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# Understanding How Adult Educators Apply Andragogy in a Correctional Educational Setting: A Case Study

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UNDERSTANDING HOW ADULT EDUCATORS APPLY ANDRAGOGY IN A  
CORRECTIONAL EDUCATIONAL SETTING: A CASE STUDY

UNDERSTANDING HOW ADULT EDUCATORS APPLY ANDRAGOGY IN A  
CORRECTIONAL EDUCATIONAL SETTING: A CASE STUDY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Administration

By

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this case study was to examine how adult educators apply the six principles of andragogy, by Malcolm Knowles with adult learners in a correctional educational GED program. The following six principles label adult learners as people who: (1) Are self-directed and intrinsically motivated learners; (2) Bridge life experiences with old knowledge with new learning; (3) Are goals-driven learners; (4) Expect experiences to be relevant to them; (5) Are practical learners; and (6) Want respect (Knowles, 1984). The study included qualitative research. There were nine participants involved in this study. Conversational interviews were conducted with the principal and four adult learners. Standardized, open-ended interviews were conducted with four adult educators.

The literature review discussed whether or not adult educators should teach adult learners to their mental abilities or whether they should teach to their ages. The literature review also shared research on behavioral aspects of pedagogy versus andragogy, adult education, adult education teachers, learning tips for effective instructors, characteristics of adult learners, effective adult learning principles, teaching adult learners, prison education, recidivism and instructional leadership.

To ensure the findings were based on credible information, triangulation, member checks, audit trail and peer debriefing were addressed and considered a vital part of the research. To meet triangulation, the researcher used interviews, classroom observations and documents to collect data for this study. Data were open-coded and analyzed to find axial codes, or major themes. The study found that the six principles played a large role in the learning process of adult learners. This study showed that it is equally important to consider the maturity level as

well as the physical attributes when educating adult learners. Regardless of their age or appearance, many inmates are not mentally prepared to handle certain types of instruction and must receive a variety of methods to help them open up and want to learn. The six principles of andragogy allowed educators to teach to varying aspects of the adult learner in the correctional educational school. The adult educators used strategies that they thought would facilitate the best possible learning outcomes for their students.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council.

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I hereby authorized the University of Arkansas Libraries to duplicate this Dissertation when needed for research and/or scholarship.

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I would like to thank the employees of the ACSD who took time out of their busy schedules to allow me to interview them. This dissertation would not have been possible without them. I would also like to thank the district's administration staff for their total support.

I have enjoyed my experience with the case study school, the principal, teachers, and students. Thank you for your willingness to contribute your knowledge and experience to my study.

Lastly, I want to express my gratitude to Laura and Kim for being my helpers, support system, and friends. Thanks a lot!

## **Dedication**

Dedicated to:

My mother and sister for being so supportive and encouraging me to strive to be the best and for never letting me give up and encouraging me to keep writing.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Education is the foundation of a successful nation (Obama, 2009). It is the very entity by which a nation can measure its future as a strong player in a global community (Wadhwa, 2011). With the role education plays in society, it is not surprising that the United States of America would want to ensure a good education for all citizens. In past years, the United States boast a superior educational system (Broad Foundation, 2011), but in more recent years, however, American students scored below those of other countries (Gonzales et al., 2008). This trend caused concern at the national level, and educational reform movements were the end result. Education reform is currently receiving much attention in the United States with the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002). It is a strategic plan, program, or movement that seeks to ignite positive change in education, locally or nationally (Arkansas Department of Education, 2010). While much attention has been paid to reforming public education, less national attention has been focused on educating inmates within the American Correctional System throughout the United States.

### **Education in Correctional Facilities**

The first American correctional facility was opened in 1791, and education became an added duty for the correctional system by 1798. Today there are at least 115 correctional facilities throughout the United States, and the importance of education in the correctional system remains apparent for as of 2011 more than 90% of public prisons and more than 80% of private prisons offer educational programs to their inmates (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

The Arkansas Correctional School District (ACSD) was established in 1968. At that time, the ACSD employed nine teachers that provided instruction to inmates within three separate correctional units. In 2010, the ACSD encompassed 21 separate units that offer General Education Development (GED) programs to approximately 2200 inmates. Currently, 71 licensed teachers and 7 classified employees provide instruction within the ACSD.

### **Mission, Goals, and Objectives**

To ensure that the correctional school district provides adult learners with an educational experience that promotes self-worth and individual development, the ACSD established guiding principles by which the district is measured. The mission of the ACSD is to promote an educational environment that fosters positive self-worth and success in all inmate students. It reported that every adult learner has worth, dignity, the ability to learn and the right to be respected as an adult learner. The ACSD teaches adult learners basic skills that focus on the three R's--reading, writing, and arithmetic. The district also provides every adult learner the opportunity to develop their sense of values, and adult learners are taught to respect the rights of others. The objectives of the school district are to focus on teaching non-readers to read, write and comprehend basic math, and prepare as many adult learners to take and pass the GED test (Arkansas Correctional School District, 2010.)

### **ACSD Funding**

Each year funding for staffing and operations in ACSD is calculated and presented to the state legislature. The money is allocated to the Arkansas Department of Education in the form of a line item appropriation, which the Arkansas Department of Education transfers to the district. The ACSD receives federal money for the Title I programs. According to the Arkansas Department of Education (2010), Title I is a federal aid program that provides assistant to

schools around the world. Title I money is given to school districts that need help with providing the resources that are important to helping students who are affected by poverty. The money is to help close the achievement gap between schools in poor neighborhoods and communities. ACSD uses the Title I money to pay the salaries of three Title I teachers within the district and buy supplies for the district.

The ACSD also receives Title VI-B money for special education and some adult education money for correctional education. The Arkansas Department of Education maintains that Title VI-B provides federal funds within small rural districts. Title VI-B funds provide a variety of services and activities that will help students to better their reading and math skills. ACSD uses the Title VI-B money to pay the salaries of two special education teachers within the district (Arkansas Department Education, 2010).

### **Adult Education Programs**

Malcolm Knowles (1984), the father of adult education, contends that the academic success of adult learners is contingent on adult educators using best instructional practices to address the needs of their adult learners. His study examined how adult educators in a correctional educational school setting apply andragogy with adult learners. Knowles defined andragogy as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005, p. 60). He discovered six principles of adult learning that are essential when educating adults:

- Self-directed and intrinsically motivated learners;
- Bridge life experiences with old knowledge with new learning;
- Goals-driven learners;
- Expect experiences to be relevant to them;
- Practical learners; and

- Want respect (Knowles, 1984).

### **Adult Educator Characteristics**

There are very specific characteristics attributed to the adult educator. Lieb (1991) discussed that being an effective adult educator involves understanding how adult learners learn best. Adult educators must understand the learning styles of adult learners and instruct them in those ways. Knowles (1984) stated that an adult educator is one who applies the principles of andragogy when facilitating adult student learning. Understanding the method of andragogy is key in fostering success in adult learners. Lieb suggested that adult educators who teach in an adult setting need to focus their instruction on helping adults to learn because learning for adults is not automatic and must be facilitated. He goes on to state adult educators must be careful to avoid lecturing formats of instruction that merely provide facts and should embrace the role of facilitators where learning is guided.

When considering andragogy, Knowles (1990) suggested that the goal and knowledge that the adult learners bring to the lesson will determine the method of instruction required. For example, if an adult learner is unfamiliar with the concept, then direct instruction would be necessary to help the student achieve success. Knowles also suggested that the most effective method would be for adult educators to address specific topics and expand on how specific topics can be applied in other situations. However, the adult learner needs to know why any concept to be learned is important in order for him or her to stay motivated to learn. Lieb (1991) discussed that adult educators need to remember that adult learning occurs on a continuous basis throughout life. Also, adult educators need to keep in mind that adult learners learn at different speeds, so it is natural for adult learners to be nervous and anxious in learning situations.

## **Adult Learner Characteristics**

According to Knowles (1984), adult learners have a range of learning characteristics. Adult learners are diverse, with varying educational backgrounds going from no schooling to several years of schooling, they believe their education will help them, and they have varying degrees of awareness of their own learning styles. Smith (1982) discussed that adult learners can be exposed to a variety of needs that will be helpful to them as they go through the learning process. He believed that adult learners needed a basic understanding about learning; they needed to know how important it is to develop a positive attitude as well as the motivation to learn. Smith also said that adult learners need basic skills in reading, writing, math and listening to be able to perform in a learning environment. Adult learners need to understand how and why their strengths and weaknesses as learners correlate with their preference for learning situations and environments. To help them navigate this process, Smith said that adult learners must be self-directed learners, collaborative learners, and institutional learners. Self-directed learning requires adult learners to develop skills for planning, directing, and monitoring their own learning. Collaborative learning requires adult learners to have good teamwork and interpersonal skills. Institutional learning requires adult learners to have the following basic study skills: taking notes, writing, and taking test.

## **Background of the Study**

### **Educational Process within the Arkansas Prison System**

When inmates enter the Arkansas Department of Correction, they go through an orientation process at the Diagnostic Center. During the orientation process, inmates who state they have a high school diploma or a General Education Development (GED) certification will then fill out a verification form. The verification form that is filled out by the inmates is mailed

to the particular school from which the inmates state they received their high school diploma or GED. Until inmates are verified as having a high school diploma or a GED, it is mandatory that they attend the GED program.

Once the verification form is returned to the ACSD, it will state if the inmate is verified or not verified. If the verification form from the particular school states the inmate did receive a high diploma or a GED, the inmate will be dropped from the GED program. However, if the verification form from the particular school states the inmate did not receive a high school diploma or a GED, the inmate will remain in the GED program.

Before any inmate is placed in the GED program, the inmate will take a placement test. The test is referred to as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). According to the official ACSD manual, the TABE is a standardized test that consists of the following five levels:

- The Limited Literacy Level;
- The Easy Level;
- The Medium Level;
- The Difficult Level; and
- The Advanced Level

The difficult and advanced levels predict how the adult learner will perform on the GED test.

There is a locator test that is given first that will help determine which level of the TABE the adult learner will take. The locator test consists of four subsections: reading comprehension, math comprehension, math application, and language arts writing. Each of these sections takes five to twelve minutes to complete. The score that the adult learner receives on the locator test will determine which level of the TABE test will be given for each subject. However, an adult learner can have more than one level test administered to him or her. Once the adult learner

completes the locator test, he or she will start testing with the different subtests (Arkansas Correctional School District, 2010).

The TABE test consists of the same subtests as the locator test: reading comprehension, math comprehension, math application, and language arts writing. The entire test takes three to four hours to complete. After the adult learner completes the TABE test, he or she will be placed in the GED program based on his or her total battery score. The GED program consists of the following levels:

- Adult Basic Education with a grade level equivalent of 0-3.9;
- Adult Intermediate Education with a grade level equivalent of 4.0-5.9;
- Adult Pre-GED Education with a grade level equivalent of 6.0-8.9; and
- Adult GED Education with a grade level equivalent of 9.0-12.0 (Arkansas Correctional School District, 2010).

As adult learners progress through the GED program, they can take the Pre-GED test and Official GED test. The Pre-GED and Official GED test both consists of five tests which measure the achievement in subject areas associated with a high school program of study.

- Language Arts Writing;
- Social Studies;
- Science;
- Language Arts Reading; and
- Mathematics

The passing criteria set by the Arkansas GED Testing Program for the Pre-GED and Official GED tests are a minimum of 410 on each of the five tests and an average of 450. During the 42

year history of the school district, 18,722 adult learners have earned their GED (Arkansas Correctional School District, 2010).

### **Educational Criteria and the Role of Adult Educators**

Any person who applies for an adult educator position with the Arkansas Correctional School District is required to have completed their student teaching or served an internship as part of an approved teaching education program. Adult educators shall hold a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution and have 9 credit hours of adult education classes in order to teach in an adult setting. An adult educator must work very closely with the principal and follow the proper chain of command. He must plan and direct learning activities of adult learners in the classroom, and is required to keep an accurate record of student attendance and maintain proper records. The adult educator also assists in selecting text books and related materials and performs various other job related duties as required by the principal (Arkansas Correctional School District, 2010).

### **Adult Educator Evaluation Process**

The principal, who is the evaluator of ACSD personnel, is responsible for evaluating adult educators based on a satisfactory performance or an unsatisfactory performance. The adult educator can receive a satisfactory or unsatisfactory evaluation based on:

- Professional conduct;
- Instructional planning;
- Learning environment;
- Teaching; and
- Reflection.



Under professional conduct, the adult educator is evaluated based on maintaining the appropriate dress and appearance in accordance with the guidelines of the ACSD. The adult educator must follow the district and unit policies as well as demonstrate respect and loyalty to the principal. Under instructional planning, the adult educator is evaluated based on articulating clear learning goals and creating or selecting teaching methods, learning activities and instructional materials that are appropriate to the needs of the student. Under learning environment, the adult educator is evaluated based on establishing and maintaining a rapport with students as well as communicating challenging learning expectations to each adult learner. Under teaching, the adult educator is evaluated based on making sure that learning goals and instructional procedures are clear to the adult learner as well as making sure that they are using their instructional time effectively. Under reflection, the adult educator is evaluated based on reflecting to the extent which learning goals are met as well as demonstrating a sense of efficacy (Arkansas Correctional School District, 2010).

### **Statement of the Problem**

While there are approximately 2200 students served by the Arkansas Correctional School District each year, there is little research regarding the use of andragogy within this educational setting. More research must be done to show how inmates learn and how andragogy could be the method by which adult educators help inmates be successful adult learners.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to explore the purposeful and observable applications of adult learning theory within one correctional educational unit in Arkansas. It sought to enlighten policy makers and school leaders on the andragogy method and its effect on prison education. The findings may help policy makers and school leaders make decisions to help

inmates further their education while incarcerated and be productive citizens and lessen their chance of recidivism when released.

### **Relevance of the Study**

There is an increasing demand for adult educators to understand issues related to adult learners. This study examined the impact on the quality of instructional delivery to adult learners and how the six principles of andragogy helped adult educators during their instruction with adult learners through a GED program at a male adult correctional educational school within the Arkansas Correctional School District.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed:

1. Which principles of andragogy do adult educators apply in their instruction with adult learners?
2. How do these principles influence their instruction?
3. How do adult learners perceive GED instruction?

### **Conceptual Design**

The following is a conceptual design to provide the reader with a better understanding of the four phases that were completed in this qualitative study. In the following paragraphs, the research study included the following phases: (1) gaining approval for the study from my dissertation committee, the Institutional Review Board, the Arkansas Department of Corrections, and the school to be studied in a specific district; (2) conducting interviews with the principal, adult educators, and adult learners within the GED program; (3) conducting classroom observations of adult educators and adult learners; and (4) the examination of the findings.

These qualitative research methods were utilized for triangulation. Mason (2002) discussed that

triangulation is a way to look at multiple sources of data to explore a process, result, or phenomenon.

The first phase required gaining approval for the study from my dissertation committee, the Institutional Review Board, the Arkansas Department of Corrections, and the school to be studied in a specific district. The second phase included conducting interviews with the principal, two African American male adult educators, two Caucasian female adult educators, two African American male adult learners, and two Caucasian male adult learners within the GED program. I began with a conversational interview with the principal. The goal of this interview was to inquire about the correctional educational GED program and the philosophy the district has toward adult education in a correctional setting.

Upon completion of the conversational interview with the principal, I wrote the findings from the interview. Standardized open-ended interviews were conducted with four adult educators. These interviews provided information about the instructional methods used in the classroom setting. Upon the completion of the standardized open-ended interviews with the adult educators, I open-coded the interview responses and looked for major themes. I also conducted conversational interviews with four adult learners. Upon completion of the conversational interviews with the adult learners, I transcribed the information from the interviews and completed the open-coding process.

In the third phase, I conducted classroom observations of the adult educators and adult learners. The classroom observations consisted of taking field notes and recording of events. Marshall and Rossman (2006) stated that observations are comprised of meticulous note-taking of participant actions, behaviors, and events in the social setting chosen as the focus for the study. The notes that are taken during observations are referred to as field notes. They should be

a direct depiction of what was observed and should be both detailed and nonbiased. The fourth phase included analyzing and reporting the data collected. As themes emerge from the data, additional research, review of the literature, or clarification of interviews or data were necessary.

### **Theoretical Sensitivity**

As the researcher, I used qualitative research instruments to conduct this qualitative study. In my academic career, I have successfully completed the following three college degrees from Arkansas State University: a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration, a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership, and a Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership. I am currently pursuing a Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. I have been a principal for four years in a correctional educational setting and have four years of teaching experience in a correctional educational setting. Also, I have five years of teaching experience on the secondary level and two years on the college level.

The GED program at the studied site, as the case study, allowed me to incorporate my personal depth of knowledge and experience into research to discover the most effective instructional strategies for adult learners. This research study afforded me the chance to employ current literature on best practices for adult learners and allowed time for reflection and an opportunity to analyze the practices occurring in the GED program at the school. Lastly, this study provided an opportunity to help other correctional educational GED programs with significant adult learners to align their instructional strategies, professional development and related services with best practices.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Adult Learning Theory, by Malcolm Knowles (1984), underpinned this study. It focuses on six principles that label adult learners as people who:

- Are self-directed and intrinsically motivated learners;
- Bridge life experiences with old knowledge with new learning;
- Are goals-driven learners;
- Expect experiences to be relevant to them;
- Are practical learners; and
- Want respect (Knowles, 1984).

Through interviews, observations, and document review from multiple sources, I illuminated how these principles were used to enhance instruction of adult learners within the prison population of one correctional unit in Arkansas.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations to this case study included: (1) only one correctional school site was reviewed; (2) six principles of andragogy were used to focus on adult learners; (3) results can only be generalized to the studied school; and (4) other variables have contributed to the success of the adult learner.

### **Parameters of the Study**

This study was conducted during the 2010-2011 school year. During the summer of 2010, I began the literature research and review. In the fall of 2010, I began document collection and gained entry into the school. In the spring of 2011, the interviews were conducted and the data were analyzed.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following definitions and acronym descriptions are provided to ensure consistency and understanding of these terms throughout the study:

*ACSD*: Arkansas Correctional School District

*Adult Educator:* In this study, a person who practices the profession of facilitating the learning of adult learners by applying the principles of andragogy.

*Adult Learner:* A person who is socially accepted as an adult in a learning process.

*Andragogy:* “The art and science of helping adults learn” (Conner, 2004, p. 2).

*Assessment:* This term refers to any test instrument used to measure student learning and performance.

*Best Practices:* This term refers to the most efficient and effective way of accomplishing a task.

*Curriculum Guide:* An academic tool that determines what an adult educator needs to teach, how to teach, and what ways to teach material to a diverse group of adult learners.

*General Education Development (GED) Program:* In this study, the GED program is a program for male adult learners in an adult correctional educational setting.

*General Education Development Test:* The GED Test consists of the following subjects: writing, social studies, science, reading, and math.

*Pedagogy:* This term refers to the art and science of teaching children.

*Pre-General Education Development (Pre-GED) Test:* The Pre-GED Test consists of the following subjects: writing, social studies, science, reading, and math.

*Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) Test:* The Test of Adult Basic Education Test consists of the following subjects: reading comprehension, math comprehension, math application, and language arts writing.

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

A review of the literature can be found in Chapter Two. The literature review presents an overview of research-based methods that are successful with adult learners. Chapter Three outlines the methodology, which includes a timeline for research and questions for conversational interviews and standardized open-ended interview questions. Chapter Four reports the findings and Chapter Five outlines conclusions, suggestions and recommendations for future studies.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of the Literature**

In society today, providing a free, public education to all is a given. There is a question, however, regarding how to implement prison education to inmates in the prison system. Many inmates lack social and mental skills that are required in the learning process. For adult educators, the idea of how to effectively educate this particular population becomes perplexing, specifically which strategies should be used when teaching adult learners. Adult educators are concerned about whether they should focus on the immature skills of adult learners, or on their “grown up” bodies and often intense life experiences. This literature review discussed whether or not adult educators should teach adult learners to their mental abilities or whether they should teach to their ages. Another topic that was addressed in this review is whether the andragogical method—a teaching method used for implementing instructions to adults—is the best way to provide instruction for inmates in a general education development (GED) setting. This section also shared research on behavioral aspects of pedagogy versus andragogy, adult education, adult education teachers, learning tips for effective instructors, characteristics of adult learners, effective adult learning principles, teaching adult learners, prison education, recidivism, instructional leadership, and a conclusion.

### **Understanding Andragogy**

To get a good understanding of andragogy, a person must begin with what it means to be an adult. According to Knowles (1984), there are two criteria for evaluating whether or not a learner should be considered an adult. First, the person takes on the role that has been defined as an adult—for example, being a responsible parent or worker. Second, the self-concept of a person is important. Once a person understands who he or she is and has a sense of self-



direction, he or she is psychologically considered an adult. Knowles (1990) discussed that a person is considered an adult when the individual can see himself or herself as being responsible for his or her own life.

### **Behavioral Aspects of Pedagogy versus Andragogy**

Knowles (1984) defined pedagogy as the artistic and scientific method for teaching children. A Greek word, pedagogy literally means “child leading”. When implementing the pedagogical methods, a teacher has total control of all aspects of the learning process and makes all of the decisions about the what, when, and how learning will take place. Knowles (1984) discussed that pedagogy is also known as teacher-directed instruction, which requires the student to be obedient to the instruction from the teacher. The focus of pedagogy is the learner learning solely what the teacher teaches him or her. This type of teaching and learning places a great dependency on the instructor.

While Knowles defines andragogy as the art and science of educating adult learners, Conner (2004) believes that andragogy is an alternative to pedagogy and insists that the learner-focused teaching method is suitable of all learners. Conner discussed that the andragogic model asserts the following five issues to be considered and addressed in formal learning:

- Showing learners why learning is important;
- Showing learners how to direct themselves through information;
- Relating the topic to the experiences of the learners;
- Learners will learn when they are ready and motivated; and
- Helping learners to overcome inhibitions, behavioral problems, and beliefs on how to learn.

McCormick (1931) reported that pedagogy and andragogy are methods that are central to all forms of prison education. In research findings, it is clear that pedagogy relates to the conditions of education for juveniles and andragogy to the education of adults. However, McCormick described one program which reveals how juveniles act like adults and how adults act like children in correctional facilities. He found that the principles of pedagogy do not necessarily fit confined juveniles as they suffered through years of experiences that cause them to think and behave like adults. Likewise, andragogy is not always suitable for some adult prisoners due to varying levels of maturity. McCormick noted that some adults who are incarcerated behave emotionally like children. Incarcerated youth behaving like adults and incarcerated adults behaving more like children is not uncommon. A body of literature on criminal personalities discusses these behavioral issues in-depth.

### **Adult Basic Education**

Students who enter a correctional facility and do not have a high school diploma or a GED are required to enroll in the adult education prison GED program in most states. They are screened and enrolled in levels that best accommodate their learning abilities. Peters (1991) stated that adult education provides instruction and support services to adults who are no longer in school and who do not have the educational foundation to adequately speak, read, and write the English language.

Adult education programs began in Arkansas in 1967. They provide adults without a high school education with opportunities to gain the skills necessary to function in society (Peters, 1991). According to the Arkansas Department of Workforce Education (2008), Arkansas was first in developing a training program for teachers specifically in adult education where teachers could obtain teacher certification and graduate degrees in this area. Arkansas

was one of the first states to provide training for teaching adults with learning disabilities and adult education in the work place. It is one of the few states that give the GED test free of charge to residents.

### **Types of Adult Basic Education Tests**

**Test of Adult Basic Education.** The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) is a test used to diagnose the educational deficiencies of adult learners. It was created by McGraw-Hill and administered to adults attending vocational programs or community colleges. The TABE test consists of reading, math, and language and is not considered as a pass or fail test. It is used to determine if a student will have to take remedial classes before beginning his or her chosen curriculum (Tutwiler, 2009).

Before taking the TABE, the locator test is given. This test is a short version of the the TABE test that takes approximately thirty minutes to complete. This test sets the adult student on a specific path to demonstrate knowledge as the results determine the level of difficulty of the subsequent TABE test—easy, medium, difficult, advanced, and level L for adults who cannot read (Tutwiler, 2009).

**General Education Development.** The General Education Development (GED) test was developed out of necessity for members of the military. In 1942, the test was developed to assist military personnel who did not have a high school diploma (American Council of Education, 2010). The GED test consists of the following: writing, social studies, science, reading, and math. An individual must make a minimum of 410 on each of the five tests and an average of 450 to pass the GED test. According to the American Council of Education, the GED test measures the general knowledge that one would acquire over the four-year period

taking traditional high school courses. The test utilizes current curriculum standards and follows standardized assessment protocol.

The American Council of Education (2010) reported that the GED tests are given in all fifty states including the U.S. territories and in some Canadian provinces. In fact, about 800,000 adults take the tests each year, with nearly two-thirds successfully passing it. Neither the GED test nor a GED can take the place of a high school education or a high school diploma. The GED test is designed to assess the level of educational development of students who did not finish a formal high school education.

### **Characteristics of an Adult Educator**

The adult educator is one who understands the principles of andragogy and uses the method to instruct adult learners. To be successful, adult educators must recognize that adult learners are self-directed. These educators must create a learning environment that is safe for adult learners, understanding conditions that foster greater learning for adult learners. Adult educators must know why adults learn and how adults are taught in order to combine the two to create a safe atmosphere for adult learning success.

### **Teaching Roles**

Merriam and Simpson (1995) discussed how the role of an adult educator is that of a teacher or trainer. They stated that the roles of adult educators vary from adult basic education teachers, teachers of noncredit classes such as quilting, vocational teachers in a trade school, to a company trainer. Merriam and Simpson reported that adult education is evolving more and more compared to other professions throughout the world today. They believed that the profession of adult education is constantly in a state of development and change as a large number of adult education teachers or trainers still require specific training related to the adult as learner.

Merriam and Simpson noted that as the adult education field matures, grows financially and develops more, this situation may cease to be the case as more resources may mandate that all adult education teachers receive required training.

### **Learning Tips for Effective Instructors**

Educators know that learning is life-long for each person. Effective educators know that throughout the continual process of learning, people learn at different paces and can become quite nervous when placed in a learning situation where there is no prior knowledge. Since learning develops as a result of senses stimulation, the effective instructor should use instructional strategies that allow the content to stimulate multiple senses to ensure the chances of greater learning (Lieb, 1991).

In order for learning to be successful, Lieb (1991) suggested that it is of extreme importance to incorporate the following four areas in the educational process:

- Motivation,
- Reinforcement,
- Retention, and
- Transference

Lieb (1991) reported that establishing rapport with adult learners and preparing them for learning is considered part of motivation. Reinforcement plays a major role in the teaching and learning process. It should be used regularly in the beginning to help the students understand, internalize, and retain what they have learned. Once understanding is established, reinforcement should be used to maintain consistent, positive behavior. Retention involves students retaining information in order to benefit from the learning. Lieb discussed that students who do not learn material well in class, will not retain the information long-term.

Lieb suggested that transference will occur in the following four situations: (1) association-participants; (2) similarity; (3) degree of original learning-participants; and (4) critical attribute element. Lieb reported that association-participants associate new information with something they already know. With similarity, the information is similar to material that participants already know. Lieb stated that the degree of original learning suggests that the student may not have been exposed to the information previously. The critical attribute element allows the student to feel that the information learned contains pieces that were very beneficial to his/her learning.

The effective adult educator may incorporate instructor-centered and learner-centered teaching styles to foster adult student learning. Table 1 explains the two styles and how they help students learn.

Table 1

Teaching Styles

Instructor-centered	Learner-centered
The learning objective is usually the transfer of knowledge, information, or skills from the instructor to the students. The instructor more or less controls the material to be learned and the pace of learning while presenting the course content to the students. The purpose of learning is to acquire and memorize new knowledge or learn new skills.	The underlying philosophy is that students learn best not only by receiving knowledge but also by interpreting it, learning through discovery while also setting the pace of their own learning. Instruct, coach, and mentor students to facilitate their learning, designing experiences through which students acquire new knowledge and develop new skills.

Rochester Institute of Technology Online learning. (2010). Teaching styles, p. 3. Retrieved June 6, 2010 from <http://online.rit.edu>

Other strategies that would help adult learners increase their knowledge can be found in table 2. According to Rochester Institute of Technology Online Learning (2010), the following table discusses additional adult learner characteristics and teaching strategies for adult learners.

Table 2

Teaching Strategies for Adult Learners

Adult Learner Characteristics	Teaching Strategies
Adults have years of experience and a wealth of knowledge	Use your adult students as resources for yourself and for other students; use open-ended questions to draw out the knowledge and experiences of students; provide many opportunities for dialogue among students
Adults have established values, beliefs, and opinions	Take time to clarify student expectations of the course; permit debate and the challenge of ideas; be careful to protect minority opinions within the class
Adults expect to be treated as adults	Treat questions and comments with respect; acknowledge contributions students make to the class; do not expect students to necessarily agree with your plan for the course
Adults need to feel self-directed	Engage students in designing the learning process; expect students to want more than one medium for learning and to want control over the learning pace and start/stop times
Adults often have a problem-centered approach to learning	Show immediately how new knowledge or skills can be applied to current problems or situations; use participatory techniques such as case studies and problem-solving groups
Adults tend to be less interested in survey types of courses and more interested in straightforward how-to	Focus on theories and concepts within the context of their applications to relevant problems; orient the course content toward direct applications rather than toward theory
Adults have increased variation in learning styles (individual differences among people increase with age)	Use a variety of teaching materials and methods to take into account differences in style, time, types, and pace of learning

Rochester Institute of Technology Online Learning. (2010). Teaching strategies for adult learners, p. 2. Retrieved June 6, 2010 from <http://online.rit.edu>

## **Job Training and Certifications for the Adult Education Teacher**

An adult educator is a professional and some states require that he/she hold a license to teach adult education classes. These educators teach English language, reading, writing, and basic mathematics to adult learners. They also work with adult learners who need help with building their basic skills to become successful in the job market. Because of the impact that adult educators have on the ability of their students to be successful, these teachers must hold a bachelor's degree and must have completed an adult education teaching program from an accredited college or university. If an adult education teacher plans to teach in the GED preparation program, he/she must have knowledge of the GED exam requirements.

### **Characteristics of an Adult Learner**

Most adult students have various experiences in life as a whole and certain educational experiences which come into play when they enter a classroom. Lieb (1991) reported that adults are goal/relevancy oriented, autonomous, self-directed, practical and problem-solvers. Adult learners need to know why they need to learn something. They are self-reliant learners and like to work at their own pace. Lieb discussed that adult learners must see a reason for learning something.

### **Effective Adult Learning Principles**

An effective adult learning program understands how adults learn best and realizes that adults have special requirements as learners. Though the principles of learning have been around for several years, the adult learning theory is a fairly new study to education. Malcolm Knowles (1984) pioneered the field of adult learning. According to Lieb (1991), motivation is an aspect of adult learning. The following are six areas which are extremely crucial for motivating adult learners in the educational process:



- Social relationships;
- External expectations;
- Social welfare;
- Personal advancement;
- Escape/Stimulation; and
- Cognitive interest

Lieb (1991) reported that social relationships involve meeting and making new friends. External expectations involve fulfilling the expectations or recommendations of someone with authority. Social welfare deals with improving the ability to participate in community work. Lieb discussed that personal advancement focuses on achieving a higher status on a job, securing professional advancement and staying abreast of competitors. Escape/stimulation involves finding an outlet to break the daily routine of work or home, an activity to relieve boredom. Cognitive interest means to find something new to learn, not out of necessity, but simply for the sake of learning.

Table three gives a comparison of the learning characteristics of adult learners and youth learners according to Rochester Institute of Technology Online Learning (2010).

Table 3

Adult Learners versus Youth Learners

Adult Learners	Youth Learners
Problem-centered; seek educational solutions to where they are compared to where they want to be in life	Subject-oriented; seek to successfully complete each course, regardless of how course relates to their own goals
Result-oriented; have specific results in mind for education-will drop out if education does not lead to those results because their participation is usually voluntary	Future-oriented; youth education is often a mandatory or an expected activity in the life of the youth and designed for the future of the youth
Self-directed; typically not dependent on others for direction	Often depend on adults for direction
Often skeptical about new information; prefer to try it out before accepting it	Likely to accept new information without trying it out or seriously questioning it
Seek education that relates or applies directly to their perceived needs, that is timely and appropriate for their current lives	Seek education that prepares them for an often unclear future; accept postponed application of what is being learned
Accept responsibility for their own learning if learning is perceived as timely and appropriate	Depend on others to design their learning; reluctant to accept responsibility for their own learning

Rochester Institute of Technology Online Learning. (2010). Characteristics of adult learners versus youth learners, p. 1. Retrieved June 6, 2010 from <http://online.rit.edu>

**Teaching Behaviors Related to Adult Learners and Pre-Adult Learners**

Beder and Darkenwald (1982) discussed whether or not teachers taught adult learners differently than they taught pre-adult learners. Beder and Darkenwald reported that 173 teachers were surveyed based on their teaching practices with adult and pre-adult learners. The results of the surveys showed that teachers who taught adult learners felt that they had richer discussions, were able to change their teaching techniques more often, were able to relate discussions to student experiences, and made more adjustments in content and instructional strategies based on

student feedback.

Beder and Darkenwald (1982) reported that the teachers spent more time giving directions and providing emotional support to pre-adult learners. However, the survey appeared to focus more on supporting the idea that andragogical principles are utilized when teaching adult learners. Beder and Darkenwald wanted to know whether student focused (andragogy) instructional methods or teacher control (pedagogy) instructional methods were variables that guided the instruction of the teacher. They found that teachers used both andragogical and pedagogical models as variables, rather than just using one model over the other. Beder and Darkenwald discussed that various teaching techniques were shown as a means to control or structure the classroom setting. For instance, class discussions were both a way to get students to respond and to control student behavior by keeping them focused.

### **Prison Education**

When many think of prison, education is typically not associated. Prison is thought to be a place for harsh punishment, restrictions, and the loss of most wanted privileges, but there is an opportunity for rehabilitation and betterment of inmates through a very important and crucial activity that happens daily in prison, prison education. Prison or correctional education involves vocational training or academic education provided to prisoners as an intriguing part of their rehabilitation.

### **Benefits of Prison Education**

Cuizon (2009) reported that the welfare of the adult learner is promoted through the help of education programs around the world. In a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education and spearheaded by Stephen J. Steurer of the Correctional Educational Association, inmates who participated in classes while in the prison education program were more likely to

remain free within the first three years of release (Cuizon, 2009). Cuizon reported that only 22% of prisoners, who took educational classes while in prison returned to prison compared to 31%. He suggested that prison education was not only positive for inmates, but was also positive for public safety as studies show that a reduction in crime was indirectly related to prison education. Therefore, education in prison is beneficial not just to prisoners but to the society as well (Cuizon, 2009).

### **The Effect of Prison Education on Recidivism**

In the United States, the prison population has increased at an alarming rate, by more than three-fold over the last few decades (Vacca, 2004). Financing prisons places an enormous burden on all levels of government. In order to prevent this burden on the government, prisoners should avoid being incarcerated. Vacca discussed that the best way to prevent incarceration from happening is to reduce the number of recidivists. Recidivists are individuals who were released from prison or jail only to become repeat offenders who ultimately return back to the prison facilities. Unfortunately, a large percentage of inmates are recidivists. Most prisoners who are in a vocational or GED program are less likely to return back to prison or jail. Vacca noted that not only did the prison education system work, but it was also more cost-efficient than other options to reduce recidivism. He contends that despite the historical success of prison education systems, society seems to value incapacitation more than rehabilitation.

Research has shown that inmates who participate in educational programs appear to have a better success rate after leaving prison than inmates who do not participate in educational programs while incarcerated. Steurer and Smith (2003) explained that the Bureau of Prisons estimated that 16% of inmates who are in an educational program are less likely to return back to prison than inmates who are not in an educational program.

Cuizon (2009) reported that prison education helps reduce the recidivism rate among inmates because they attend classes or go through training programs while incarcerated. Cuizon discussed that crime reduction and financial savings on prison budgets also help reduce the recidivism rate among inmates. Cuizon found in his research that for every dollar spent on education, two dollars can be saved to cover the cost of re-incarceration. The results of these studies suggest that prison education plays a major role in recidivism reduction. The benefits for society are immense for educated inmates would have a positive effect on the welfare of society as a whole and the financial burdens will decrease for taxpayers.

### **Research and Studies**

Smith, Steurer, and Tracy (2001) discussed how the Correctional Educational Association study supports the conclusion that prison education programs are as effective as high school or GED training within a community. Stephen and Smith (2003) noted how inmates, who participated in educational programs, recidivated 29% less than inmates who did not participate in educational programs. They shared that the prison educational programs were the means to avoid overcrowded prisons and spending a substantial amount of money on building new facilities. Stephen and Smith discussed how the comprehensive analysis, *The Three State Recidivism Study*, found that the 1,373 inmates who were enrolled in college programs while incarcerated had significantly lower re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration rates than non-participants.

### **Leadership Role in Adult Education**

Brookover and Lezotte (1982) discussed that the role of instructional leader was introduced in the early 1980's as a relatively new concept which called for a shift of emphasis from principals to instructional or academic leaders. Brookover and Lezotte reported that this

shift was later influenced by research which found that principals stressed the importance of instructional leadership in their schools. Later, in the first half of the 1990's, the focus of instructional leadership seemed to yield to school-based management and facilitative leadership (Lashway, 2002).

Fullan (1991) found in his research that schools where teachers perceived their principals to be strong instructional leaders had significantly greater gains in achievement scores for reading and mathematics than schools where teachers believed their principal to be average and weak instructional leaders. Elmore (2000) discussed that adult education leaders focus on instructional quality, spend time observing classrooms and helping teachers improve, and make sure that students achieve the best education possible. It is important for adult education leaders to challenge teachers to examine traditional assumptions about teaching and establish support networks for teachers so they can share information with other teachers.

### **Instructional Leadership**

Whitaker (1997) discussed that instructional leaders need to be resource providers. Instructional leaders need to know the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers as well as recognize and acknowledge a job well done by their teachers. Instructional leaders need to be an instructional resource. Instructional leaders need to provide their teachers with information on current trends and instructional practices. Whitaker reported that instructional leaders need to be good communicators. Instructional leaders need to communicate with their teachers that all adult learners can learn.

### **Summary of the Review of Literature**

Adult learners come into the GED class with precisely defined expectations. Part of being an effective adult educator involves understanding how adult learners learn best.

Unfortunately, there are barriers to their learning. The best way to motivate adult learners is simply to enhance the learning process and decrease the barriers. The best motivators for adult learners are interest and participation. Many adult learners in adult education programs possess barriers which prevents them from showing interest and participating in learning. Some of these barriers include lack of prior knowledge, interest, or essential necessary life experiences.

When considering instructional methods, research shows that the pedagogical method is best when attempting to educate adults with little to no knowledge while some teachers use this method with all learners. The andragogical method, research shows, is an effective strategy used to educate adult learners and has been proven to be successful in correctional education. Lastly, the instructional leader plays a vital and crucial role in the educational process. Instructional leaders need to know what effective instructional leadership is and how they can become effective instructional leaders. Effective instructional leaders must continue to focus on improving instructional delivery and student learning. They must understand curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this case study is to investigate how adult educators apply the six principles of andragogy by Malcolm Knowles (1984) to instruction of adult learners in a correctional educational GED program. The six principles label adult learners as people who:

- Are self-directed and intrinsically motivated learners;
- Bridge life experiences with old knowledge with new learning;
- Are goals-driven learners;
- Expect experiences to be relevant to them;
- Are practical learners; and
- Want respect (Knowles, 1984).

Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because qualitative research, unlike a quantitative approach, strives to understand a phenomenon. It occurs in natural settings, uses multiple methods, focuses on context, is emergent and yields to interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Through such methods as interviews, content analysis, and observations, elements which contribute to the GED program were explored. This chapter will describe all methods that were used to conduct the study. The study site, study participants, data collection techniques, and data analysis methods will also be described.

### **Focus of the Study**

The primary focus of this case study is to investigate how adult educators apply the six principles of andragogy (Knowles, 1984) with adult learners in a GED program. In an effort to understand the experiences and opinions of those who have contributed to the GED program, conversational interviews were conducted with the principal and four adult learners, and



standardized, open-ended interviews were conducted with four adult educators. Additionally, documents related to the GED program were reviewed and lessons in the classrooms were observed. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), triangulation of data refers to the comparison of multiple sources of data. Agreement between multiple data sources contributes to the validity or trustworthiness of the study. For this study, the multiple data sources which were compared included a principal interview, adult educator interviews, adult learner interviews, content analysis through collection and review of documents relevant to the study, site visits, and classroom observations.

According to Creswell and Miller (1997), to study phenomena in which meaning is constructed through interactions and discussions, the investigator must conduct field visits and gather data through in-depth interviews of those involved. After examining the results from the interviews, data collection and classroom observations, I looked at the literature on effective methods for adult educators and adult learners specific to the findings of the study and discussed it further in Chapter Four.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will be addressed:

1. Which principles of andragogy do adult educators apply in their instruction with adult learners?
2. How do these principles influence their instruction?
3. How do adult learners perceive GED instruction?

### **Research Design**

Creswell, Hanson, Clark, and Morales (2007) define a case study as an in-depth exploration of a program, designed to offer insight into the topic. Through collection and

analysis of multiple sources of data, an issue is more thoroughly explored. Marshall and Rossman (2006) refer to a case study as the most complex strategy for studying the culture of a group or program as the researcher becomes immersed in the setting. Due to the complexity of the GED program, case study was chosen as the appropriate method of studying how adult educators apply the six principles, by Malcolm Knowles of andragogy with adult learners in a correctional educational GED program. This case study relied upon multiple methods of data collection and analysis to determine features of the GED program which contribute to the academic progress of adult learners. Data collection included conversational interviews, standardized open-ended interviews, document analysis, and observations.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Marshall and Rossman (2006) state that qualitative research often originates from the researchers interest in a topic with which the researcher has personal experience. The challenge for the researcher is to gather and interpret the data needed to advance the research while remaining neutral and objective. The researcher is the instrument or lens through which the data are viewed (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The viewpoint of the researcher is critical to establishing validity of the study.

The researcher may use his knowledge and familiarity with the topic to gain entry into the site to be included in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this study, entry to the site was facilitated by the relationship that I had already established as an adult educator and as a principal in the school district. I served as the interviewer, data collector, and classroom observer. My role was explained to the participants as well as to the district level administrators.

## **Site Selection**

The participants of this study were the principal, four adult educators, and four adult learners from a correctional educational GED program site. I used a combination sampling for this study. Marshall and Rossman (2006) stated that this type of sampling includes triangulation and allows for flexibility while fulfilling multiple interests and needs. This type of sampling will help in achieving the desired sample for this study. I chose this school because the population is accessible and I live in proximity of the particular school. I interviewed the principal, four adult educators, and four adult learners. A formal request form was devised to get the official participation of all the participants who were involved in this study. Written confirmation of dates and locations of interviews were mailed prior to the interview process.

## **Data Collection**

I received permission from the Institutional Review Board to conduct the study. After approval was received, I requested permission from the Arkansas Department of Corrections, the superintendent, and building principal to use their facilities, employees, and students to conduct my research. Once approval was received, the collection of data began.

**Interviews.** I provided confidentiality consent forms which participants signed and dated. The consent form described the following: purpose of the study; a statement to assure the participants of confidentiality; my name and address; and the name and address of the chairman of the dissertation committee. Interview questionnaires were used during on-site interviews with the principal, adult educators, and adult learners from the studied site. This study focused on interview questions that allowed participants to express their individual feelings, events, and motivating factors that contributed to this study. In addition, I felt that the interview process allowed participants to share their experiences about the GED program. Demographic

information pertaining to the principal and the adult educators was collected during the interview. This information included teaching experience, number of years teaching experience in a correctional educational setting, areas of professional licensure, and the degree or degrees held. Demographic information pertaining to the adult learners was also collected during the interview. This information included social environment, academic environment, and student performance.

**Interview Protocol.** I performed informal telephone conversations with the principal and the adult educators before the actual interview so I could develop a relationship with them and explain the nature of the study. During the telephone conversations, I scheduled dates for data collection via the on-site interview. The interviews were conducted during the months of February, March, and April of 2011. The interviews with the principal and the adult educators were conducted in a secure conference room. The interviews with the adult learners were conducted in the office of the principal. During the interviews, time was allowed for me to discuss educational backgrounds and develop a deeper knowledge of each participant. After the completion of all interviews, I conducted formal telephone conversations to schedule dates for follow-up interviews with each participant. See initial interview questions in appendices A, B, and C.

**Content Analysis.** Content analysis refers to the practice of collecting, describing, and interpreting artifacts related to the subject being studied (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). After completing the conversational and standardized open-ended interviews, I collected and reviewed documents relevant to themes and topics which were identified through the interviews. I looked for correlations between the artifacts and the themes identified in the interviews. Documents including lesson plans and the curriculum guide were collected. I reviewed the documents to

determine support for data collected during interviews. All documents were treated as confidential and maintained in a secure location.

**Observations.** After completing the interviews, classroom observations were conducted in the Intermediate, Pre-GED and GED classrooms. The observations lasted 40 minutes. Teacher practices were the focus of the observations as they were identified in the interviews as contributing to the success of the GED program. Based upon themes which emerged during the interviews with the adult educators and adult learners, a descriptive and an observation matrix were developed. A matrix resembles a table with topics or themes listed along each axis. As behaviors are observed, they are recorded in the appropriate box in the matrix. It serves as an organizational tool to use for analysis of data collected (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). However, Marshall and Rossman caution against allowing the matrix to drive or lead the observation as the observer searches for information to complete all sections of the matrix. Field notes of the observations were also treated confidentially.

**Data Analysis.** Transcripts of interviews were first typed using Microsoft Office Word 2003. Following the framework for data analysis described by Marshall and Rossman (2006), open coding was used to identify common themes in the interviews. When open coding is used, there are no predetermined categories for data analysis. Interview transcripts were reviewed to identify common categories or themes. Themes may be key words which appear multiple times or common responses given by numerous interview participants. Data were classified into themes as common strains and topics emerged. Common themes were then explored further through content analysis of documents related to adult learners and observations in classrooms to determine if these other forms of data support themes which were developed from the interview transcripts.

## **Trustworthiness**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), qualitative researchers must demonstrate that inferences from their studies are grounded in data. Trustworthiness was addressed in this case study by using several forms of data: interviews, data collection, and classroom observations. For this study, I used triangulation, member checks, audit trail, peer debriefing, and researcher reflexivity. These techniques are defined and described in more detail.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation refers to the practice of using multiple sources of data to identify themes in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this study, triangulation was achieved through the investigation of one school site. Data collected through multiple sources including interviews, content analysis, and observations of instruction contributes to triangulation. Review and comparison of interview transcripts, observational field notes, documents collected, and the review of literature contribute to the triangulation of data.

**Member Checks.** Throughout the study, I did member checks with the principal, the four adult educators, and the four adult learners. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined member checking as a process that allows interviewed participants to verify the transcribed data and my interpretation of the data. To facilitate member checks, I conferred with interview participants as themes emerged to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation of the data. Summaries of interviews were sent to participants and transcripts of interviews were reviewed with any participant who requested more clarification. Participants were offered the opportunity to explain or expand any responses.

**Audit Trail.** The data were provided by an audit trail. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined an audit trail as a step by step trail of all facets of the research process from seeking permission to conduct research to reporting findings from the research. Data were stored on my computer

and stored securely. Data which were collected, including transcripts, field notes, and documents gathered for content analysis were labeled, catalogued, and maintained in a secure location for five years.

**Peer Debriefing.** Throughout the study, I used peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined peer debriefing as a process of talking to professional people with no direct affiliation to the research to gain their perceptions regarding varying aspects of the study that might not otherwise have been revealed to the researcher. I communicated with the dissertation chair and other members of the committee as the dissertation was being written. I also attended monthly debriefing sessions with the superintendent of the Arkansas Correctional School District as the data were being analyzed.

**Researcher Reflexivity.** Creswell (2007) stated that reflexivity means awareness the researcher has of his/her biases and experiences that he/she brings to a qualitative research study. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), the researcher can use his experiences and insights to enrich the study and to more accurately describe the topic being studied. In this research study, I had experience as a GED adult educator and a principal. As the study began, I believed that all adult learners should have the opportunity to get a good education with the help of dedicated adult educators who are willing to do whatever it takes for adult learners to improve and succeed academically.

### **Pilot Study**

To establish the content validity of the interview questions, a pilot study was conducted at a similar adult male correctional facility in October 2010. One principal, one male adult educator, one female adult educator, and two adult learners were selected as a sample of

convenience to participate in the pilot study. I administered the interview questions, suggestions from the participants were noted, and the interview questions were edited and revised.

### **Summary**

The process of data collection and analysis, which occurred during this qualitative research study, was extensive and comprehensive. The triangulation and coding techniques utilized in identifying major themes and features were a critical stage in the overall analysis and interpretation of the collected data. Data analysis methods were presented to illustrate the orderly progression of this study. The systematic and thoughtful development of the interview questions provided an avenue through which significant ideas, thoughts, and beliefs emerged for the purpose of data analysis. The interviews provided for the perceptions of the principal and adult educators in ensuring how adult learners learn. The strategies and techniques used to study this school, collect and analyze the data, and extract findings and conclusions clearly answered the research questions. Chapter Four provides a thorough description of the findings of this study. The descriptions and displays are included to provide the reader with the answers to the research questions and to support the basic conclusions and recommendations found in Chapter Five.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

The purpose of this case study was to examine how adult educators apply the six principles of andragogy, by Malcolm Knowles (1984), with adult learners in a correctional educational GED program. The following six principles label adult learners as people who:

- Are self-directed and intrinsically motivated learners;
- Bridge life experiences with old knowledge with new learning;
- Are goals-driven learners;
- Expect experiences to be relevant to them;
- Are practical learners; and
- Want respect (Knowles, 1984).

Through interviews with adult educators, classroom observations, and the analysis of documents related to the GED program, my research goal was to identify how adult educators used andragogy in their instruction with adult learners in a correctional educational GED program.

This chapter presents the key findings based on triangulated data collection, analysis, and synthesis associated with each research question. Using adult education literature and my extensive experience as a principal of a school in a correctional facility, I constructed the following research questions to guide my exploration regarding how andragogy was used in different level-specific classrooms within a correctional facility in the northeast.

#### **Research Questions**

1. Which principles of andragogy do adult educators apply in their instruction with adult learners?
2. How do these principles influence their instruction?

### 3. How do adult learners perceive GED instruction?

This chapter describes how the data associated with each research question were collected, analyzed, and synthesized into major themes. For each research question, I will present findings from interviews, observations, and document reviews. The chapter summary provides a discussion regarding how data from multiple sources were integrated, synthesized, and presented as major themes.

#### **Case Study Boundaries**

I completed a within-site study because the school is a single program (Creswell, 2007). Before any inmate was placed in the GED program, he/she would take the locator test that would help determine which level of the placement test, Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), the adult learner will take. The locator test consists of the following subtests: reading comprehension, math comprehension, math application, and language arts writing. It takes five to twelve minutes to complete.

According to the manual of the ACSD, the TABE is a standardized test that consists of the following five levels: (1) The Limited Literacy Level; (2) The Easy Level; (3) The Medium Level; (4) The Difficult Level; and (5) The Advanced Level. The difficult and advanced levels predict how the adult learner will perform on the GED test (Arkansas Correctional School District, 2010). The TABE test consists of the following subtests: reading comprehension, math comprehension, math application, and language arts writing and takes three to four hours to complete. After the adult learner completes the TABE test, he or she will be placed in the General Education Development (GED) program based on his or her total battery score. The GED program consists of the following levels: (1) Adult Basic Education with a grade level equivalent of 0-3.9; (2) Adult Intermediate Education with a grade level equivalent of 4.0-5.9;

(3) Adult Pre-GED Education with a grade level equivalent of 6.0-8.9; and (4) Adult GED Education with a grade level equivalent of 9.0-12.0 (Arkansas Correctional School District, 2010).

As adult learners progress through the GED program, they can take the Pre-GED test and Official GED test. The Pre-GED and Official GED test both consists of five tests which measure the achievement in subject areas associated with a high school program of study. The following are the five tests: (1) language arts writing; (2) social studies; (3) science; (4) language arts reading; and (5) mathematics. The passing criteria set by the Arkansas GED Testing Program for the Pre-GED and Official GED test are a minimum of 410 on each of the five tests and an average of 450. During the 42 year history of the school district, 18,722 adult learners have earned their GED (Arkansas Correctional School District, 2010).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

I used various data collection techniques during the course of the research to maximize trustworthiness of the data. However, individual interviews were my primary method for data collection because it afforded me the ability to talk with and observe participants in their natural environment and to probe for deeper understanding of the research questions. Subsequent informal interviews, observations, and document reviews were conducted to confirm or disconfirm data that were collected during the interview process.

### **Individual Interviews**

I performed informal telephone conversations before the interviews with the principal and the adult educators before the actual interview so I could develop a relationship with them and explain the nature of the study. I conducted telephone conversations with them to schedule dates for data collection via the on-site interview. The interviews were conducted during the

months of February, March, and April of 2011. The interviews with the principal and the adult educators were conducted in a secure conference room. The interviews with the adult learners were conducted in the office of the principal. Each interview with the participants was approximately 30 to 40 minutes. At the interviews, I was allowed time to discuss my educational background and to develop a comfort level with each participant by getting to know their backgrounds. After the completion of all interviews, I conducted formal telephone conversations to schedule dates for follow-up interviews with each participant.

### **Participant Demographics**

To provide contextual data and illustrate similarities and differences among the principal and adult educators, I collected demographic information about their teaching experience and educational background. The principal is a college graduate with an Educational Specialist degree in Educational Leadership. He has a total of 42 years of teaching experience, with 27 being in the public school system, and has been a principal in the correctional educational system for 15 years. Of the four adult educators, two hold Master's degrees in Adult Education, and two hold Bachelor's degrees in Elementary Education. Two of these educators have 21 years of teaching experience with at least five years spent in the public school system. One of the adult educators has 17 years of teaching experience with five of those years having been in the public school system. The last of the four adult educators has 33 years of teaching experience in correctional education only.

To provide contextual data and illustrate similarities and differences among the adult learners, I collected demographic information about their social environment, academic environment, and student performance. Of the four participants, two did not get along with students when they attended public schools. Two had trouble with reading and math. Two were

unhappy and bored. All of the participants dropped out of public school before the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. To see a full description of the demographics for participants see appendices D and E.

### **Observations**

Classroom observations were conducted in the GED program in this study over a three month period during the fall and spring semester of the 2010-2011 school year. Visits to the classrooms were unannounced and took place at random times during the school day. Each observation lasted 40 minutes. Downey et al. (2004) propose brief unannounced classroom visits as a way to gather data regarding classroom instructional practices and curriculum. Each class was observed 6 times during the data collection phase.

### **Document Review**

I collected the curriculum guide and sample lesson plans from the school district for review. These documents were analyzed and triangulated with interview and observation data.

### **Data Management Strategies**

According to Creswell (2007), data management is developing a system to organize and store data. The data I collected were securely stored on my computer. The following were kept in a secured area: recording of interviews, transcripts of interviews, interview questions, collected documents, field notes, data analysis and analysis of documents. Adult educators were assured of confidentiality regarding anything observed during classroom visits. No identifying information was collected during observations. Visits were designated by the studied site, content area or subject, and class period. For ease of data analysis, observation matrices were grouped together and were numbered consecutively. In regards to confidentiality issues pertaining to adult learners based on the informed consent, adult learners were assigned a code number that was used to match the interview question responses they gave. All information was

recorded anonymously. Only I knew the names of the participants, and stated to each that I would not divulge names or identify their answers to anyone. All information was held in the strictest of confidence.

### **Audit Trail**

Each participant was assigned an alpha-numeric code to ensure anonymity prior to and during data analysis and to ensure that responses or observations could be traced to a particular source. The audit trail contributes to data trustworthiness by enabling me, other researchers, and readers to confirm how I arrived at my findings and recommendations. The letters PR indicates that data are associated with the principal who participated in the study. The letters ED indicates that data are associated with one of four adult educators that participated in the study and the letters AD indicates that data are associated with one of four adult learners. These letters are followed by a number which indicates the individual interviewee and the second number followed by a slash identifies the page of the transcript where the quotation is located.

Confidentiality of participants was also assured on documents collected for content analysis. Information that might identify individual participants was removed before the documents were copied and synthesized. Because concerns for confidentiality do not apply to publicly available documents, the curriculum guide and sample lesson plans were coded and are referred to directly in the study. To clarify audit trail notations, Table 4 provides a list of observation numbers assigned to participants, the type of documents collected, and the location.

Table 4

## Audit Trail Notations for Observations and Documents

Notation	Participant or Document	Site
CO1 through CO24	Classroom Observations	School
LP1 through LP12	Lesson Plans	School
CurrReading	Curriculum Guide for Reading	District
CurrWriting	Curriculum Guide for Writing	District
CurrMath	Curriculum Guide for Math	District

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis involved reviewing and coding transcribed interviews, observation protocols, field notes and documents germane to the phenomenon. Through the inductive process of coding, repeated topics, related concepts, terminology, and critical incidents were identified and grouped to provide structure to the large amount of data that were collected through interviews, observations, document review, and field notes. Allowing themes to emerge from data rather than assigning comments to predetermined topics or categories is referred to as open coding (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Subsequently, the open codes from each interview, observation, and document review were compared to subsequent data sources which Boeije (2002) suggests strengthens conclusions by lending validity to the study. Glaser and Strauss (1967) discussed the importance of using comparison as a way to maximize credibility of the study and build validity as themes are revealed through the comparisons.

## **Trustworthiness of the Data**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), qualitative researchers must demonstrate that inferences from their studies are grounded in data. Trustworthiness was addressed in this case study by using several forms of data: interviews, data collection, and classroom observations. For this study, I used triangulation, member checks, audit trail, peer debriefing, and researcher reflexivity.

Triangulation refers to the practice of using multiple sources of data to identify themes in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this study, triangulation was achieved through the investigation of one school site. Additionally, data collected through multiple sources including interviews, content analysis, and observations of instruction contributed to triangulation. Review and comparison of interview transcripts, observational field notes, documents collected, and the review of literature contributed to the triangulation of data.

Throughout the study, I completed member checks with the principal, adult educators, and adult learners. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined member checking as a process that allows interviewed participants to verify the transcribed data and the interpretation of the data. To facilitate member checks, I conferred with interview participants as themes emerged to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation of the data. Summaries of interviews were sent to participants and transcripts of interviews were reviewed with any participant who requested more clarification. Participants were offered the opportunity to explain or expand any responses.

The data were provided by an audit trail. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined an audit trail as a step by step trail of all facets of the research process from seeking permission, to conducting research, to reporting findings from the research. I stored and secured data on my computer.



The following were kept in a secured area: recording of interviews, transcripts of interviews, interview questions, collected documents, field notes, data analysis, and analysis of documents.

Throughout the study, I used peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined peer debriefing as a process of talking to professional people with no direct affiliation to the research to gain their perceptions regarding varying aspects of the study that might not otherwise have been revealed to the researcher. I communicated with the dissertation chair and the committee on a regular basis as the dissertation was being written. I also attended monthly debriefing sessions with the superintendent of the Arkansas Correctional School District as the data were being analyzed.

Creswell (2007) stated that reflexivity means being cognizant of biases, values, and experiences that the researcher brings into a qualitative study. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), the researcher can use his experiences and insights to enrich the study and to more accurately describe the topic being studied. In this research study, I have experience as an adult educator in the GED classroom and as a principal. I believe that all adult learners should have the opportunity to get a good education with the help of dedicated adult educators who are willing to do whatever it takes for adult learners to improve and succeed academically.

### **Open Coding**

According to Creswell (2007), open coding involves taking data and breaking them down into informative categories. For this study, open coding was used to identify common themes in the interviews. When open coding is used, there are no predetermined categories for data analysis. Transcripts were reviewed to identify common categories or themes present in the interview transcripts. For example, the need to know is the first code I used in my study with the adult educators. Knowles (1984) stated that adults feel that they must understand and know why

they must learn a new concept before they begin to learn it. Themes may be key words which appear multiple times or common responses given by numerous interview participants. The following are some of the words that were coded: need to know, life experiences, goal and relevancy oriented, practical, and respected. The next section discusses how building on the open codes, I continued to synthesize data from the individual interviews to form axial codes, which form the basis of my findings.

### **Axial Coding**

As recurrent terms, ideas, and topics emerged from review of multiple data sources, they were organized into themes or categories by the axial coding process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Axial coding was used to make tentative connections between open codes. This process was the result of reviewing the data multiple times, confirming data with adult educators, and allowing a peer researcher to review and evaluate my coding categories to ensure clarity and trustworthiness. The axial codes were reviewed and combined until the data were tied to the six themes relative to the use of andragogy in instruction by adult educators for adult learners in a correctional educational GED program. An example of an axial code from my analysis is adult learners like to be respected. For example, all adult learners should be treated with respect.

### **Descriptive Matrix**

Table 5 is a conceptually clustered matrix, which provides a display of axial codes, or major themes which emerged from the collected data of the interviews with adult educators. The following are the major themes:

- Self-directed and intrinsically motivated learners;
- Bridge life experiences with old knowledge and new learning;
- Goals-driven learners;

- Expect experiences to be relevant to them;
- Practical learners; and
- Want respect (Knowles, 1984).

Data displayed in the matrix represent standardized open-ended interviews. Each conceptually clustered matrix is followed by additional data from interviews to support the major themes.

Table 5

Descriptive Matrix: Axial Codes (Major Themes) of Adult Educators

Participants	Themes					
	Intrinsically Motivated and Self-directed (need to know)	Life Experiences to Learning Experiences	Goal Oriented	Relevancy Oriented	Adults are Practical	Adult Learners Like to be Respected
ED1	Adult learners sometimes need the why before the how.	Adult learners come into my classroom with a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that includes work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education.	I also try to include skills needed to pass the GED test.	Making the lesson interesting and relevant is always a key to learning.	I tell my students explicitly how the lessons that I am teaching will be useful to them in and out of my classroom.	The adult learners should always be respected.
ED2	Also, I make sure that that my students know why they need to learn any assignment before they learn it. Most of all, I put forth every effort to help my students move from dependent learners to self directing learners.	I try to engage any previous learning that the student has developed.	Any student that gets a GED can receive 90 days of good time and go home 3 months early.	I try to get the student involved by keeping the lessons focused and student-centered	I explain to my students why it is important for them to get a GED.	When teaching in the GED program, I always treat the person like an adult not like a child.
ED3	In adult education, we as adult educators need to let adult learners know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.	I try to use life examples to motivate students and increase interest during my instructional time.	I try to show the unwilling students' getting a GED is away to get out of school for good.	I try to make my lessons I teach applicable to my student's lives.	I explain to my students that it is very important and beneficial for them to work toward getting a GED.	I believe that all adult learners should be treated with respect.
ED4	I believe that all adult educators need to let adult learners know why they need to know something before they undertake learning something.	I relate theories and concepts to the adult learners and recognize the value of experience in learning.	When a student gets his GED, he will receive 90 days of good time. The students will leave prison 3 months early.	experience and knowledge which is relevant to the topic	I tell my students how important and useful my GED instruction will be to them while they are going through the GED program.	I treat all my students as adults and not as children.

Table 6 is a conceptually clustered matrix, which provides a display of axial codes, or major themes which emerged from the collected data of the interviews with adult learners. The following are the major themes:

- Self-directed and intrinsically motivated learners;
- Bridge life experiences with old knowledge with new learning;
- Goals-driven learners;
- Expect experiences to be relevant to them;
- Practical learners; and
- Want respect (Knowles, 1984).

Data displayed in the matrix represent conversational interviews. Each conceptually clustered matrix is followed by additional data from interviews to support the major themes.

Table 6

Descriptive Matrix: Axial Codes (Major Themes) of Adult Learners

Participants	Themes					
	Intrinsically Motivated and Self-directed (need to know)	Life Experiences to Learning Experiences	Goal Oriented	Relevancy Oriented	Adults are Practical	Adult Learners Like to be Respected
AD1	I had a problem with my writing skills. Now I am able to write effective essays.	Writing essays in class have allowed me to use my life experiences in my writing during GED instruction.	If I get my GED while I am incarcerated, I can get out 90 days early	The GED instruction is very important and helpful to my future plans	Adults are Practical	My instructor is very respectful.
AD2	When I started in the GED program, I was not good at writing essays. After much practice, I am now writing good essays.	I have used my own life experiences when writing an essay that relates to something that I have experienced throughout my journey in life.	If I get my GED, I can get 90 days of good time that will allow me to go home 3 months early.	The GED instruction is very important and useful to my future plans.		My teacher is very respectful and willing to help me as an adult learner.
AD3	I am getting exposed to different writing styles.	I am able to use my knowledge and work experience in brick layering, roofing, and cooking when it comes to dealing with different measurements in mathematics during GED instruction.	Getting 90 days of good time off of my prison sentence if I can get my GED motivates me to get my GED.	The GED instruction is very pertinent and practicable to my future plans.		My teacher totally gives me respect as an adult learner.
AD4	I had major problems with trying to write an essay and do the more difficult math problems like Algebra, Ratios, and Percents. I am able to write essays better and do Algebra, Ratios, and Percent problems	Most of the essays that I have had to write about have had to do with everyday life experiences.	The 90 days of good time is going to motivate me to get my GED. If I can pass the GED test, I will get out of prison 3 months early	The GED instruction is very important and beneficial to my future plans.		My instructor treats me like an adult and not like I am a child.

## **Report of Findings**

Findings related to data collection will be grouped according to the research questions that guided this study. For each research question, I identified the interview questions that were constructed to explore the issue, I discussed the coding procedure that accompanied data collection for that research question, and I reported the main themes that emerged from data analysis associated with the research questions. Following the interview analysis for each research question, I presented and discussed the findings related to observation and document review that explored the research questions. The chapter summary will make explicit the main themes that emerged for each research question and discuss the patterns of data that were evident across the research questions. In the following sections, the findings for each research question are reported.

### **Research Question One**

The first research question is, “Which principles of andragogy do adult educators apply in their instruction with adult learners?” The following interview questions and main themes were used to answer research question one:

Table 7

Interview Questions and Major Themes for Research Question One

Interview Questions	Main Themes
Describe your expectations of adult learners in your classroom.	Adults are self-directed and intrinsically motivated learners;
Describe the methods or strategies you have found to be the most successful and engaging to adult learners.	Adults bridge life experiences with old knowledge with new learning;
Many adults undertake learning because of a need-to-know, how do you engage adult learners who are required to participate and may not want-to-know?	Adults are goals-driven learners; Adults expect experiences to be relevant to them;
Describe how you plan your lessons for adult learners.	Adults are practical learners; and Adults want respect (Knowles, 1984).
Describe the types of collaboration you have practiced with other adult educators in your school to improve the academic achievement of adult learners.	
Describe what you believe makes the most positive influence in improving the academic achievement of adult learners.	

**Adult Education Philosophy.** During the interviews, the principal and adult educators voiced their personal philosophy about adult education.

Adult educator two stated,

“The adult learners should always be respected. I believe when an adult learner gets a GED he or she has the opportunity to further their education as well acquire and retain employment” (ED2/7).



The principal and the other adult educators disclosed positive personal philosophies on adult education:

The principal stated,

“I believe that all adult can learn with the help of dedicated adult educators that believe the adult learner comes first. I believe that adults should have the opportunity to learn as much as they can while going through an adult education program” (PR/1).

While an adult educator said,

“I believe all adults can learn, no matter what their previous educational experience might have been. Adult learners bring their experiences and knowledge to the learning process which includes work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education ” (ED1/4).

Another adult educator said,

“I believe that all adults can learn. I believe that anyone who wishes to receive a GED should have the right to do so. You can never get too much education. I believe that all adult learners should always be respected. In adult education, we as adult educators need to let adult learners know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it” (ED3/10).

Still another voiced,

“Adults can be more productive to society as their education increases. Adult education is worthwhile as a means of improving the living standards of those that pursue it. I believe that all adult educators need to let adult learners know why

they need to know something before they undertake learning something”  
(ED4/13).

**Respect.** All the adult educators expect their students to respect them, their classmates, and themselves in the classroom. One adult educator stated, “I expect my students to have respect for me, their classmates, and themselves. They should complete their work to the best of their ability and be willing to ask for help if they are having difficulties” (ED1/4). Another adult educator stated, “I expect a positive outcome from all of my students. My students are required to participate in class. I expect my students to be respectful to me and others in the class” (ED4/13).

Additional adult educator stated,

“I expect my students to treat me and their classmates with respect. I expect my students to do the best they can on any work assignments that they have to do. My students should always ask questions and for help when needed” (ED2/7).

Yet another adult educator stated,

“I expect all my students to obey the rules posted in the classroom, and I expect all my students to participate in class. I expect my students to show me respect and their classmates. I expect my students to come into my classroom with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from that of youths. Above all, I expect the best from them academically” (ED3/10).

The principal agreed that there should be respect between the adult educators and their students. The principal stated,

“The best adult educator that has ever taught in my GED program had the following characteristics: a strong educational background in adult education, was willing to go the entire distance or go that extra mile to help adult learners to

achieve academically, was a great role model who believed that all adults can learn, and treated the adult learner as an adult and not like a child . . . students would . . . enjoy this adult educator with the highest respect” (PR/3).

**Instructional Strategies.** The first instructional method utilized by adult educators most frequently to improve the instruction and achievement of adult learners as reported by the participants in this case study was cooperative learning. The adult educators identified many different types of cooperative learning structures such as whole group, small groups, one-on-one instruction, peer tutoring, and feedback. While adult educators certainly have knowledge to share and discuss with students, learning is more effective when students have an opportunity to participate fully in lessons by discussing ideas and information with peers. The adult educators identified many types of cooperative learning structures. Flexible small groups promote the development of numerous perspectives and encourage collaboration.

Partnering encourages success because it provides practice opportunities, scaffolding, and assistance for classmates (Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992). The participants in this study used a form of cooperative learning—peer tutoring, to help adult learners to fully understand the lesson. Peer tutoring is when a teacher pairs a student with someone who is better able to do a task or knows more about a particular subject. Peer tutoring also reinforces the benefits of a cooperative approach to learning. Both of the students can gain academically and socially from this strategy. All of the adult educators see the importance of using cooperative learning as an instructional tool and as a way to build rapport with the students they serve.

One adult educator stated, “I use whole group, small groups, and one-on-one instruction in my classroom that I have found to be successful and engaging to adult learners” (ED1/4). Another adult educator stated, “There are adult learners that benefit more in small, individual groups and I try this approach whenever possible. I use whole group, small groups, and one-on-one instruction, and feedback to engage adult learners in my classroom” (ED3/10).

Another stated,

“I use whole group, small groups, and one-on-one instruction with all my students. I also provide feedback to my students. I believe it is very important to give student’s feedback on any assignment they have done in class. Feedback is a way of helping students learn by their mistakes. Repeat teaching is useful” (ED2/8).

Still another stated,

“I have found that allowing adult learners to work in small groups and allowing them to use the computers in the computer lab are ways to get adult learners actively engaged in the learning process within the GED program. I also use whole group instruction in my classroom. I give all my students feedback on all their assignments. Students like when they are given feedback on their assignments” (ED4/14).

The principal agreed with the adult educators. He stated,

“My adult educators use many methods and strategies to engage the adult learner. These include lectures, whole group, small groups, one-on-one instruction, computerized instruction, educational videos, power point presentations, smart

board demonstrations, students working at the board, and students using the Smart board. My adult educators provide a lot of practice and more practice in Math and Writing and they constantly give feedback to the adult learner” (PR/3).

When asked specifically about the want-to-know versus the not want-to-know students, the adult educators shared their strategies to engage.

One adult educator stated,

“Making the lesson interesting and relevant is always a key to learning. I try to show the unwilling adult learners getting a GED is way to get out of school for good. Plus, 90 days will be removed from their sentenced time. This means they will go home 90 days early. As a veteran adult educator, I have seen that when I group the not want-to-know adult learners with adult learners that want to learn the want-to-know adult learners can express to the not want-to-know adult learners how important it is to get a good education. So using cooperative learning groups in my classroom is a good way to engage the not want-to-know adult learners in the learning process. I state to the not want-to-know students that I am here to help them get the best education possible. When they see that I am here to treat them as an adult as well as an adult learner, they will come around and participate. It is all about how I come to them as a person. When students are made to come to school, it is always a challenge for the teacher. I keep that thought in mind and try to get the student involved by keeping the lessons focused and student-centered” (ED2/8).

Another adult educator said,

“I have found that when I group adult learners that do not want to participate in the GED program with other adult learners that do want to participate in the GED program the not want-to-know adult learners will try to engage in the individual assignments. I use positive reinforcement to try to engage the not want-to-know adult learners in my lessons. I give them a lot of praise and I encourage them to try and do their best in my classroom” (ED3/11).

An additional adult educator shared,

“I group the not want-to-know adult learners with the adult learners that want to learn. This helps to a certain degree because the adult learners that are willing to learn can motivate the not want-to-know adult learners to learn as well. Most adult learners learn better when they are working in groups with other adult learners. I use a lot of positive reinforcement with all my students especially the students that are required to participate and may not want to be in school.

Overall, it is a challenge dealing with students that do not want to be in school, but as adult educators, we need to do whatever it takes to get all adult learners engaged in the learning process” (ED4/14).

The principal reported similar information in his interview. He stated,

“My adult educators use small groups/cooperative learning groups in their classrooms for the adult learners that do not want to be engaged in the learning process with the adult learners that want to be engaged in the learning process. This method of teaching seems to help my adult educators when dealing with adult learners that do not want to undertake learning seriously. Also, my adult

educators make sure that they use a lot of positive reinforcement with the adult learners that do not want to take learning seriously” (PR/2).

**Planning.** All the adult educators indicated that time was critical to comprehensive lesson planning. The adult educators reported that they plan their lessons based on the curriculum guide for the Arkansas Correctional School District and TABE scores. One adult educator stated, “I use TABE scores to plan my teaching units. I use TABE scores to determine what my lessons should cover whether it be whole group or individual lessons” (ED1/5). Another adult educator stated, “I plan my lessons based on the curriculum guide that the Arkansas Correctional School District expects me to use to teach adult learners. I plan my lessons to meet the educational needs of my students” (ED3/11). A third adult educator stated, “I plan my lessons based on the Arkansas Correctional School District’s curriculum guide that helps me to teach my GED level class” (ED4/14). Adult educator two stated,

“My daily lesson plans are based on the adult learners needs as shown on their individual TABE sheet. These sheets show skills that need to be mastered. I look at these sheets to plan daily whole group lessons as well as individual lessons” (ED2/8).

**Collaboration.** For this study, the term “collaboration” is used to describe a reciprocal action or communication between two individuals. Comments of adult educators frequently focused on collaboration between adult educators, adult educators and adult learners, and between adult learners.

***Adult Educator to Adult Educator.*** The first form of collaboration was adult educator to adult educator collaboration. The principal reported on the importance of this ability in all of the adult learners. He stated,

“I look for someone who is a team player and whose personality will blend in with the other adult educators. These characteristics are important for a new adult educator to have when dealing with current adult educators and adult learners in a correctional educational setting” (PR/2).

Likewise, all adult educators reported talking regularly with each other about ways to help adult learners improve academically in the GED program. Adult educator one stated,

“If I have problems with the curriculum or students, it is helpful to discuss it with my fellow adult educators. We collaborate with each other about using GED score booster workbooks because they can help students prepare for the GED test. The GED score booster workbooks have questions that are similar to questions on the actual GED test” (ED1/5).

Adult educator two, who is a Pre-GED adult educator, explained how collaborating with the other Pre-GED adult educator helps them to help adult learners improve academically.

Adult educator two stated the following:

“We share teaching materials, different teaching styles, different methods of instruction, teaching tools, and personal advice that will help improve the academic achievement of the adult learners. When we find anything to help with



skill mastery we share it. We try to do whatever will be helpful to the adult learner to get a GED” (ED2/8).

According to adult educator three, collaborating with fellow adult educators about student learning will be helpful when it comes to helping adult learners improve academically in the GED program. Adult educator three stated, “We share materials and ideas on ways to better educate the adult learner. We collaborate with each other about using GED score booster workbooks that have questions that are similar to questions on the GED test” (ED3/11).

Adult educator four stated the following about collaborating with the other adult educators:

“I collaborate with other adult educators both informally and formally about ways to improve the academic achievement of adult learners. In particular, when testing takes place, student test results are reviewed with that student’s teacher and discussion takes place for the proper placement of that student in the different levels within the GED program” (ED4/14).

***Adult Educator to Adult Learner.*** Another form of interaction which was identified by the adult educators was communication between adult educators and adult learners. One adult educator reported, “I want them to know I am here to help with their educational needs” (ED2/7). Several adult educators reported collaborating individually with adult learners as they provided one-on-one assistance, support, and redirection. Adult educator and adult learner interaction was considered important in increasing student comfort in the classrooms.

Adult educator two stated,

“Adult learners must feel they can succeed. The learning environment must be non-threatening and structured so learning is the main goal. Praise is essential. Adult learners must be told they are doing a good job as much as possible. I find a lot of adult learners have low self-esteem and have given up. I start at a level where success is almost immediate to build the adult learner’s self-esteem. After the adult learner can see success is possible, then we get to work harder skills” (ED2/9).

***Adult Learner to Adult Learner.*** A third form of collaboration was adult learner to adult learner collaboration. Adult educators in the GED program reported that many lessons which they considered to be successful included adult learner to adult learner collaboration. When describing a successful lesson, one adult educator reported, “When adult learners are able to help each other and talk things out, they seem to get it more” (ED2/8). This adult educator went on to say, “My students help each other during independent learning time” (ED2/8).

According to adult educator three, “Some adult learners can reach others in a way that I find remarkable, so I am always open to them taking a leading role and model for others” (ED3/11). Adult educator four reported, “Adult learners sometimes learn and work better with their classmates” (ED4/14).

***Achievement of Adult Learners.*** The adult educators voiced a commitment to the achievement of all adult learners. Adult educator two stated, “I truly believe that motivation is important in adult education because we as adult educators have to motivate adult learners to keep growing and developing in the learning process to help them to improve academically” (ED2/9).

Adult educator one stated,

“Other students’ receiving a GED makes an impact on my students’ attitude in class. The attitude of their family can contribute to students’ recognizing the need for a GED. The 90 day rule has really encouraged some of my students to take the GED test. Any student that gets a GED can receive 90 days of good time and go home 3 months early” (ED1/5).

Adult educator three stated,

“I believe my positive attitude toward my students is the most positive influence in improving their academic achievement. To build a good rapport with adult learners in the learning environment, I use positive nonverbal communication, deal with the whole person, and address adult learners as equals. I believe that by creating this positive environment, my students will want to succeed academically” (ED3/11).

Adult educator four stated,

“I believe the one thing that has the most positive influence on the adult learner’s academic achievement is the attitude of the teacher in the classroom. I have to believe that what I teach is important. The idea that my students have worth and dignity has a positive influence. Once that catches on to them, then I can begin to teach them what they should learn in my class” (ED4/15).

## **Research Question Two**

The second research question is, “How do these principles of andragogy influence their instruction?” The following data were used to answer research question two:

**Observations.** Data collected during observations was guided by an observational matrix. The observational matrix can be located in appendix F. According

to Marshall and Rossman (2006), a matrix is a way to organize data which has been discovered. As observations were made, data were entered into matrices based upon themes which had emerged from analysis of the interviews. The matrices were then compared to determine common features present during multiple observations at the studied site. Content analysis of the documents collected was completed to identify features of lesson plans that were included in the study. Additionally, the district curriculum guide was reviewed to determine support for data collected through interviews, observation, and analysis of other documents.

A review of classroom observation data indicated certain features which were common across the studied site. These were the classroom instructional arrangement, the adult educator roles and interactions, teaching modeling or displaying a visual aid or work sample, and the frequent assignment or written work for adult learners. It should be noted as the lessons progressed during some classroom observations adult educator roles, instructional arrangements, and student activities shifted or changed.

***Classroom Instructional Arrangement.*** The instructional arrangement most often observed in the classrooms at the studied site was whole group instruction. Whole group instructional arrangement was observed during 24 classroom visits conducted for this study. The second most common instructional arrangement was the clustering or dividing the class into small groups. Adult learners worked in small groups during eight classroom observations. Adult learners were observed to be working in a paired instructional arrangement during seven classroom observations. Adult learners were observed to be working individually during nine classroom observations.

***Adult Educator Roles and Interactions.*** During classroom observations, the adult educators were most often observed providing lectures, demonstrations, modeling to the whole class, or engaged in adult educator directed question and answer time. Almost all interaction during classroom visits was observed to be educator initiated and directed. Adult educators were observed interacting frequently one-on-one with adult learners at their desk. Adult learner initiated interaction was most often the result of the adult learner raising his hand to ask a question.

***Adult Educator Modeling.*** Adult educators provided adult learners with visual cues or models during classroom visits. One form of modeling frequently used was to display an example of the actual work of the adult learners using the Smartboard. As the adult educator discussed the lesson material for the day, the adult learners completed the worksheet, allowing them to copy correct answers directly from the example of the adult educator. Other visual models included working sample math problems or writing examples on the marker board. (CO1-CO24)

***Lesson Plans.*** Copies of four lesson plans were collected from each adult educator, for a total of twelve lesson plans for this study. Numerous other lesson plans were reviewed during classroom observations. In addition to basic information of subject area and date, lesson plans stated the instructional objective, the curriculum framework to be addressed, methods of instruction, materials to be used, the activities to be completed, and any assessments. (LP1-LP12)

***Curriculum Alignment.*** Documents relating to the alignment of curriculum frameworks to the school calendar were posted on the website for the school district and were available at the studied school site. The curriculum guide consists of literacy,

writing, and mathematics skills. The literacy section for the Adult Basic Education (ABE) Level of the curriculum guide focuses on foundation, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency skills. The literacy section for the Intermediate Level and the Pre-GED Level of the curriculum guide focuses on vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency skills. The literacy section for the GED Level of the curriculum guide focuses on comprehension and literacy arts skills.

The writing section for the ABE Level of the curriculum guide focuses on foundation mechanics, organization, and usage skills. The writing section for the Intermediate, Pre-GED, and GED Levels of the curriculum guide focuses on sentence structure, organization, usage, and mechanics skills. The mathematics section for the ABE Level of the curriculum guide focuses on pre-computational, whole numbers, money and measurement, applied math, geometry, estimates, table, charts, and graphs, and fractions. The mathematics section for the Intermediate Level and Pre-GED Level of the curriculum guide focuses on fractions, decimals and percents, applied math, money and measurement, geometry, ratios and proportions, tables, charts, graphs, mean, median, mode, and estimation. The mathematics section for the GED Level of the curriculum guide focuses on applied math, geometry, ratios and proportions, table, charts, and graphs (CurrReading, CurrWriting, CurrMath).

### **Research Question Three**

The third research question is, “How do adult learners perceive GED instruction?” The following interview questions and main themes were used to answer research question three.

Table 8

Interview Questions and Major Themes for Research Question Three

Interview Questions	Main Themes
Tell me about your experience as a GED student in the GED program.	Adults are self-directed and intrinsically motivated learners;
What motivates you to complete your GED?	Adults bridge life experiences with old knowledge with new learning;
How are you able to use your life experiences during GED instruction?	Adults are goals-driven learners;
How relevant and practical is the GED instruction to your future plans?	Adults expect experiences to be relevant to them;
How does your instructor demonstrate respect for you as an adult learner?	Adults are practical learners; and Adults want respect (Knowles, 1984).

**Motivation.** During the interviews with the adult learners, the adult learners indicated what their experience was like going through the GED program. Adult learner one made the following statement about his experience in the GED program:

“My experience as a GED student in the GED program has been a good experience for me. I am able to work on getting my GED that will help me to further my education once I am released from prison. Writing essays have been a challenging experience for me as well. When I was first enrolled in the GED program, I had a problem with my writing skills. Now I am able to write effective essays. Overall, my experience as a GED student in the GED program is good”  
(AD1/17).

Adult learner two stated,

“My experience as a GED student in the GED program is good and at first was somewhat a challenge for me. When I started in the GED program, I was not good at writing essays. I had trouble trying to come up with five good paragraphs that are required to have a good essay. My teacher has helped me a lot to overcome my fears about writing essays. After much practice, I am now writing good essays” (AD2/19).

Adult learner three stated,

“My experience in the GED program has been an enlightening experience for me. I am really learning a lot about different types of math problems and getting expose to different writing styles in the GED program. This experience will allow me to help my two kids when they start school. While I am in the GED program, I now know how important it is to get a good education” (AD3/20).

Adult learner four stated,

“For me, my experience as a GED student is been a good experience. I am able to work on improving my writing and math skills. When I started the GED program a year ago, I had major problems with trying to write an essay and do the more difficult math problems like Algebra, Ratios, and Percents. As I continue my education in the GED program, I am able to write essays better and do Algebra, Ratios, and Percent problems. The best part is that I have time to put my all into what I have to work on in the GED program” (AD4/21).

**Motivators.** The adult learners also reported how their mothers, fathers, and teachers are great motivators to them. The adult learners expressed if it was not for their mothers, fathers, and teachers they would not try to get their GED.



Adult learner one stated,

“First of all, I never finished high school. I dropped out of school in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I really wanted to go back and get my high school diploma. Now I am incarcerated and I am working on trying to get my GED. Without a high school diploma or a GED it is hard to get a good job. My mother and father are motivating me to get my GED. I have to make my mother and father proud of me. My teacher is motivating me to work hard to get my GED. My teacher stresses to me that it very important that I get my GED. By getting my GED, I have a chance to get a better job and further my education. If I get my GED while I am incarcerated, I can get out 90 days early. Now that really motivates me to complete my GED since I have 6 months left in prison. I plan to take my GED test in February” (AD1/17).

Adult learner two stated,

“My mother is a good motivator who encourages me to get my GED. My mother was a school teacher. I did not finish high school. I dropped out in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Now I am in prison and now I have a chance to get my GED. I am very motivated to come to school and work on getting my GED. Getting my GED will motivate me to further my education and get a good paying job that will help me to stay out of prison. My teacher is also motivating me to get my GED. If I get my GED, I can get 90 days of good time that will allow me to go home 3 months early. I got 11 months left. If I can get my GED in February or March, I can get out 90 day earlier” (AD2/19).

Adult learner three stated,

“Getting 90 days of good time off of my prison sentence if I can get my GED motivates me to get my GED. Anyone who gets a GED will get out 90 days early. I have 7 months left in prison. I am going to take my GED test in February. My teacher is really motivating me to get my GED. He believes that I can get my GED. That makes me want to get my GED” (AD3/20).

Adult learner four stated,

“My mother and my teacher are motivating me to get my GED. They tell me that getting a GED will open up doors for me. Getting my GED will give me the opportunity to further my education and go to college as well as help me get a good job. The 90 days of good time is going to motivate me to get my GED. If I can pass the GED test, I will get out of prison 3 months early. That’s enough to motivate anyone to get a GED that does not have a lot of time to do in prison. I have 10 months left to do in prison” (AD4/21).

**Life Experiences.** Some of the adult learners bring prior experiences into the GED program such as brick layering, carpentry, and roofing experience that is very helpful in regards to helping them do geometry word problems. Some of the adult learners reported how they used their previous life experiences in their essay writing. Also, some of the adult learners indicated that they want to use what they know and want to be acknowledged for having that knowledge.

Adult learner one stated,

“Writing essays in class have allowed me to use my life experiences in my writing during GED instruction. When I am given an essay topic to write on, I can use my life experiences as well as my knowledge about the topic and things that I

have observed that can relate to the essay topic. I have work experience in roofing and carpentry that has really helped me with working with different geometric figures when I am doing geometry during GED instruction” (AD1/17).

Adult learner two stated,

“Most of the essays that I have had to write in the GED program during GED instruction have had to do with everyday life experiences. I have used my own life experiences when writing an essay that relates to something that I have experienced throughout my journey in life. The essays that I have to write in class allow me to talk about my personal experiences and my knowledge of the essay topic” (AD2/19).

Adult learner three stated,

“I am able to use my knowledge and work experience in brick layering, roofing, and cooking when it comes to dealing with different measurements in mathematics during GED instruction. When I have to write essays, I can talk about my life experiences in my essay writing during GED instruction” (AD3/20).

Adult learner four stated,

“Most of the essays that I have had to write about have had to do with everyday life experiences. Most of the essay topics relate to everyday life experiences that any student can use in their essay writing assignment. Just plain knowledge that I have learned throughout life has been a good factor in what is needed to complete the GED class” (AD4/21).

**Relevant and Practical.** The adult learners reported that they always come into the classroom ready to learn something. One adult learner stated, “The GED instruction is very pertinent and practicable to my future plans. If I get my GED, I can be able to

take college courses or at least get a better job and help others to obtain their GED” (AD3/20).

Adult learner one stated,

“The GED instruction is very important and helpful to my future plans. I have plans to get my GED and go to college and get a degree in Computer Information Systems. When I started in the GED program, I did not know anything about a computer. During the GED instruction, all students are allowed 40 minutes a day to work on GED material in the computer lab. Students learn how to better their typing skills. Computers are very popular. In this society, it is very important to know how to use a computer. So learning the fundamentals about a computer will help me in the future when I start working on my degree in Computer Information Systems” (AD1/17).

Adult learner two stated,

“The GED instruction is very important and useful to my future plans. If I can get my GED, I plan to go to college and get a degree in auto mechanics. Hopefully then, I can finish my degree in auto mechanics and find a job in auto mechanics so I will not end up back in prison” (AD2/19).

Adult learner four stated,

“The GED instruction is very important and beneficial to my future plans. It will keep me more focus and attentive on bettering my life in all situations and to know that it is never too late to get a good education. It will hopefully help me get my GED and go to college or a university so I can work on getting a degree in accounting” (AD4/21).

**Respect.** The adult learners reported how their teachers respect them as adult learners and are there to help them to get the best education possible. One adult learner stated, “He totally gives me respect as an adult learner. He is not hot headed as other instructors. If I have a question, he doesn’t hesitate to answer me. I am given respect as an adult” (AD3/20).

Adult learner one stated,

“My instructor is very respectful. She is willing to help me and will do whatever it takes to make sure that I get a good education. My instructor has given me respect as a student and as an adult. I am very thankful for the way my instructor treats me in the GED program” (AD1/18).

Adult learner two stated,

“My teacher is very respectful and willing to help me as an adult learner. He is really better than any teacher I ever had in the public school system. His teaching styles would make anyone who wants to learn be able to learn” (AD2/19).

Adult learner four stated,

“My instructor treats me like an adult and not like I am a child. She demonstrates respect to me as an adult learner by showing and telling me that she’s here to help me to get the best education possible. I am so thankful to have her as my instructor in the GED program” (AD4/22).

**Observations.** During the classroom observations, I observed how the adult learners were very respectful to the teacher as well as to their classmates. During the instructional time, the adult learners were focused and attentive. Some of the adult learners participated and asked questions during instructional time. Some of the adult learners came to the chalkboard to work different types of math problems before doing

their individual assignment. During one observation, I observed that some of the adult learners seemed task-centered and some of the adult learners did not seem task-centered in their orientation to learning during the instructional time. The majority of the adult learners were motivated to learn while some were not very motivated to learn the material that was presented to them. The teacher used positive reinforcement with the non-motivated adult learners as well as grouped them with the motivated adult learners. This technique did have a positive outcome because the motivated adult learners encouraged the non-motivated adult learners to get involved in the lesson. Throughout the observations, none of the adult learners were observed as behaving emotionally like children.

### **Summary of Data**

In Chapter four, I presented common themes which developed through analysis of the data that had been collected. Data included transcripts of interviews with the principal, adult educators, adult learners, observations in the classrooms, and through analysis of various documents related to the GED program.

Information was coded to identify major themes. The following major themes which developed from interviews with the adult educators were: need to know, life experiences, goal and relevancy oriented, practical, and respected. The following major themes which developed from the observations of the adult educators and the adult learners were: need to know, life experiences, goal and relevancy oriented, practical, and respected. The following major themes which developed from interviews with the adult learners were: need to know, life experiences, goal and relevancy oriented, practical, and respected. Following analysis of the interviews, observations in the classrooms, and

collection of documents related to the GED program in the studied site were completed. As observations were being conducted, data were entered into observational matrices which had been developed based upon themes which had emerged during the interviews. Content analysis of the documents collected was done to determine support for the themes being explored.

Information collected was organized around the research questions. After the research questions were explored separately, the results were compared looking for triangulation of the data to identify how adult educators used andragogy in their instruction with adult learners in a correctional educational GED program from the studied site in an effort to answer the research questions. The major themes were used to answer the research questions.

In Chapter Five, the findings and the relationship to the literature in the field is reported. Additionally, conclusions from the research are addressed. Finally, recommendations are reported from my perspective.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion**

The purpose of this case study was to investigate how adult educators apply the adult learning theory with adult learners in a correctional educational GED program. This study explored how andragogy was practiced by adult educators in a correctional institution and if students perceived that andragogy influenced their success in their academic program. Research suggests that inmates who participate in an education program are less likely to return to prison once released (Cuizon, 2009; Steurer & Smith, 2003). My study looked at the impact on the instruction using the six principles of andragogy, by Malcolm Knowles (1984), with adult learners in a GED program at a correctional educational school. The study found that the six principles played a large role in the learning process of adult learners.

#### **Summary of Findings**

Prison education programs come with a unique set of obstacles that make it important for adult educators to carefully strategize when instructing. The following are obstacles that make it important for adult educators to carefully strategize when instructing: uncomfortable environment, insecurities, different learning styles and learning disabilities. Lieb (1991) reported that adult educators need to create a learning environment that is safe for adult learners. Lieb discussed that adult educators need to remember that adult learning occurs on a continuous basis throughout life. Also, adult educators need to keep in mind that adult learners learn at different speeds, so it is natural for adult learners to be nervous and anxious in learning situation. Some of the adult educators stated they put forth every effort to help students move from dependent



learners to self directing learners. My study did confirm that it is equally important to consider the maturity level as well as the physical attributes when educating adult learners. According to McCormick (1931), andragogy is not always suitable for some adult learners due to varying levels of maturity. McCormick noted that some adults who are incarcerated behave emotionally like children which this is not uncommon. Knowles (1984) discussed that adult educators will use both pedagogy and andragogy with adult learners depending on the maturity level of the adult learner. Conner (2004) believes that andragogy is an alternative to pedagogy and insists that the learner-focused teaching method is suitable of all learners. Regardless of their age or appearance, many inmates are not mentally prepared to handle certain types of instruction and must receive a variety of methods to help them open up and want to learn. The six principles of andragogy allowed adult educators to teach to varying aspects of the adult learner in the correctional educational school. The adult educators used strategies that they thought would facilitate the best possible learning outcomes for their students.

### **Review of Results by Research Questions**

**Research Question One.** Which principles of andragogy do adult educators apply in their instruction with adult learners?

The results of interviews with adult educators indicated a direct link to the six principles of Knowles' model (1984). The following were the major themes that I used to analyze my data: (1) Adults are internally motivated and self-directed; (2) Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences; (3) Adults are goal oriented; (4) Adults are relevancy oriented; (5) Adults are practical; and (6) Adult learners like to be respected (Knowles, 1984).

The first principle of Knowles' model of andragogy that my research investigated using interviews and observations was that learners need to know. Adult educators reported how important it is to let adult learners know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it. Some of the adult educators reported that adult learners are given the opportunity to learn as much as they can while they are in the GED program. They reported how they find out the educational needs of each student by various testing methods, and then teach the skills they need to succeed throughout the GED program.

The adult educators reported that they use many different types of cooperative learning structures such as whole group, small groups, one-on-one instruction, peer tutoring, and feedback to help their adult learners. While adult educators certainly have knowledge to share and discuss with students, learning is more effective when students have an opportunity to participate fully in lessons by discussing ideas and information with peers. The adult educators reported that some adult learners are not always willing to participate during instructional time, but they try to encourage and motivate those adult learners to try and do their best. They also reported how they grouped the adult learners who did not want to participate with the adult learners who did want to participate by using small group instruction in their classroom.

The adult educators said that this method of instruction helped the students learn better and understand the importance of what they were learning. My study did confirm that adult educators let adult learners know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it. My study did confirm that adult educators use many different types of cooperative learning structures as whole group, small groups, one-on-one

instruction, peer tutoring, and feedback with their students. Also, my study did confirm that adult educators grouped adult learners who did not want to participate with adult learners who did want to participate by using small group instruction in their classroom. Knowles (1984) discussed that adult learners need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it. Lieb (1991) discussed that being an effective adult educator involves understanding how adult learners learn best. Adult educators must understand the learning styles of adult learners and instruct them in those ways.

The second principle that emerged from interviews and observations was that learning had to incorporate life experiences. Some of the adult educators reported how adult learners bring their experiences to the learning process. Adult educators reported how they use life examples to motivate adult learners and increase interest during their instructional time. My study did confirm that adult learners bring a foundation of life experiences and knowledge into the classroom. Also, my study did confirm that adult educators use life examples to motivate adult learners and increase interest during their instructional time. According to Rochester Institute of Technology Online Learning (2010), adult learners have years of experience and a wealth of knowledge that they bring into the classroom. Knowles (1990) suggested that the most effective method would be for adult educators to address specific topics and expand on how specific topics can be applied in other situations.

The third principle was that learning had to be goal-oriented. The adult educators reported they include skills during their instructional time that is needed to pass the GED test. The adult educators reported how important it is for adult learners to achieve a good education while going through the GED program. Most of the adult educators reported

that they motivate adult learners to keep growing and developing in the learning process and strive to improve academically. Some of the adult educators reported that their positive attitude toward their students is important when it comes to the students improving academically. The adult learners were more likely to remain in the program and complete it with this motivation. The adult educators also reported that when a student gets a GED he can receive 90 days of good time and go home 3 months early. My study did confirm that adult educators included skills during their instructional time that was needed to pass the GED test. Knowles (1984) discussed that adult educators have to motivate adult learners to continue to strive to improve academically while going through the learning process. Lieb (1991) reported that establishing rapport with adult learners and preparing them for learning is considered part of motivation in an adult education setting.

The fourth principle was that learning had to be relevant. Adult educators reported that making their lesson interesting and relevant is always a key to learning. Some of the adult educators reported that they get their students involved by keeping the lessons focused and student-centered. My study did confirm that adult educators keep their lessons focused and student-centered during their instructional time. According to Rochester Institute of Technology Online (2010), adult educators focus on theories and concepts within the context of their applications to relevant problems.

The fifth principle was that learning had to be practical. Adult educators reported that they tell their students explicitly how the lessons that they teach will be useful to them in and out of the classroom. Adult educators reported that they explained to their students why it is important for them to get a GED. Adult educators also reported that

they told their students that it is very important and beneficial for them to work toward getting a GED. My study did confirm that adult educators tell their students explicitly how the lessons that they teach will be useful to them in and out of the classroom. Since learning develops as a result of senses stimulation, the effective instructor should use instructional strategies that allow the content to stimulate multiple senses to ensure the chances of greater learning (Lieb, 1991).

The final principle was that the learner must feel respect. Adult educators reported that respect was needed for the development of relationships among the adult educators and adult learners. Adult educators expected the adult learners to respect them, their classmates as well as themselves. Adult educators also reported that they expected their students to obey and comply with the rules in their classroom and complete all assignments that are given to them to complete. My study did confirm that adult educators respected the students and treated them as an adult. Lieb (1991) reported that establishing rapport with adult learners and preparing them for learning is considered part of motivation.

**Research Question Two.** How do these principles influence their instruction?

Classroom observations and the analysis of documents collected were used to investigate classroom practices. I identified varied classroom instructional arrangements, teacher roles and interactions, teaching modeling, and use of student written work assignments which were presented in the classrooms observed. The most commonly observed instructional model was whole group instruction. Separation of the class into small groups was most frequently done to get the more motivated adult learners to motivate the not want to learn adult learners to participate more in class as well as letting

adult learners help other adult learners that were struggling in class. During classroom instruction, adult educators were observed using modeling and providing visual cues or examples to enhance instruction. It was also observed that more formal forms of written work, such as worksheets and study guides, were used in the classrooms, rather than less formal forms such as student created note taking.

Through content analysis, I investigated information pertaining to the curriculum guide and lesson plans. Documents were reviewed to identify elements which would support or conflict with observations which had been made. Through a review of lesson plans, it was discovered that teacher roles during lessons and the differentiation of instruction and student work were included in the written lesson plans. My study did confirm that adult educators were observed using whole group and small group instruction. Also, my study did confirm that adult educators were observed using modeling and providing visual cues or examples to enhance instruction. Marshall and Rossman (2006) stated that observations are comprised of meticulous note-taking of participant actions, behaviors, and events in the social setting chosen as the focus for the study. The notes that are taken during observations are referred to as field notes. They should be a direct depiction of what was observed and should be both detailed and nonbiased. I took field notes throughout the observational process of the study. My study did confirm that the field notes were a direct depiction of what was observed. The field notes were both detailed and nonbiased. Also, the field notes were securely stored on my computer and were also treated confidentially.

**Research Question Three.** How do adult learners perceive GED instruction?

The results of interviews with adult learners also followed the six major themes of Knowles (1984). The first principle was that learners need to know. The adult learners reported that they knew working on their GED as well as getting a GED would help them be successful after prison. Some even stated that getting their GED would help them help others such as their children when they were released. My study did confirm that adult learners were told why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it. Knowles (1984) discussed adult learners need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.

The second principle was life experiences. Some of the adult learners bring prior experiences into the GED program such as brick layering, carpentry, and roofing experience that is very helpful in regards to helping them do geometry word problems. Some of the adult learners reported how they used their previous life experiences in their essay writing as well. My study did confirm that adult learners bring prior experience into the GED program such as brick layering, carpentry and roofing experience that is very helpful in regards to helping them do geometry work problems. Also, my study did confirm that adult learners used their previous life experiences in their essay writing. According to Rochester Institute of Technology Online Learning (2010), adult learners have years of experience and a wealth of knowledge that they bring into the classroom.

The third principle was that learning should be goal-oriented. The adult learners reported how their mothers, fathers, and teachers were great motivators helping them to complete the GED process. The adult learners expressed if it was not for their mothers, fathers, and teachers they would not try to get their GED. The adult learners also reported that getting 90 days of good time off of their prison sentence really motivated

them to get their GED. My study did confirm that some of the adult learners were motivated and goal-oriented to get their GED before being released from prison. Cuizon (2009) reported that the welfare of the adult learner is promoted through the help of education programs around the world.

The fourth and fifth principles were that learning should be relevant and practical. The adult learners reported how the GED instruction was pertinent, important, practicable, helpful, useful and beneficial to their future plans. The adult learners reported that if they could get their GED, they could have plans to go to college and get a degree in a field where they could make a decent salary to support their families. My study did confirm that some of the adult learners understand how important and beneficial it is to get their GED before being released from prison. Vacca (2004) discussed that most prisoners who are in a vocational or GED program are less likely to return back to prison or jail. Cuizon (2009) reported that prison education helps reduce the recidivism rate among inmates because they attend classes or go through training programs while incarcerated.

The final principle was that the learner must feel respect. The adult learners reported how their teachers respected them as an adult and not as a child. The adult learners also reported how their teachers were there to help them get the best education possible while going through the GED program. My study did confirm that adult learners were respected and got all the help and support from their teachers while going through the GED program. Knowles (1984) reported that adult learners expect to be treated as adults.



The adult learners were observed as being very respectful to the teacher as well as to their classmates. The adult learners were focused and attentive during instructional time. Some of the adult learners participated and asked questions during instructional time. Some of the adult learners came to the chalkboard to work different types of math problems before doing their individual assignment. Some of the adult learners seemed task-centered and some of the adult learners did not seem task-centered in their orientation to learning during instructional time.

The majority of the adult learners were motivated to learn while some were not very motivated to learn the material that was presented to them. The adult educators used positive reinforcement with the adult learners who were not motivated as well as grouped them with the motivated adult learners. This technique did have a positive outcome because the motivated adult learners encouraged the adult learners who were not motivated to get involved in the lesson. My study did confirm that adult learners were observed as being very respectful to their teachers and classmates. Also, my study did confirm that some of the adult learners came to the chalkboard to work different types of math problems before doing their individual assignment. Marshall and Rossman (2006) stated that observations are comprised of meticulous note-taking of participant actions, behaviors, and events in the social setting chosen as the focus for the study. The notes that are taken during observations are referred to as field notes. They should be a direct depiction of what was observed and should be both detailed and nonbiased. I took field notes throughout the observational process of the study. My study did confirm that the field notes were a direct depiction of what was observed. The field notes were both

detailed and nonbiased. Also, the field notes were securely stored on my computer and were also treated confidentially.

### **Implications for the Field**

The most significant factors derived from my study are that there are various and complex natures with correctional institution adult learners and there is a necessity on the part of the correctional adult educator to adopt various and unique teaching techniques to accomplish the educational goals that have been set and agreed upon. Mandatory education and motivation to learn are some of the various and complex natures that adult learners have to deal with while going through the GED program. Adult learners, who are incarcerated, are required to attend GED classes if they are not verified as having a high school diploma or the equivalent. Some incarcerated adult learners are not very motivated while attending GED classes because they are required to attend school. They often have negative attitudes about school and little faith in their ability to succeed in school. However, some adult learners are very motivated to learn and want to earn a GED. Adult educators used various and unique teaching techniques such as: whole group, small groups, one-on-one instruction, peer tutoring and feedback with their adult learners to help them improve and succeed academically. Adult learners in correctional school systems come not only from various family backgrounds, they also come from all parts of the state, are committed with various charges and are sentenced to time spans that range from as little as three months to as long as life. While the andragogy method is indeed applicable and effective in this setting, my study reveals that using andragogy coupled with these unique techniques and methods implemented by current correctional educators can render improved results in adult learner studies.

This study reveals a need for a different mindset, different techniques and different approaches on the part of correctional institution principals and adult educators when dealing with incarcerated adult learners. Principals and adult educators need to have a different mindset when dealing with incarcerated adult learners. A positive attitude is a mindset that principals and adult educators have to focus on having when dealing with the different personalities of adult learners. Principals, adult educators and policy makers in correctional institutions must find and in some cases have found and instituted methods of teaching and motivating that take into account this unique setting and set of circumstances. My study reveals a need for those educators who are successful and are able to recognize the need for unique, non-standard methods should share their methods and these teaching methods should be implemented as part of the correctional institution curriculum.

### **Lessons Learned**

As a former teacher and current administrator in a correctional educational school, I found it challenging to remove my personal feelings and biases about correctional educational settings. I found myself wanting to write more on the need for increased funding to help adult educators get more resources, such as professional development, to help them help their students. Another challenge I encountered was wanting to predict and write about the outcomes of the study before it was completed. I firmly believe that adult learners deserve to be treated with dignity. Also, I felt that andragogy was appropriate as an instructional strategy before all participants completed the interview process. Fortunately, the participants were able to provide insight through their perceptions.

I was grateful to the participants for their involvement in my study. I was surprised, however, by the willingness of the inmates, or adult learners, to be candid about their beliefs and feelings. Once they got to their level of comfort, the adult learners really expressed their thoughts. They appeared extremely open when responding to the interview questions.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The scope of this research project was to investigate the GED program at the studied school site and to identify themes or elements which were present at the site. Future research should explore more deeply the nature of the relationship between the principal, adult educators, and adult learners. Interaction between adult educators and adult educators, adult educator and adult learner, and adult learner to adult learner should be investigated to determine what influence those interactions have upon the GED program setting.

During one classroom visit, it was observed that adult learners were given worksheets and study guides which are tools of pedagogy. Based on the research of andragogy, adult educators should use participatory techniques such as case studies and problem-solving groups as well as focus on essay writing that are considered tools of andragogy. Worksheets and study guides that were given to the adult learners should be further investigated because adult learners need to focus on written work that is focused on andragogy and not on pedagogy. However, the worksheets and study guides were used during the adult educators' instructional time to help prepare the adult learners for the upcoming Pre-GED and GED test.

A recidivism study should be conducted to explore the impact of the mandatory education policy that is mandated in the state of Arkansas. Recidivism studies previously examined show that adult learners that get a GED or graduated with a technical or college degree are less likely to return back to prison compared to adult learners that do not get their GED or graduated with a technical or college degree. This data may provide the Arkansas Correctional School District and Arkansas Correctional School administrators with useful information on the effectiveness of mandatory education.

The perceptions of the adult learners of correctional education in Arkansas should be examined. Inmates who attend school in prison did not have positive experiences in public schools and did not graduate. Insights may be gained on the factors that encourage and discourage inmates in regard to education in prison. Education is generally perceived as being essential for success in the free world. In prison, the rewards for educational accomplishment and attitudes about education may not be the same. Information on the motivators inside prisons may provide correctional education administrators with information helpful in structuring education programs in correctional settings.

Further research should be conducted on the effects of educational achievement on inmate self-esteem. Some adult learners who attend school often have negative attitudes about school and little faith in their ability to succeed in school. Research is needed to determine the value education has as a tool to build the self-esteem of adult learners.

Many inmates come to prison with little regard for getting a formal education. Receiving a GED, for some adult learners is the first successful educational experience in their lives. A study should be conducted to determine the effects of prison education on

the families of inmates who are released from prison. Research may determine if there is any improvement in attitudes about education and performance in school on the part of the children of inmates who received the GED in prison.

Many inmates come to the Arkansas Department of Corrections without a high school diploma or the equivalent. There are approximately 2200 students served by the Arkansas Correctional School District each year (Arkansas Correctional School District, 2010). A study should be conducted to determine the long-term impact of earning a GED in prison in Arkansas. Releasees should also be interviewed to determine if the GED had helped them get a better job after release or if they had kept a job longer than before their incarceration as well if they furthered their education beyond a GED.

## **Conclusion**

This case study brought to the forefront the need to educate adult learners using a method that helped them understand why they needed to learn, allowed them to bring their experiences to the learning process, allowed them to set personal goals to motivate them to finish, let them see the relevance of their learning, showed them how to apply what they learned, and made them feel respected as an adult. Andragogy was the ideal method to help adult educators impart knowledge to adult learners who may or may not have wanted to learn. Worksheets and study guides which are tools of pedagogy were not the ideal method to help adult educators impart knowledge to adult learners throughout this study. The findings from this study will help policy makers and school leaders make decisions pertaining to adult education instruction that will help inmates further their education while incarcerated and make society a safer place as those inmates

have a better chance of being productive citizens and lessening their chance of recidivism when released.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Conversational Interview Questions with the Principal**

1. What is your personal philosophy about adult education?
2. How has your philosophy of adult education shaped the GED program here?
3. Tell me about your educational background.
4. What professional qualifications do you require of adult educators? Why are these important?
5. What personal characteristics do you look for when hiring an adult educator? Why are these important?
6. What strategies do the adult educators use to engage the adult learner?
7. Many adults undertake learning because of a need-to-know. How do your adult educators engage students who are required to participate and may not want-to-know?
8. Describe the characteristics of the best adult educator that has ever taught in the program. Would students pick the same individual?

## **Appendix B**

### **Standardized Open-Ended Questions with the Adult Educator**

1. What is your personal philosophy about adult education?
2. How has your philosophy of adult education shaped your work in the GED program here?
3. Tell me about your educational background.
4. Describe your expectations of adult learners in your classroom.
5. Describe the methods or strategies you have found to be the most successful and engaging to adult learners.
6. Many adults undertake learning because of a need-to-know. How do you engage adult learners who are required to participate and may not want-to-know?
7. Describe how you plan your lessons for adult learners.
8. Describe the types of collaboration you have practiced with other adult educators in your school to improve the academic achievement of adult learners.
9. Describe what you believe makes the most positive influence in improving the academic achievement of adult learners.

## **Appendix C**

### **Conversational Interview Questions with the Adult Learner**

1. Tell me about your experience as a GED student in the GED program.
2. What motivates you to complete your GED?
3. How are you able to use your life experiences during GED instruction?
4. How relevant and practical is the GED instruction to your future plans?
5. How does your instructor demonstrate respect for you as an adult learner?

## Appendix D

Table 9

Participant Demographics and Adult Education Philosophy

Participant	Demographics	Philosophy
PR/1	Bachelor's in Secondary Mathematics--UAPB Master's in Educational Leadership--ASU Specialist in Educational Leadership--ASU Certified in secondary mathematics 7-12, physical science, and building/district level administration. 42 years of teaching experience, taught algebra, geometry, chemistry, and physics 9-12 in the public school system for 27 years, 15 years as principal in the correctional educational system	All adult can learn with the help of dedicated adult educators that believe the adult learner comes first. I believe that adults should have the opportunity to learn as much as they can while going through an adult education program.
ED1/4	Bachelor's in History and Sociology--SMSU Missouri Master's in Adult Education--UALR Certified in elementary education, social studies 7-12, and adult education. 21 years of teaching experience, taught 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade for 5 years in the public school system, 16 years of teaching experience in the correctional educational system--Adult Basic Level for 12 years, and I am currently teaching at the Pre-GED Level for the past 4 years.	All adults can learn, no matter what their previous educational experience might have been. Adult learners bring their experiences to the learning process.
ED2/7	Bachelor's in Elementary Education K-8--ASU Certified in elementary education, middle school social studies, and adult education. 21 years of teaching experience, 10 years in the public school system teaching 5 <sup>th</sup> grade, 11 years in the correctional educational system teaching at the Pre-GED Level.	Adult learners want to be respected. When an adult learner gets a GED he or she has the opportunity to further their education as well acquire and retain employment.
ED3/10	Bachelor's in Elementary Education--UAPB. Certified in elementary K-8 (Self-Contained), elementary physical education K-8, and adult education. 33 years of teaching experience in correctional education Intermediate Level. I have never taught in the public school system.	All adults can learn and anyone who wishes to receive a GED should do so and be respected. Adult learners need to know why they will learn something before it is learned.
ED4/13	Bachelor's Agriculture Education—ASU Master's in Adult Education—ASU Certified in agriculture, general science, and adult education. 17 years of teaching experience, 5 years of teaching experience in the public school system teaching agriculture and general science, 12 years of teaching experience in the correctional educational system teaching at the Adult Basic Education Level for 4 years, the Pre-GED Level for 4 years, and I am currently teaching at the GED Level for the past 4 years.	Adults can be more productive to society as their education increases. Adult education is worthwhile as a means of improving the living standards of those that pursue it. All adult educators need to let adult learners know why they need to know something before they undertake learning it.

## Appendix E

Table 10

Adult Learner Participant Demographics

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Participants	Demographics
AD1	I did not get along with other students and teachers when I was in the public school system. I did not like school at all. I had trouble with reading and math. I dropped out of school in the 10 <sup>th</sup> grade.
AD2	I got along with all my teachers, but I did not get along with students when I was in the public school system. I was always bored in school. I had poor grades throughout my high school years. I dropped out of school in the 11 <sup>th</sup> grade.
AD3	I was very unhappy in school. I constantly got suspended during my 10 <sup>th</sup> grade year. School was very boring as well. I had trouble with math and writing. I also had poor grades and test scores. I dropped out of school in the 10 <sup>th</sup> grade.
AD4	I was not happy in school. I got suspended as well as I got expelled my 9 <sup>th</sup> grade year. I was always bored in school. I had poor grades and poor test scores. I dropped out of school in the 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.

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**Appendix F**  
Observation Matrix

Observation Matrix				
Context	Educator Behavior	Student Behavior	Adult Learning Principles	Reflective Notes

## **Appendix G**

### **Adult Educator Informed Consent**

*Title:* Understanding how Adult Educators apply Andragogy in a Correctional Educational Setting: A Case Study

*Researcher:* Carl Stephen, Graduate Student  
University of Arkansas  
300 North 9<sup>th</sup> Street  
West Memphis, AR 72301  
(901) 355-2256

*Faculty Advisor:* Dr. Carleton Holt  
Associate Professor of Education Leadership  
University of Arkansas  
233 Graduate Education Building  
Fayetteville, AR 72701  
(479) 575-5112

*Description:* The purpose of this study is to investigate how adult educators apply the six principles of andragogy, by Malcolm Knowles, with adult learners in a correctional educational GED program. As a participant, you will be asked to answer questions in a private tape recorded interview session.

*Risks and Benefits:* The benefits of this research include contributing to the knowledge base of an effective correctional educational GED program for adult learners. There are no anticipated risks to participating in the study.

*Voluntary Participation:* Your participation in the research is completely voluntary. There are no payments for participating.

*Confidentiality:* You will be assigned a code number that will be used to match the interview question responses you give. All information will be recorded anonymously. Only the researcher will know your name, but will not divulge it or identify your answers to anyone. All information will be held in the strictest of confidence.

*Right to Withdraw:* You are free to refuse to participate in the research and to withdraw from this study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will bring no negative consequences – no penalty to you.

*Questions or Concerns:* If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Carl Stephen at (901) 355-2256 or by e-mail at [cjstephe@uark.edu](mailto:cjstephe@uark.edu) or Dr.

Carleton Holt at (479) 575-5112 or by email at [cholt@uark.edu](mailto:cholt@uark.edu). For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, University of Arkansas Compliance Coordinator, at (479) 575-2208 or by e-mail at [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

*Informed Consent:* I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks, the confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Each of these items has been explained to me by the investigator. The investigator has answered my questions regarding the study, and I believe I understand what is involved. My signature below indicates that I freely agree to participate in this study and that I have received a copy of this agreement from the investigator.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix H

### Adult Learner Informed Consent

*Title:* Understanding how Adult Educators apply Andragogy in a Correctional Educational Setting: A Case Study

*Researcher:* Carl Stephen, Graduate Student  
University of Arkansas

*Description:* The purpose of this study is to investigate how adult educators apply the six principles of andragogy, by Malcolm Knowles, with adult learners in a correctional educational GED program. As a participant, you will be asked to answer questions in a private tape recorded interview session.

*Risks and Benefits:* The benefits of this research include contributing to the knowledge base of an effective correctional educational GED program for adult learners. There are no anticipated risks to participating in the study.

*Voluntary Participation:* Your participation in the research is completely voluntary. There are no payments for participating.

*Confidentiality:* You will be assigned a code number that will be used to match the interview question responses you give. All information will be recorded anonymously. Only the researcher will know your name, but will not divulge it or identify your answers to anyone. All information will be held in the strictest of confidence.

*Right to Withdraw:* You are free to refuse to participate in the research and to withdraw from this study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will bring no negative consequences – no penalty to you.

*Informed Consent:* I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks, the confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Each of these items has been explained to me by the investigator. The investigator has answered my questions regarding the study, and I believe I understand what is involved. My signature below indicates that I freely agree to participate in this study and that I have received a copy of this agreement from the investigator.

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Signature

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Date