21).

Table 21

*ANOVA for Facilitator Provided Relevant Examples about Content as Reported by COABE Members*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Between groups	2	5.35	4.46	.013
Within groups	140	84.07		
Total	142	89.43		

**Facilitator possession of relatable teaching experience.** The overall mean scores for question 39 were compared only among teachers who taught ABE ( $n=33$ ), ASE ( $n=42$ ), or ESL ( $n=69$ ) classes. ABE teachers had the lowest mean of 3.76 ( $SD=1.001$ ) for the item and ASE teachers had the highest mean of 4.00 ( $SD=.988$ ) (see Table 22).

Table 22

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Item Related to Facilitator Had Relatable Teaching Experience as Reported by COABE Members*

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	33	3.76	1.001
Adult Secondary Teachers (ASE)	42	4.00	.988
English as a Second Language (ESL)	69	3.88	.883
Total	144	3.89	.940

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' perceptions of whether or not the facilitator had relatable teaching experience. There were no statistically significant differences among the groups for this item (see Table 23).

Table 23

*ANOVA for Facilitator Had Relatable Teaching Experience as Reported by COABE Members*

Source	$df$	$SS$	$F$	$P$
Between groups	2	1.09	.614	.543
Within groups	141	125.13		
Total	143	126.22		

**Facilitator knowledge of subject matter.** The overall mean scores for question 40 were compared only among teachers who taught ABE ( $n=32$ ), ASE ( $n=42$ ), or ESL ( $n=69$ ) classes. ABE teachers had the lowest mean of 4.03 ( $SD=.740$ ) for the item and ASE teachers had the highest mean of 4.38 ( $SD=.661$ ) (see Table 24).

Table 24

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Item Related to Facilitator Knowledgeable of Subject Matter as Reported by COABE Members*

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	32	4.03	.740
Adult Secondary Teachers (ASE)	42	4.38	.661
English as a Second Language (ESL)	69	4.17	.747
Total	143	4.20	.727

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' perceptions of whether or not the facilitator was knowledgeable of the subject matter presented during professional development. There were no statistically significant differences among the groups for this item (see Table 25).

Table 25

*ANOVA for Facilitator Knowledgeable of Subject Matter as Reported by COABE Members*

Source	$df$	$SS$	$F$	$P$
Between groups	2	2.33	2.24	.110
Within groups	140	72.79		
Total	142	75.12		

### **Participants' Responses to Open-Response Question**

The survey instrument included one open-response question. The open-response question was: Is there anything else you would like to add about how professional development is relevant to your role as an adult educator? To analyze the text, the researcher coded the data. Creswell (2015) defines coding as “the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data” (p. 242). The following themes emerged from the data: Facilitator, Specific Needs of Teachers, Sharing of Information, Need for Professional Development, Presentation of Professional Development, and Budget Issues.

**Facilitator.** According to Lawler and King (2000), facilitators, or presenters, of professional development “should be aware of the importance of all of the principles of adult learning as they begin constructing the presentations” (p. 64). Facilitators are responsible for creating a climate of respect that promotes active participation during the professional development activities. However, participants in this study indicated that their professional development activities were “put together by people who haven’t been in a classroom in years.” Another respondent wrote, “I’ve been in activities when the mix of experience was as varied as a nurse wanting to give back to her community by teaching in Ad Ed programs and had no teaching experience to instructors with PhD’s.”

**Specific needs of teachers.** While adult education teachers participate in professional development activities to meet professional development requirements, it might be assumed that many adult education teachers participate in professional development activities to improve their practice. A respondent wrote, “As an ABE teacher in the correctional setting, it is difficult to find professional development for our unique needs outside of our Correctional Education

Association conference.” Other respondents indicated they chose professional development activities that helped them become better teachers.

**Sharing of information.** An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was utilized to analysis the first 32 items on the survey instrument. Seven factors explained 67.11% of the total variance among the first 32 items on the instrument. The second factor in the factor analysis indicated adult education teachers appreciated time for participation and collaboration with their peers during professional development activities. One respondent wrote, “I can always use more time to share with other colleagues.” Another respondent stated that “the teacher to teacher interaction is as valuable as the lesson content.”

**Need for professional development.** Based on responses to the open-response question, participants in this study indicated they believe there is a need for professional development. Participants indicated that professional development that is relevant to their role as an adult education teacher helps them become more effective teachers. One person wrote that “professional development is very relevant to my role as an adult educator because many of us in AE are not adequately trained to be AE teachers.” Another person suggested that “good professional development is crucial to the success of new adult educators.”

**Presentation of professional development.** Participants who responded to the open-response question voiced some concerns about the presentation of professional development in which they have participated. One respondent wrote, “Quality over quantity. We must constantly focus on perfecting our craft, in very immediate and relevant ways. MORE and better are not the same.” Yet, another person wrote, “Some of it has been very good. Other PDs have been a terrible waste of time or did not deliver on what was promised. Often, PD provided by our state treats us as if we’re inept.”

**Budget issues.** The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires a certain percentage of federal grant funds to be set aside for state leadership activities (H.R. 803, 2014). One of the permissible activities that is included for state leadership activities is improving teacher quality and retention. Although WIOA requires a percentage of funds set aside that can be used toward professional development, respondents indicated that their budgets were still a concern. One respondent wrote, “Budget often is the crucial factor in determining how frequently PD is offered.” Another respondent wrote, “For budgeting purposes, it’s frustrating to pay instructors for required PD. Then, they often leave the program due to part-time position. Then, the program needs to pay for required PD for their replacement again.”

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusions**

#### **Study Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to explore Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers' experiences with professional development. This study sought to determine whether adult learning principles were evident in the facilitation of professional development activities. The following objectives were adopted to answer the central research question:

- Objective one was to describe the ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who participated in this study on selected demographic variables.
- Objective two was to identify the dimensions of the experiences that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers have with professional development activities.
- Objective three was to compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the learning environment of professional development in which they participate.
- Objective four was to compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the skillsets of those who facilitate their professional development activities.

The survey was distributed to approximately 23,000 members of the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE). The entire population of COABE membership was surveyed since the researcher had no way to determine which COABE members identified specifically as ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers. Respondents to the survey were asked to identify their primary role in

adult education programs along with their primary teaching areas. The total number of respondents for the study was  $n=348$ .

## Study Results

**Objective one.** The first objective of this study was to describe the ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who participated in the study on selected demographic variables. The demographic variables of COABE members were identified through responses to items on the investigator-constructed instrument. The instrument identified the following demographic information: current primary role, type of adult education classes taught, highest degree earned by respondent, obtainment of adult education certification/licensure, plans to obtain adult education certification, number of years worked in adult education, whether the participant was employed full-time or part-time as an ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher, if their adult education program was located in a rural or urban area, who was the provider of their local adult education program, and who was the provider of the majority of professional development hours in which they participated.

The largest number of respondents for the current primary role category was “Teacher/Instructor” ( $n=232$ , 66.7%). The largest category of type of adult education classes taught by respondents was a combination of ABE and ASE classes ( $n=107$ , 31.8%), while ESL classes ( $n=72$ , 21.4%) had the largest number of responses for a single type of adult education classes taught. The highest degree earned by a majority of respondents was a master’s degree ( $n=187$ , 54.4%). A majority of respondents ( $n=205$ , 59.1%) had not attained adult education certification/licensure, and a large number of respondents ( $n=159$ , 74.0%) were not currently working toward earning adult education certification/licensure or planning to add adult education certification/licensure in the near future. The category with the largest number of respondents



for years worked in adult education was “One to five years” ( $n=98$ , 82.2%) and a majority of respondents ( $n=181$ , 52.8%) indicated they worked full-time as an ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher. An overwhelming number of respondents ( $n=221$ , 64.2%) indicated they worked in an adult education program that is located in an urban area. More participants indicated that a “Community College or Other Two-Year Institution” ( $n=123$ , 35.4%) serves as their local adult education program provider, and that the majority of their professional development hours were provided by a “State Agency Administering Adult Education Program” ( $n=108$ , 31.3%).

**Objective two.** The second objective of this study was to identify the dimensions of the experiences that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers have with professional development activities. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to analyze the first 32 items on the instrument used in this study. The Kaiser-Meyer, Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was .939 and the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant  $\chi^2=6419.42$ ,  $df=496$ ,  $p=.000$ , which verified to the researcher that the first 32 items on the instrument were suitable for factor analysis. A review of the Initial Eigenvalues and their cumulative percentage indicated the first seven factors with Eigenvalues above one (1) explained 67.11% of the total variance among the first 32 items on the instrument.

The first factor in the factor analysis indicated that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers learned new skills and strategies for working with adult learners that were applicable to their classroom instruction. The second factor suggested that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers were given time for active participation and collaboration with their peers during professional development sessions. The third factor indicated that teachers found content unrelated to. The fourth factor suggested the format and presentation of professional development sessions were important to ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers. The fifth factor suggested that the professional development activities ABE,

ASE, and ESL teachers participated in was linked to previous learning experiences. The sixth factor suggested that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers were provided with opportunities to assess the professional development in which they participated. Finally, the seventh factor indicated that teachers had the opportunity to determine the content of the programs.

**Objective three.** The third objective of this study was to compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the learning environment of professional development in which they participated. Questions 33 and 34 of the survey instrument related to the learning environment. For questions 33 and 34, those participants who self-identified as teachers of ABE, ASE, or ESL classes only were included in the data analysis. The overall mean score for respondents ( $n=144$ ) included in the analysis of question 33, *facilitator created an environment conducive to learning*, was  $\bar{x}=4.01$  ( $SD=.840$ ) and the overall mean score for the respondents ( $n=143$ ) included in the analysis of questions 34, *professional development sessions were held in a comfortable location*, was  $\bar{x}=3.97$  ( $SD=.839$ ). To describe how the learning environment impacts ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' professional development experiences, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the data for these two questions. Results indicated there were no statistically significant differences between the groups for the items associated with objective three.

**Objective four.** The fourth objective of this study was to compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the skillsets of those who facilitate their professional development activities. Perceptions of facilitator skills and abilities that impacted the professional development experiences of ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers were reflected in questions 35-40. For questions 35-40, those participants who self-identified as teachers of ABE, ASE, or ESL classes only were included in the data analysis. The overall mean score for

respondents ( $n=114$ ) in the analysis of question 35, *facilitator invited attendees to share ideas*, was  $\bar{x}=4.02$  ( $SD=.848$ ). A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for question 35 and a significant difference was found among groups ( $F=5.371$  (2, 141)  $p=.006$ ). Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) test indicated the difference existed between ASE and ESL groups. The overall mean score for respondents ( $n=143$ ) in the analysis of question 36, *facilitator encouraged attendees to share different points of view*, was  $\bar{x}=3.68$  ( $SD=.997$ ). A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for questions 36 and no statistically significant differences existed among the groups. The overall mean score for respondents ( $n=143$ ) in the analysis of question 37, *facilitator appeared to have direct experience with content*, was  $\bar{x}=4.12$  ( $SD=.843$ ). A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for questions 37 and no statistically significant differences existed among the groups. The overall mean score for respondents ( $n=143$ ) in the analysis of question 38, item related to facilitator provided relevant examples about content, was  $\bar{x}=4.10$  ( $SD=.794$ ). A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for question 38 and a significant difference was found among groups ( $F=4.46$  (2, 140)  $p=.013$ ). Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) test indicated the difference existed between ASE and ESL groups. The overall mean score for respondents ( $n=144$ ) in the analysis of question 39, *facilitator had relatable teaching experience*, was  $\bar{x}=3.89$  ( $SD=.940$ ). A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for question 39 and no statistically significant differences existed among the groups. The overall mean score for respondents ( $n=143$ ) in the analysis of question 40, *facilitator knowledgeable of subject matter*, was  $\bar{x}=4.20$  ( $SD=.727$ ). A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for question 40 and no statistically significant differences existed among the groups.

## Discussion

**Objective one.** The first objective of this study was to describe the ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers who participated in the study on selected demographic variables. Results from the study instrument indicated that the majority of participants ( $n=232$ , 66.7%) described their current primary role as teacher/instructor. A large number of respondents ( $n=187$ , 54.4%) had earned at least a master's degree. While adult learners may benefit from having an instructor who holds a graduate degree, an overwhelming number of respondents ( $n=205$ , 59.1%) lacked adult education certification/licensure, with a large majority of respondents ( $n=159$ , 74.0%) indicating that they were not currently working on adult education certification/licensure, nor had plans to add adult education certification/licensure in the near future. This finding is not surprising, given that research indicates very few states require adult education teachers to possess an adult education credential or endorsement (Belzer & Darkenwald-DeCola, 2014). The category with the largest number of respondents ( $n=98$ , 28.2%) for the number of years worked in adult education was "one to five years", but almost as many reported working in adult education for eleven to nineteen years ( $n=85$ , 24.5%) and six to ten years ( $n=82$ , 23.6%). Participants in this represent a wide distribution of adult education teaching experience, and more than half of the respondents ( $n=181$ , 52.8%) reported employment as a full-time ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher. This finding is contrary to the notion that the majority of adult education teachers work part-time (Kutner, Sherman, Tibbetts & Condelli, 1997; Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Young, Flesichman, Fitzgerald, & Morgan, 1995). However, one explanation for this result is that full-time employees are more likely to be members of a professional organization than part-time employees.

A majority of the respondents ( $n=221$ , 64.2%) worked at adult education programs located in urban areas. Over two-thirds of the total respondents ( $n=347$ ) reported having either a “Community College or Other Two-Year Institution” ( $n=123$ , 35.4%) or “K-12 public school” ( $n=104$ , 30.0%) serving as their local adult education program provider. Community colleges serving as the local adult education program provider is aligned with national trends. Data from the National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education reported that out of 1,074 providers of adult education, almost half of the providers ( $n=531$ ) for the 2016-2017 program year were community colleges (Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, n.d.). Interestingly, respondents earned the majority of their professional development hours from a “State Agency Administering Adult Education Program” ( $n=108$ , 31.3%) or at a state conference ( $n=78$ , 22.6%). This could be a result of the state agency that administers the adult program requiring mandatory attendance for the professional development it offers.

**Objective two.** Objective two of this study was to identify the dimensions of the experiences that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers have with professional development activities. The first factor in the factor analysis indicated that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers learned new skills and strategies for working with adult learners that were applicable to their classroom instruction. The first factor included more items than any of the other factors. Responses to questions that made up the second factor suggested that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers were given time for active participation and collaboration with their peers during professional development sessions. The third factor indicated that teachers did not always find content of the professional development relevant to their practice and at times was not interesting to them. The fourth factor suggested teachers were treated as professionals, the sessions were based on practical application, and the purpose of the session was explained to them. The fifth factor

suggested that the professional development activities ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers participated in was linked to previous learning experiences. The sixth factor suggested that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers were provided with opportunities to assess the professional development in which they participated. Finally, the seventh factor indicated that teachers had the opportunity to determine the content of the programs.

Overall, these results indicate that professional development activities align with the assumptions of adult learners as espoused by Knowles et al. (2015). These assumptions include the learner's need to know, their concept of self as one who takes responsibilities for their choices, the influence that previous experience has on their learning, the need for their learning to be related to real-life situations and problem-centered, and the nature of their motivation to learn being both internal and external.

**Objective three.** Objective three of this study was to compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the learning environment of the professional development in which they participated. Two questions from the study instrument related to the learning environment. Analysis of the data suggested that the teachers experienced an environment conducive to learning. Knowles, Holton III, and Swanson (2015) wrote, "The physical environment requires provision for animal comfort (temperature, ventilation, easy access to refreshments and rest rooms, comfortable chairs, adequate light, good acoustics, etc.) to avoid blocks to learning. More subtle physical features may make even more of an impact" (pp. 53-54). Knowles et al. (2015) suggested that another crucial element of "effective learning is the richness and accessibility of resources—both material and human" (p. 54).

**Objective four.** Objective four of this study was to compare the differences between ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' impressions of the skillsets of those who facilitate their

professional development activities. Six questions on the survey instrument sought to compare the differences between the teachers. After conducting a one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each of the six questions included on the study instrument for objective four, data analysis indicated differences existed among the groups on two items. First, a difference existed between ASE and ESL participants impressions of whether the *facilitator invited attendees to share ideas*. In a study conducted by Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Soloman, and Rowe (2003), the researchers found that “Teachers felt that sharing ideas with colleagues, even colleagues who had not participated in the professional development, helped them to continue thinking about what they had learned and prompted them to take action” (p. 102). The data from this study tends to support the findings of Smith et al. (2003) which indicated that ESL teachers may value being invited to share their thoughts and ideas with others in the session. Second, a difference existed between ASE and ESL teachers’ perceptions of whether the *facilitator provided relevant examples about content*. While in most cases the differences were not statistically significant, ESL teachers’ mean scores were typically lower than that of their peers, perhaps indicating that the professional development activities ESL teachers participate in do not align with adult learning principles as closely as that of their counterparts teaching ABE and ASE classes. However, responses to the question about whether the facilitator invited attendees to share ideas was significantly different, with ESL teachers overall mean scores being significantly lower than ASE teachers’ scores. A significant difference in responses also existed between these same two groups for whether or not the facilitator provided relevant examples of content presented during professional development. These findings may indicate several things, including the notion that ESL instructors have different professional development needs and expectations than those of their counterparts teaching ABE and ASE. Professional development

opportunities related to ESL may be overlooked and underemphasized, and not valued as they could be, even with a growing population of adult learners who need to learn the English language.

### **Implications**

The conceptual framework of this study suggested that Knowles' andragogical model and his six assumptions about the adult learner would influence ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' experiences with professional development. The results of this study indicate that adult learning principles are present in the professional development provided to participants in this study. When professional development facilitators fail to observe Knowles' principles and assumptions, adult education teachers may find professional development does not address their needs as adult learners. After all, it was Knowles, Holton III, and Swanson (2015) who suggested that teachers would teach as they were taught. In addition, since the majority of professional development models are based on K-12 research (Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe, 2003), current professional development activities for adult education teachers may reflect more aspects of pedagogy than that of andragogy.

King and Lawler (2003) believed that "The professional development of teachers of adults has tremendous potential when looked at through the lens of adult learning" (p. 12). Professional development for adult educators can be greatly improved by viewing it as adult education. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) defined adult education as "a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills" (p. 9). Professional development should bring about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills in adult education teachers. Because adult education teachers are



adult learners themselves, the use of adult learning theory and principles may enhance professional development in which adult education teachers participate. In turn, their learning may impact whether their students achieve their educational goals.

Seven factors were derived from an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the first 32 questions of the survey instrument. The first factor suggested that ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers learned new skills and strategies for working with adult learners that were applicable to their classroom instruction. The first factor included the following items:

- New strategies to become a better teacher,
- New concepts applied in classroom,
- Learned new skills to become a better teacher,
- Learned new content information,
- Changed methods/approach to teaching,
- Immediately applied concepts learned,
- Satisfied with professional development,
- Opportunity to apply skills/concepts presented, and
- Encouraged to consider new approaches to teaching.

By seeking out and acquiring new teaching strategies and concepts, adult education teachers are actively participating in lifelong learning. Second, adult education teachers appear to be learning new skills and strategies that they can apply to their classroom. Based on the results of this study, an overwhelming number of participants do not have adult education certification/licensure, nor do participants have plans to earn adult education certification/licensure. Professional development activities that reflect adult learning theory and principles could address any possible shortcomings in the training of adult education teachers. It

would behoove adult education professional development facilitators to at least be aware of these items that are important to teachers who attend professional development.

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), funds are available for adult education programs to use specifically for state leadership activities, which includes professional development. WIOA requires adult education programs to establish or operate professional development programs that are high in quality and lead to improvements in adult learning. The establishment and operation of high-quality professional development programs for adult educators may be challenging problematic since states will have to build and maintain such a system (Jacobson, 2017). Nevertheless, state leaders of adult education and facilitators of professional development for adult education teachers at the state level should ensure that professional development activities for adult education teachers reflect adult learning theory and principles. If state personnel are not knowledgeable of adult learning theory and principles, then perhaps they are not providing professional development activities that might otherwise prove to be efficient and effective for the adult education teacher. Regardless of the delivery system, professional development for adult education teachers is expected to lead to increases in student achievement. The results of the study could provide some insight for state officials, adult education program directors, and professional development facilitators into what is needed and expected by adult education teachers for professional development that is of the highest quality and that leads to improvements in adult education.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study:

- Like the students they teach, adult education teachers are adult learners.  
Therefore, professional development should be viewed as a form of adult

education. With this in mind, professional development for adult education teachers could be improved by using adult learning theory and principles to design professional development activities. In addition, it might prove beneficial to move away from compulsory professional development for the sake of professional development. Professional development activities for adult education teachers should be based on the quality of the activities and not the quantity of activities. Future research might explore how professional development activities purposely developed with adult learning principles in mind impact teachers' perceptions of the quality of the training, and their perceived impact on student outcomes.

- This study used quantitative methods to explore ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' experiences with professional development. A qualitative study could be conducted to identify the attitudes, values, and beliefs of adult education teachers toward professional development as well as their perceptions of what practices are meaningful and impact their learning and professional growth.
- In addition to adult education certification/licensure requirements, there is little consistency among the states for adult education professional development requirements. An investigation into the differences in student outcomes between states that do, and states that do not require certification/licensure for teachers might reveal whether or not this requirement is a viable means of professional development.
- Research should be conducted that examines how states could effectively work together to build and maintain a high-quality professional development system.

This is necessary because adult education needs a highly-skilled group of adult education teachers who can handle the challenges of the classroom, who can meet the needs of the students, and who can prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace.

### **Conclusion**

This Ex Post Facto Research designed study sought to explore ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' experiences with professional development. The results of this study provide new information on a topic that has produced very little research in the field of adult education. Although findings from this study suggest that adult learning principles are present in professional development for adult education teachers, the study did not indicate the scope and breadth of the adult learning principles that were evident in the facilitation of professional development activities. High-quality professional development that is based on adult learning theory and principles is one way to ensure teachers are effectively trained so that they may impact student success.

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## Appendix A

### Email Requesting Permission to Survey COABE Members

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Research Proposal

From: Robbie Cornelius <[robbie.cornelius@fayar.net](mailto:robbie.cornelius@fayar.net)>

Date: Mon, November 27, 2017 11:14 am

To: "[sharonbonney@coabe.org](mailto:sharonbonney@coabe.org)" <[sharonbonney@coabe.org](mailto:sharonbonney@coabe.org)>

Ms. Bonney,

My name is Robbie Cornelius and I am the director of adult education for Fayetteville Public Schools in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I am also enrolled in the Adult and Lifelong Learning Doctor of Education degree program at the University of Arkansas. I am currently working on my dissertation, and I was hoping to survey COABE members to collect data related to my research.

My research is focused on the use of adult learning principles during professional development opportunities for ABE, ASE, and ESL instructors. The guiding research question for my study is: What are the perceptions among ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers about how adult learning principles are integrated into professional development opportunities? The conceptual framework of the study is based on andragogy and Knowles' six assumptions of the adult learner. Since my target population of the study is ABE, ASE, and ESL instructors, I was hoping to somehow be able to survey COABE members who fit this criterion.

I believe this study could be insightful for professional development facilitators, program directors, and instructors. We, as adult educators, work with adults on a daily basis using adult learning principles. But, are these same principles used with adult education teachers when they participate in learning opportunities as well? I would greatly appreciate any suggestions or assistance you might be able to provide in collecting data that can possibly shed some light on this topic.

I appreciate your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

*Robbie Cornelius*

Director of Adult Education  
Fayetteville Public Schools  
Jefferson Center  
612 S. College Avenue  
Fayetteville, AR 72701  
[district.fayar.net](http://district.fayar.net)

Sharon Bonney [sharonbonney@coabe.org]

Actions

**To:**

Robbie Cornelius

**Cc:**

Kaye Sharbono [kayesharbono@icloud.com]

*Inbox*

Monday, November 27, 2017 12:06 PM

You replied on 11/27/2017 12:46 PM.

Hi Robbie,

Thanks so much for contacting us and for your interest in reaching out to our members to survey them! I am copying in our board president so she is aware of your request as well.

Can you let us know your timeline for when you hoped the survey would go out and if you have the survey prepared already?

I will be back in touch with you following our next executive committee meeting in a few weeks when we will discuss this.

Kind Regards,

**Sharon Bonney**

Executive Director, Coalition on Adult Basic Education

P: 888-44-COABE (888-442-6223) | F: 866-941-5129

| [sharonbonney@coabe.org](mailto:sharonbonney@coabe.org) | [www.COABE.org](http://www.COABE.org) | PO Box 1820 Cicero, NY 13039

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Touching Base

From: Robbie Cornelius <[robbie.cornelius@fayar.net](mailto:robbie.cornelius@fayar.net)>

Date: Fri, January 12, 2018 1:44 pm

To: "[sharonbonney@coabe.org](mailto:sharonbonney@coabe.org)" <[sharonbonney@coabe.org](mailto:sharonbonney@coabe.org)>

Ms. Bonney,

I just wanted to touch base with concerning the possibility of surveying COABE members for my research study. I will be more than happy to answer any questions you or your team might have about the administration of the survey instrument.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you!

*Robbie Cornelius*

Director of Adult Education  
Fayetteville Public Schools  
Jefferson Center  
612 S. College Avenue  
Fayetteville, AR 72701  
[district.fayar.net](http://district.fayar.net)

## RE: Cornelius: Survey Draft for Study

Sharon Bonney [sharonbonney@coabe.org]

**To:**

Robbie Cornelius

Friday, January 12, 2018 2:26 PM

You replied on 1/17/2018 8:09 AM.

Hi Robbie,

I apologize for not responding sooner, but we are happy to move forward with this.

Thanks,

**Sharon Bonney**

Executive Director, Coalition on Adult Basic Education

P: 888-44-COABE (888-442-6223) | F: 866-941-5129

| [sharonbonney@coabe.org](mailto:sharonbonney@coabe.org) | [www.COABE.org](http://www.COABE.org) | PO Box 1820 Cicero, NY 13039

## Appendix B

### IRB Approval



---

**To:** Robbie Scott Cornelius  
**From:** Douglas James Adams, Chair  
IRB Committee  
**Date:** 02/20/2018  
**Action:** **Exemption Granted**  
**Action Date:** 02/20/2018  
**Protocol #:** 1801098191  
**Study Title:** Adult Education Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

cc: Kenda Shea Grover, Investigator

## Appendix C

### Invitation to Participate

COABE Members,

I am conducting research on adult education teachers' perceptions of professional development. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as an ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher and you are a member of the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE). I am looking for participants who are willing to complete an online survey instrument that contains questions related to teachers' formal learning experiences.

I invite you to participate in the study. The survey should take no longer than 15-20 minutes to complete. For more information and to access the survey, please click on the following link:

[http://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_4IQDsmcV8UrK7jL](http://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4IQDsmcV8UrK7jL)

Thank you in advance for your participation!

Robbie Cornelius, Doctoral Candidate  
University of Arkansas – Adult and Lifelong Learning  
Director of Adult Education for Fayetteville Public Schools  
Fayetteville, Arkansas



## Appendix D

### Second Invitation to Participate Sent to COABE Members

COABE Members,

Last week you received an invitation to participate in my study of adult education teachers' perceptions of professional development. Thanks so much to those who have completed my survey! If you have not yet participated, please click on the link below.

The survey should take no longer than 15-20 minutes to complete. For more information and to access the survey, please click on the following link:

[http://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_4IQDsmcV8UrK7jL](http://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4IQDsmcV8UrK7jL)

Thank you in advance for your participation!

Robbie Cornelius, Doctoral Candidate  
University of Arkansas – Adult and Lifelong Learning  
Director of Adult Education for Fayetteville Public Schools  
Fayetteville, Arkansas

## Appendix E

### Survey Instrument



#### **Adult Education Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development**

##### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

Principal Researcher: Robbie Cornelius

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kenda Grover

##### **INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE**

You are invited to participate in a research study about adult education teachers' perceptions of professional development. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as an ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher and you are a member of the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE).

##### **WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY**

###### *Who is the Principal Researcher?*

Robbie Cornelius, Doctoral Candidate in Adult and Lifelong Learning

rcornel@uark.edu

479-601-3771

###### *Who is the Faculty Advisor?*

Dr. Kenda Grover, Assistant Professor of Adult and Lifelong Learning, University of Arkansas

kgrover@uark.edu

479-575-2675

###### *What is the purpose of this research study?*

The purpose of this study is to explore ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers' experiences with professional development .

*Who will participate in this study?*

Approximately 23,000 COABE members who identify as being ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers.

*What am I being asked to do?*

Your participation will require the following:  
Completion of an online survey.

*What are the possible risks or discomforts?*

There are no anticipated risks to participating in the survey.

*What are the possible benefits of this study?*

Participants may benefit from changes in professional development for ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers that may lead to more meaningful and effective professional development activities.

*How long will the study last?*

The participant will complete a web-based survey that is expected to take 15-20 minutes to complete.

*Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this study?*

No.

*Will I have to pay for anything?*

No, there will be no cost associated with your participation in the study.

*What are the options if I do not want to be in the study?*

If you do not want to be in this study, you may refuse to participate. Also, you may refuse to participate at any time during the study. Your job will not be affected in any way if you refuse to participate.

*How will my confidentiality be protected?*

All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law.

All data collection will occur online. No identifying marks will be requested or included on the survey instrument. No survey respondent will be identified individually. All data will be reported in aggregate and confidentiality will be protected.

*Will I know the results of the study?*

At the conclusion of the study you will have the right to request feedback about the results. You may contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Kenda Grover, [kgrover@uark.edu](mailto:kgrover@uark.edu) or Principal Researcher, Robbie Cornelius, [rcornel@uark.edu](mailto:rcornel@uark.edu). You will receive a copy of this form for your files.

*What do I do if I have questions about the research study?*

You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or Faculty Advisor as listed below for any concerns that you may have.

Robbie Cornelius, Doctoral Candidate in Adult and Lifelong Learning  
[rcornel@uark.edu](mailto:rcornel@uark.edu)  
479-601-3771

Dr. Kenda Grover, Assistant Professor of Adult and Lifelong Learning, University of Arkansas  
[kgrover@uark.edu](mailto:kgrover@uark.edu)  
479-575-2675

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

Ro Windwalker, CIP  
Institutional Review Board Coordinator  
Research Compliance  
University of Arkansas  
109 MLKG Building  
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201  
479-575-2208  
irb@uark.edu

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. My completion of the survey indicates my consent for my responses to be used in this research.

Which best describes your current primary role?

- Teacher/Instructor
- Coordinator, Director, or Other Administrator
- Other

---

What type of adult education classes do you teach? (Check all that apply.)

- Adult Basic Education (ABE) (Grade Level Equivalence 0 – 8.9)
- Adult Secondary Education (ASE) (Grade Level Equivalence 9.0 – 12.9)
- English as a Second Language (ESL)

---

What is the highest degree you have earned?

- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Education Specialist
- Doctorate

---

Does the state you work in require certification/licensure in adult education?

- Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
-

Do you have adult education certification/licensure?

- Yes
  - No
- 

If you answered "No" to the previous question, are you currently working toward earning adult education certification/licensure or do you plan to add adult education certification/licensure in the near future?

- No
  - Yes
- 

How many years have you worked in adult education?

- Less than one year
  - One to five years
  - Six to ten years
  - Eleven to nineteen years
  - Twenty to thirty-four years
  - Thirty-five years or more years
- 

Are you a full-time or part-time ABE, ASE, or ESL teacher?

- Part-time
  - Full-time
-

Is the adult education program for which you work located in a rural area or urban area?

- Rural
  - Urban
- 

Which of the following providers serves as your local adult education program provider?

- K-12 public school
  - Community College or Other Two-Year Institution
  - Career and Technical Education/Vocational School
  - Community-based Organization
  - Volunteer Literacy Organization
  - Other
- 

From whom do you earn the majority of your professional development hours?

- Local Education Agency (LEA)
  - State Agency Administering Adult Education Program
  - Attending state conferences
  - Attending regional conferences
  - Attending national conferences
  - Online workshops/classes
  - Other
-



**Instructions:**

The following questions relate to your experiences with professional development activities within the last school year.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement using this five-point scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree or Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Within the last year, when I attended professional development:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I knew the purpose of the session when I chose to attend it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The content was related to my teaching area.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The facilitator explained how the content related to my teaching area.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My level of understanding of the content was assessed during the session.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was encouraged to consider new approaches to my teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My experience as a teacher was acknowledged.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was invited to share experiences from my classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The content built on previous professional development that I attended.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time was provided for collaboration with my peers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time was provided for idea sharing with my peers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The professional development facilitator(s) allowed attendees to help decide on some of the content covered during the session.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The professional development facilitator(s) encouraged active participation by attendees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it helpful when a facilitator linked learning to previous professional development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it helpful when a facilitator linked learning to my college/university teacher education coursework.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I found it helpful when a facilitator linked learning to my professional interests.

I found it helpful when a facilitator linked learning to my content knowledge (e.g. ESL, secondary, mathematics, etc.)

I changed my methods/approach to teaching based upon ideas that I obtained in the professional development session(s).

I learned new content information that helped me become a better teacher.

I learned new skills that helped me become a better teacher.

I learned new teaching strategies that helped me become a better teacher.

I was treated as a professional educator.

I learned new concepts that I was able to apply to my teaching.

The new knowledge, understanding, and skills presented at the professional development session(s) applied to situations I encounter in my classroom.

The professional development sessions were based on practical application instead of theoretical concepts.

    

I was able to provide feedback about the effectiveness of the professional development session(s).

    

A variety of instructional methods were used during the professional development sessions(s).

    

I completed a professional development/growth plan.

    

I found the content or presentation to be uninteresting on at least one occasion

    

I attended a professional development session that was not related to my job as a teacher of adult learners.

    

Overall, I was satisfied with the professional development in which I participated.

    

I was provided with an opportunity to apply the skills/concepts presented in the session.

    

I was able to apply concepts learned from a professional development session immediately in my classroom.

The facilitator created an environment that was conducive to learning (e.g., sufficient number of breaks, respectful of time, etc.).



The professional development sessions were held in a room/building/location that was comfortable (e.g. physical location, temperature, lighting, seating arrangements, etc.).



The facilitator invited attendees to share ideas.



The facilitator encourage attendees to express different points of view.



The facilitator appeared to have direct experience with the content he/she was presenting.



The facilitator provided relevant examples about the content he/she was presenting.

    

The facilitator had teaching experience that I could relate to.

    

The facilitator was knowledgeable of the subject matter presented at the professional development session.

    

---

Is there anything else you would like to add about how professional development is relevant to your role as an adult educator?