

Theory to Practice

Effective Motivational Strategies in Adult Basic Education Programs

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Abstract

This literature review examines motivational strategies that have the potential to increase retention and completion rates for adults in GED classes. Most of the articles included in this review are case studies and reports on specific GED programs or postsecondary courses. There seems to be a lack of any comparative research on GED programs or statistical data as to the factors that assist basic education. Some examples of the projects discussed in the literature focus on flexibility in scheduling, developing peer relationships through community outreach, addressing barriers that prevent students from completing high school, and individual-based instruction.

Introduction

For various reasons, enrolling in GED classes can be difficult. Many adults who did not complete high school are reluctant to go to school as their experience as a youth was negative. Once an adult enrolls, maintaining attendance and progress can be difficult. The demands of work and family obligations can limit the amount of time available to focus on GED study.

The median annual income in 2008 for those with less than a high school diploma was \$23,500 compared to \$30,000 for those with a high school diploma, including those who have a GED (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Those with an associate's degree had a median income of \$36,000 and those with a bachelor's degree had a median income of \$46,000 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Furthermore,

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the 2008 unemployment rate for those over 25 was 13.3% for those with less than a high school diploma, 9.7% for those with a high school diploma, 9.0% for those with some college or an associate's degree, and 5.0% for those with a bachelor's degree (U.S Department of Education, 2010). Based on these statistics, it is apparent that having a GED or high school diploma increases the potential for gainful employment which leads to self-sufficiency.

The purpose of this literature review is to evaluate the various motivational strategies applied in individual GED programs to identify those that increased participation and completion rates. This will serve as a starting point for developing a format based on the positive outcomes of these programs. There are many GED programs available through colleges, Intermediate Units, and non-profit organizations. However, GED programs in Pennsylvania are facing difficulty with funding issues as there has been a trend to cut funding for GED programs. In order to continue to receive funding, some programs such as Bidwell Training Center in Pittsburgh, PA, only offer GED programs to students who have a goal of continuing on to post-secondary education either at Bidwell Training Center or another institution (J. Moyo, personal communication, October 6, 2010).

Having a clear procedure based on ideas from different programs that have shown evidence of increased retention and completion rates, combining them to form a standard to use in GED programs, and collecting ongoing data can be a basis to justify continued funding. If funding is being used for students who attend for a short period of time and then drop out, this can be looked upon as a waste of taxpayer money. In order to convince politicians to continue funding for GED programs, it is necessary to have a plan using effective techniques that have shown documented increases in completion rates.

Definitions

GED stands for the General Education Diploma, General Equivalency Diploma, or Graduated Equivalency Degree. These terms all refer to the same test that is an alternative to a high school diploma. The GED was established during World War II to allow veterans who did not complete high school to become eligible for post-secondary education and take advantage of the GI Bill (Caputo, 2005). In 1946, the American Council on Education began to argue that the GED was ap-

appropriate for non-veterans as well, but it was not until the 1950s that the option was available to anyone without a high school diploma and became widely recognized, (Caputo, 2005). ABE stands for Adult Basic Education which includes literacy and math skills. Many individuals enrolled in ABE programs may already have a high school diploma, but still need basic literacy and math skills in order to pursue better employment. Some may need to address reading and math skills for an extended period of time before they can begin to prepare for the GED.

“Motivation is defined as an internal state or condition that activates, guides, maintains or directs behavior” (Kleinginna & Kleinginna as cited in) (Kostelecky & Hoskinson, 2005, p. 438). The sources of motivation are defined as intrinsic, from within or internal,; and extrinsic, external to the person (Kostelecky & Hoskinson, 2005). Not everyone is motivated by the same things, but overall a person is more vested in their learning experience when they are internally motivated, so using teaching methods that promote intrinsic motivation makes the process more meaningful (Kostelecky & Hoskinson, 2005). Motivational design focuses on motivation to learn by concentrating on appealing and engaging learning strategies (Keller, 2006). Doing fun activities for entertainment, which are extrinsic motivators, or incorporating behavior modifications, are not tactics for motivational design (Keller, 2006). Instead, “motivational design is concerned primarily with improving the appeal of instruction or a work environment for people who fall within reasonable boundaries of readiness to learn or work” (Keller, 2006, p. 4).

Money as a Motivator

Motivation, in simple terms, is the amount and level of activity that an individual devotes to doing something (Keller as cited in Ziegler, et al., 2004). Motivated people expend effort commensurate with the value that they place on accomplishment. Motivational interventions, therefore, seek performance change by creating “environments that will have predictable and positive influences on people’s motivation to learn, motivation to work, and motivation in general, which are major influences on performance” (Ziegler, et al., 2004, p. 19).

Due to changes in the welfare system in 1996, most often referred to as “Welfare Reform,” those receiving cash assistance benefits were required to participate in employment-related activities or find a job. Limits were placed on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)

formerly Aid to Families with Dependent Children) (AFDC) recipients to only allow families to receive cash assistance for a total of five years in a lifetime. “More than 53% of adults who receive welfare dropped out of high school; these low educational levels make it impossible for many welfare recipients to escape poverty and attain self-sufficiency, the primary goal of welfare reform.” (Fox, Boyer, & Vicks as cited in Ziegler et al., 2004, p. 18).

Ziegler, Ebert, and Cope’s *Using Cash Incentives to Encourage Progress of Welfare Recipients in Adult Basic Education* explores the use of money as an extrinsic (external) motivator to increase welfare recipients’ progress in GED and ABE programs in Tennessee. Tennessee’s legislation allowed for eligible welfare recipients to enroll in adult basic education (ABE) programs to improve skills or earn a General Education Diploma (GED) to enable them to increase their earnings potential and participate in job training opportunities (Ziegler et al., 2004). Previous data found that although almost half of welfare recipients chose to enroll in ABE programs, 25% of them dropped out within 30 days and many others had irregular attendance and left the programs prior to obtaining a GED (Ziegler et al., 2004). Many factors that inhibited participation had previously been identified, but less was known about factors that encouraged participation among welfare recipients who were mostly poor women with dependent children (Ziegler et al., 2004). Families First, Tennessee’s welfare reform administered by the Department of Human Services (DHS), implemented the “Completion Bonus” in March 2000. This provided a cash incentive program to encourage completion of educational and employment outcomes leading to self-sufficiency and career achievement (Ziegler et al., 2004). Self-sufficiency in this case meant participants no longer needed to depend on cash assistance to maintain their households.

The purpose of the “Completion Bonus” study was to determine if using cash incentives encouraged progress and resulted in positive academic outcomes in ABE. Conducted in 2001, the study replicated research done in 1999 with data from 16 ABE programs (Ziegler et al., 2004). The hypothesis was that using a replication of the 1999 study with the same 16 programs would “enable us to compare a preincentive and postincentive group of welfare recipients to assess what influence a cash incentive had on participation and achievement outcomes” (Ziegler, et al., 2004, p. 19). The results of the testing indicated that enrollment was consistent from one period to the next, but more welfare recipients

made progress in the postincentive period. The results were compared to those traditional students, not receiving welfare, in ABE classes. The traditional students' progress also increased during this time, but was not as statistically significant as the welfare recipients' progress (Ziegler et al., 2004). The number of welfare recipients who obtained a GED was higher than traditional students, but this result was also not statistically significant (Ziegler et al., 2004). Findings also showed that there was no reduction in the amount of time welfare recipients took to make progress either by increasing skills or obtaining a GED from the study even though they made more progress than traditional ABE students (Ziegler et al., 2004). Based on the results of focus groups, rural participants indicated that the cash incentive was a motivator, but urban participants were less likely to state this, although they did mention free child care, free lunch at the program, and money for transportation as positive extrinsic motivators (Ziegler et al., 2004). The positive intrinsic motivators noted by the participants included "individualized attention and pace of work; feeling good about oneself, particularly about progress made; learning things of interest; being treated as adults; positive classroom environment; and computerized instruction" (Ziegler et al., 2004, p. 26).

Flexibility and Goals

Much of the literature evaluated individual programs. Despite the different approaches, several common themes were apparent in all of the studies. One approach was individual assistance to establish goals and a method for students to review their progress at various points in their studies. Another was working with students to address barriers to being able to attend classes including making alternative study arrangements for students to avoid stop out.

Quinsigamond Community College initially introduced the "Learner Persistence Project" to their evening GED class. This program was implemented to address low retention and persistence rates as many of the students left the program either before the end of the academic year or before obtaining their GED (Kefallinou, 2009). One aspect was to allow students who were having difficulty attending class due to various life issues to be able to "stop out," or leave the program without reaching completion (Kefallinou, 2009). They allowed the students to complete home study with the following support from the program: a weekly call from a counselor, flexibility in a return date, and work assignments for students to complete on their own which would allow them to continue to make progress and to be current on their studies when they returned to class (Kefallinou, 2009).

Students who were targeted for this option were ones who had missed two consecutive classes. The counselors met with the teachers and students to address barriers, some of which were known to the staff (Kefallinou, 2009). Students stated a desire to see their progress which prompted the project to implement checklists listing benchmarks for students to monitor their progress (Kefallinou, 2009). In addition, all new students were encouraged to engage in discussions at orientation regarding goals, realistic expectations, and barriers (Kefallinou, 2009). The overall results of this project were positive and learning gains increased dramatically; for example, from 13% in 2007 to 44% in 2008 (Kefallinou, 2009). The members of the project were cautious not to be overly optimistic because the results were due, in part, to post-tests that were not previously used, so previous data was not available (Kefallinou, 2009).

Gopalakrishnan (2008) evaluated data from three programs offered in Connecticut for adults in secondary education. There were three options in Connecticut, the first being traditional GED programs, the second the National External Diploma Program (NEDP) which offers a high school diploma to non-traditional age students defined as over 25 years old, and the third was the Adult High School Credit Diploma Program (AHSCDP) which enrolled mostly students under the age of 21. The AHSCDP was administered by a local education agency and involved classroom instruction and credits measured similarly to high school. However, the NEDP was structured such that students met with an instructor once per week for approximately two hours and completed most of their instruction on their own time (Gopalakrishnan, 2008). Both of these programs offered “self-study options, mastery experiences, incremental achievements toward the goal of a high school diploma, and counseling or mentoring supports” (Gopalakrishnan, 2008, p. 142). About 65% of those in GED programs did not return the following year to work on their GED even though less than 20% passed the GED—the opposite of the results from the NEDP and AHSCDP programs in which 67% and 63% returned, respectively (Gopalakrishnan, 2008). Overall, the design of the NEDP incorporated instruction that was found to be more effective in retention of students. The other tactics that demonstrated higher retention rates will be addressed in later sections of this article, but the flexible schedule and the self-study component were consistent with other literature addressing higher retention and persistence rates.

The Role of Peers in GED Programs

The recruitment efforts using peers and community outreach to enroll students in GED programs was described by Goto, Spitzer, and Sadouk (2009). Bellingham Technical College and Skagit Valley College in Whatcom County, Washington implemented an outreach program targeting local communities. The reasoning for this method was that the majority of students reported their educational decisions were influenced by recommendations from others, specifically trusted peers (Goto, et al., 2009). Students were trained to be spokespersons in their community to reach out to those they came into contact with at places such as day care facilities, drug and alcohol treatment centers, churches, and other community groups (Goto et al., 2009). To aid these students, print and video materials were designed to feature students from targeted communities using successful current and former students. A close-up photo of each student selected and a brief biography describing their background and path to success were used at recruitment events (Goto et al., 2009). These aids encouraged some students to identify with those highlighted and, in turn, these students were used on videos giving their testimonials on how seeing others like them achieve their educational goals helped them make the decision to do so as well (Goto et al., 2009).

The data supported these advertising techniques, resulting in recruitment of students who were committed to completing their educational goals, many of whom earned their GED in order to enroll in vocational programs. Data showed that a higher percentage of students enrolled in the Integrated Basic Skills Training (I-BEST) programs and transitioned from basic skills into college-level classes compared to students in other programs (Goto et al., 2009). In addition, retention rates among the I-BEST students were the highest, with the automotive technology program having over an 80% retention rate (Goto et al., 2009).

The Learner's Persistence Project at Quinsigamond Community College implemented a peer mentoring program as part of their project as well. The current students were asked to look after new students in addition to counselors and teachers checking in with new students before class and at break time (Kefallinou, 2009). The results included a stronger and friendlier sense of community by the students (Kefallinou, 2009).

Seigel (2007) explains methods used to facilitate learning in a GED class located in Brooklyn, New York. At the beginning of the class, Siegel would have students share personal experiences and study current

events (Siegel, 2007). Siegel had students work in teams to complete projects after sharing their personal lives in a section titled, “Telling Our Stories” (Siegel, 2007). Although a specific peer mentoring program is not noted, the article demonstrated how sharing with others facilitated group activities and learning.

Relating Academics to “Real Life”

Siegel’s article focused on developing reading and writing skills in students by using personal experiences and current events. The students she worked with were between the ages of 16 and 21 and were mostly from Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic (Siegel, 2007). Siegel shared her experiences and interests with the class to serve as a model for the students, but also to instill a sense of trust (Siegel, 2007). Students then had to do pre-writing exercises and outlines to prepare for their presentations which was to show the students they had “something worthwhile to say before focusing on the mechanics and structure of formal writing” (Siegel, 2007, p.101). Another activity used in this program was titled, “Our Year in Review” which focused on current events and how they relate to students’ lives (Siegel, 2007). Using newspapers, magazines, and websites, referred to as “authentic materials,” helped to promote academic skills such as summarizing data and interpretation which were skills taken from traditional GED and pre-GED workbooks (Siegel, 2007). Self-assessments were used to collect qualitative data and the results included the students’ sense that assignments created a higher level of academic achievement (Siegel, 2007). The class also designed a website incorporating a study of the website MySpace.com, which introduced computer skills, but also allowed students to post their views and hear views from others (Siegel, 2007). One student commented, “This feels like the type of project that can expand people’s minds and open doors” (Siegel, 2007, p. 102).

Kostelecky and Hoskinson (2005) described using novels in non-literature classes to relate material to students. This article focused on a gerontology course at the University of Northern Iowa. Although this explained motivation among post-secondary students, incorporating written materials, (primarily those meant to entertain), could be used in secondary education as well. Intrinsic motivation allows people to decide if and when they will engage in the learning process (Kostelecky & Hoskinson, 2005).

Four of Glassner's six conditions that must be present in order for students to be motivated to perform well were used to spur curiosity and increase cognitive growth and motivation (Kostecky & Hoskinson, 2005). The following four conditions were created: 1) creating a climate where students want to work; 2) learning skills and knowledge that can be used to succeed in careers and life; 3) explaining standards and what was expected; and 4) relating each assignment to practical work and life skills that could be applied to students' own lives (Kostecky & Hoskinson, 2005). Studying adulthood and aging may not seem relevant to undergraduate students on the surface, but using a novel can increase curiosity in students by them simply wanting to know "what happens next," (Kostecky & Hoskinson, 2005).

The next step was to have students link the novel to material in the textbooks which could be related to real life and using critical thinking and empathy to those outside of their own experiences (Kostecky & Hoskinson, 2005). These methods, called "Linkage Assignments," provided an overview of the course and enabled students to relate the topics to their own families; using a novel to get an idea of the issue at hand (in this case, the lives of older adults), and how this issue could be relevant to their own family relationships (Kostecky & Hoskinson, 2005). Feedback from students supported the idea that Linkage Assignments were the greatest strength of the course and that reading the novel kept them interested in course material and helped them relate it to their own lives (Kostecky & Hoskinson, 2005).

Individualized Instruction and Support

Golden, Kist, Trehan, and Padak (2005) described the experiences of students who dropped out of high school, later obtained their GED, and went on to post-secondary education. Although this article only addressed students who dropped out of high school and not those who completed it, it is still important to look at these issues when working in GED courses because the students' experiences in this article represent many who are enrolled in GED classes. What was striking was the number of students who still had strong emotions when explaining their high school experiences (Golden, et al., 2005). Almost every student interviewed expressed negative experiences in high school including organizational barriers, teachers, guidance counselors, curriculum practices, or instructional approaches (Golden et al., 2005). Many students noticed a contrast between high school and college in the sense that there were more

opportunities for support from instructors, the instructors were more accessible, and students' decisions and individuality were more respected (Golden et al., 2005).

Many students also felt a lack of support from high school staff while having family issues at home which resulted in their decision to drop out (Golden et al., 2005). The important issues gleaned from this article were the support and respect individuals felt as adult students in a college setting and how the difference of being treated as individuals encouraged them to continue with their education.

Educational Resilience

In 2000, the Advancing Young Adult Learning (AYAL) project was designed as a pilot program in Kansas City, Missouri as a result of funding from the Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning (MAAL). In addition, there were 10 local funders in Kansas City, Missouri Youth Cultural Competency (YCC), the Project-Based Learning (PBC) program, and the Strengths-Based Case Management (CM) initiative to support teachers, staff and administrators to work with GED students, ages 16-24 (Boulden, 2008). The goal was to address reasons students dropped out of high school which included race and ethnicity, but also other factors such as absenteeism, course failure, and negative peer influence (Boulden 2008). Other conditions included students finding themselves in social disadvantage and educational powerlessness, students' perception that school does not work for them or result in success, students' recognizing the inequity of their educational experience and refusing to continue to accept it, and students' experiencing cultural fracture (Furlong, Munns & McFadden, 1991 as cited in Boulden, 2008). Cultural fracture is the result of schools and teachers failing to acknowledge or address the constraints of students' lives and the emotional and psychological needs of students (Boulden, 2008).

Students who returned to programs to obtain their GED were found to have been positively influenced from a significant adult in their lives (Boulden, 2008). Educational resilience was defined as "the heightened likelihood of educational success despite personal vulnerabilities and adversities brought about by environmental conditions and experiences (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994 as cited in Boulden, 2008, p. 5). Aspects of educational resilience include positive self-concept, willingness to work hard, remaining motivated, and maintaining educational goals (Boulden, 2008). Resilient students are more likely to form informal

supports including family and friends who value their goal of completing their education (Boulden, 2008). The AYAL project incorporated resilience-building strategies according to researchers' suggestions to increase retention and completion rates of students in GED programs (Boulden, 2008). YCC was based on three components including youth involvement, positive peer influence, and youth popular culture (Boulden, 2008). These components have been seen in other literature citing improved success rates in GED courses that are addressed in this article. PBL focuses on learning being acquired through social interactions that result in cognitive challenges above the students' current levels of ability (Boulden, 2008). Case management was implemented with on-site staff to address the real-life issues of the students (Boulden, 2008). All of the sites offering traditional GED courses offered students the choice of continuing with the traditional course work or enrolling in the AYAL program (Boulden, 2008). Most of the students opted for the AYAL program and therefore, there were not enough students in the traditional GED programs to be used as a comparison, so data from previous years had to be used (Boulden, 2008).

Staff felt that all three components of the AYAL were necessary and this resulted in shifts in their philosophy of teaching GED classes (Boulden, 2008). Specifically, staff learned to internally motivate students by providing more meaningful instruction, facilitating learning, developing more patience, and "pushing" students when needed (Boulden, 2008). Staff reported that students learned more through peer and teacher interaction, developing a sense of pride and increased skills (Boulden, 2008).

These aspects again support the concept that when students are intrinsically motivated, they learn more because they are in control of how and when they engage in learning. The statistical data supported the success of AYAL as does the qualitative data reported by staff and students. Enrollments during the first year increased to 20.6 weeks and during the second year to 16.4 weeks (Boulden, 2008). The second measurement, the number of hours the students completed, was not measured prior to the implementation of the program, but was 100.6 during the first year and 92.4 in the second year (Boulden, 2008). Based on data from other GED programs, specifically in the state of Connecticut where the number of hours in GED courses was less than 40 (Gopalakrishnan, 2008), this appears significant. The graduation rate was 10% prior to AYAL and 24% in the first year and 40.5% the second year, respectively (Boulden, 2008).

Reducing Stress

Seay (2005) described strategies used for post-graduate students who were school principals and college administrators. Although these students were in graduate school, these strategies could apply to any academic setting for adults who have ongoing stress in their everyday lives from jobs to family issues. Seay used 15 minute breaks, flexibility in arriving late or leaving early due to other obligations, small group activities, and guest speakers (Seay, 2005). In addition, Seay set aside time for students to share events from their day and allowed others to provide feedback which leads to decreased feelings of self-doubt (Seay, 2005). Certain strategies to reduce stress were used in the GED and ABE programs at the ARIN program in Indiana County, PA including critical thinking activities and discussion of employment goals while incorporating job skills activities. These were often used to assist students in transitioning from their job and being able to focus on learning (E. Duncan, personal communication, December 2010).

The GED vs. High School Diploma from a Socio-Economic Perspective

According to Caputo (2005), financial well-being and overall health statistics show a significant discrepancy between those with a traditional or conventional high school diploma and GED recipients (Caputo, 2005). Statistics on financial well-being show a significant discrepancy between those with a high school diploma (family income of \$41,625), GED recipients (family income of \$34,415), and high school drop outs (family income of \$25,222) (Caputo, 2005). In addition, health issues were also evaluated using The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) which measures symptoms of depression and discerns those who are clinically depressed (Caputo, 2005). High school graduates had lower scores on this assessment than did GED recipients (Caputo, 2005). GED recipients were found to have significantly worse mid-life outcomes than high school graduates and significantly better late-life outcomes than high school dropouts (Caputo, 2005).

Citing various other research studies, Caputo (2005) states, “The findings corroborated previous studies indicating that GED recipients fall between high school dropouts and conventional graduates on many income- and/or employment-related measures” (p. 90). The conclusions challenged the merits of the GED to a conventional high school diploma.

Even though the conclusions also supported a significantly more productive life, it was not to the same extent as those experienced by high school graduates (Caputo, 2005). There are other factors that contribute to mid-life physical and mental health as well as socioeconomic status; nevertheless, there is evidence indicating that including GED recipients in the same statistics as high school graduates may be misguided (Caputo, 2005). The findings imply that there are other ongoing issues involved with people who drop out of high school even when they obtain a GED.

Perspective of a GED Program from Rural Pennsylvania

The disadvantage of GED programs in rural settings is the lack of transportation and the lack of reimbursement for transportation costs for students (E. Duncan, personal communication, December 2010). Ms. Duncan stated many students drive 45 minutes to one hour to come to class and the option of distance learning is difficult as many have no funding for Internet service or computers (E. Duncan, personal communication, December 2010). The advantage of a GED program in an urban area such as Pittsburgh is public transportation, and many of these programs can include fares for bus passes as part of their grants. Distance learning in Indiana County includes mailing text books and other materials to students, but there still needs to be face to face contact. Some areas only have dial up service which would not work for online instruction. The agency, ABLE, has been reasonable with continued funding of \$650-\$1000 per student depending on their needs, but the cost of employee health insurance alone increased by 24% in the past year while the budget for GED and ABE programs has gone from over \$1 million eight years ago to approximately \$300,000 today (E. Duncan, personal communication, December 2010).

In order to save costs, the program has consolidated with Careerlink which has been beneficial in incorporating GED classes with job search. Ms. Duncan uses many of the strategies described in the literature when working with students. Some examples are reviewing and explaining test scores, developing goals with the students, 1:1 instruction making the staff very accessible to students, working on critical thinking skills and discussing career goals in order to assist students in focusing on their studies especially when they have just come from their jobs. Another strategy is a thermometer that is developed for each student with scores

and benchmarks to allow students to track their progress (E. Duncan, personal communication, December 2010). This is similar to the checklists provided to students at the Quinsigamond Community College GED program.

Funding Issues in Pennsylvania

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the age group of 25 and over has the highest percentage of students passing the GED at 29.7 percent with only 4% of 16 year olds passing the GED in 2007 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This is inconsistent with the statistics presented in “The GED as a Predictor of Mid-Life Health and Economic Well Being” (Caputo, 2005) which states that many more pass the GED. “The U.S. total was 945,131 with 655,541, also nearly 70%, receiving the credential” (Caputo, 2005, p. 78). As previously noted, the statistics from the programs addressed in this paper suggest similar results to the statistics from the NCES prior to implementing strategies that promote intrinsic motivation.

Upon review of the Federal Budget from 1980-2010, there has not been a decrease in federal adult education money available as grants to states, specifically the Adult Basic and Literacy Education State Grants. The amount of funding for adult education in fiscal year 2008 and 2009 remained unchanged at \$554.1 million each year and in fiscal year 2010, there was an increase in adult education funding to \$628.2 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

However, the Pennsylvania state budget showed reductions in funding from fiscal year 2007-2008 to that in fiscal year 2010-2011. Adult Basic and Literacy Education funding was \$23.4 million in 2007-2008, \$17.68 million in fiscal year 2009-2010 (Education Fast Facts, 2010) \$14.88 million for fiscal year 2010-2011, \$12.28 million for fiscal year 2011-2012, and is proposed to be \$11.675 million for 2012-2013. (Pennsylvania Office of the Budget, 2012). The amount of federal funding available to each state in the form of grants for Adult Basic Education has increased for the most part each fiscal year through fiscal year 2010-2011. However, the amount of grant money from the federal government to Pennsylvania has significantly decreased. Another concern about the future of funding for Adult Basic Education is that projected federal funding to most states is being decreased for fiscal year 2012-2013 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Conclusion

Although it would have been helpful to find more current articles outlining GED programs that used strategies that improved overall retention and completion rates, the information found seemed very useful for the purpose of demonstrating how instruction that addresses intrinsic motivation improves outcomes. The method used to locate the articles was completing a search using the key words “GED, education, and motivation.” Two of the articles I found I did not use in this literature review.

The overall methods used in the articles selected were similar and addressed why there is a need to implement strategies that improve results of GED programs. The effective strategies noted in this literature review include providing students with options for self-study and flexibility in scheduling; providing a method for students to monitor their progress; presenting the curriculum that relates to students’ lives and goals while teaching the requirements, offering one on one instruction and counseling to address barriers, offering more high school diploma programs or designing current GED programs in a similar format to high school diploma programs, developing goals with students, and having a peer mentoring system in place to recruit and offer support to new students.

The funding reduction in federal grants for adult education programs to Pennsylvania is a real concern especially due to the fact that the federal government has continued to maintain and recently increase funding for adult education during this current fiscal year. The monetary cuts have resulted in job loss among staff which leads to fewer members of the community being able to participate in completing their GED, high school diploma, or improve literacy skills.

Individual program results addressed in this paper showed an increase in retention and completion rates in GED programs when intrinsic motivational tactics were implemented. One recommendation for GED and ABE programs is to use a combination of these strategies when working with students to further develop these methods and identify those which are most successful in assisting individual students in achieving their education and employment goals. Another recommendation is to use the methods already identified in this literature review as a standard in select GED and ABE programs throughout Pennsylvania, document the results from these methods, and compare them to previous results. My expectation is that these methods will demonstrate improved retention and completion rates which will result in the justification needed for

continued and additional funding. With approximately 14% of Pennsylvanians classified as illiterate, and considering the economic challenges facing the Commonwealth, this is real concern.

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