PLANNING A VIRTUAL SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR ADULT LITERACY STUDENTS: STAKEHOLDER INTERESTS IN DECISION MAKING

by

DALE EDENFIELD BOSWORTH

(Under the Direction of Thomas Valentine)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how stakeholder interests shape the planning and implementation of a state virtual school program for adult literacy students in one southern state. Three research questions guiding the study were: (1) What is the historical context of the virtual program for adult literacy students?, (2) What are the interests of the stakeholders in the planning process? And (3) How are the interests of stakeholders negotiated in the planning process?

A qualitative case study was used to address these questions. Data were collected through interviews of persons involved in planning the program, from key documents relative to the program, and from observations of participants. Participants in the study included state directors, local directors of adult education, teachers, and other individuals involved in planning the virtual program. Interview questions examined participants' roles, interests and actions in the planning process. Constant comparative method was used to analyze the data.

The first research question provided an understanding of the history and context of the program and key aspects of the program that impacted its development. The program aspects influencing development were: the planners of the program; participants; funding and legislation; and curriculum and management systems.

The second research question identified the interests of the stakeholders involved in the planning and development of the program. Five themes from the data included: establishing credibility, utilizing innovation, monitoring cost benefit, providing teacher preparation, and maximizing student success with the virtual program.

The third research question examined ways in which the stakeholders negotiated their interests in developing the adult education virtual school program. The methods most frequently used in negotiation were: forming partnerships, entering discussion, making executive decisions, engaging in problem solving, and filling a leadership vacuum.

There were three major conclusions drawn from this study. First, there were differences in the way power and authority were distributed among the stakeholders resulting in asymmetrical relationships. Second, the stakeholder's attitudes toward technology influenced their interests in the planning process of the virtual program. Third, the needs of the students conflicted with the needs of the educational organization providing the program.

INDEX WORDS:Adult Literacy, Adult Education, Virtual School, Online Learning,
Distance Education, Program Planning, Stakeholder Interests,
Decision Making, Negotiation, Social Context, Qualitative Case Study

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work first to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to whom belongs all the glory. Whatever gifts, talents, and inspiration I have, I believe comes from Him, the giver of life and dreams, and I humbly offer my life and work to Him. Next, I wish to dedicate this work to my family, especially my husband and rock, Craig Bosworth, whose steady support always helped me to continue the journey. I simply could not have finished without the patience and understanding that you provided. By example you have taught me the meaning of steadiness and endurance in many of life's most difficult challenges.

Also, to my children including my loving son, Jeremy, who patiently ran my errands for me and helped while I was traveling; my dear daughter, Sarah, my study partner through the years who continually encouraged me to complete the work; and to my other dear daughter, Christina, my best cheerleader, I give you my love and thanks.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

This research problem has grown out of my concern for the high numbers of young adults who have dropped out of school, and need to complete their high school education. A recent report of the Education Testing Service suggests that approximately one third of America's youth are dropping out of high school. According to Barton (2005), a number of independent researchers have made recent estimates that the actual high school graduation rate is between 66% and 71%. Among African American and Latino students, only about half are graduating from school. In this nation, the job market has become more competitive and demanding with almost all jobs necessitating a high school education and in many cases a college degree. This alarming picture suggests that we as a nation must provide more adequate educational opportunities for our youth.

This study focused on an ongoing educational opportunity which began in 2007 for young adults who have dropped out and then returned to complete their secondary education by earning a high school diploma. Several states have begun to offer high school diploma courses for adult literacy education students through state virtual schools. According to proponents of virtual education, a key benefit of online courses is that they allow students to log in anytime, anywhere (Clark & Berge, 2005). Students may also have an opportunity to fulfill course requirements for graduation more quickly; therefore some believe that virtual schools will reduce students' risk of dropping out.

While much of distance education literature focuses on higher education, virtual schooling with its emphasis on K-12 education has been described as "the next wave" of distance education. The term "virtual education" according to Clark and Berge (2005) is "generally applied to any educational organization that offers K-12 courses through the Internet or Web-based methods" (p. 9). A virtual school is a form of distance education that occurs when the teacher and learner are separated and instruction is mediated by technology, generally via the Internet or through a schools' local network.

Virtual School Education

The rapid growth of virtual schools continues to be a trend throughout the United States in recent years. Clark and Berge (2005) offer a profile of several virtual school efforts. The first two to be developed were the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) in 1997 and the Virtual High School (VHS) also in 1997. The FLVS was established through an allocation of \$200,000 from the state legislature (Friend & Johnston, 2005). The VHS was created as a "national consortium of schools offering online courses" through a five year, \$7.4 million federal grant (Pape, Adams, & Ribeiro, 2005, p. 119). Through its initial establishment in 1997-1998 the VHS offered 28 courses to schools and later grew to 156 course offerings during the 2000-2001 school year. The FLVS also began offering courses that same year with an enrollment of 157 students and has now grown to over 57,000 students. In the past decade it is estimated that the number of K-12 students who have engaged in distance education in the United States, including virtual schools, is more than 300,000 (Setzer & Lewis, 2005). Since these initial efforts, virtual schools continue to emerge in other states as an alternative vehicle for education in the United States.

Recently lawmakers of one southern state enacted legislation that established, regulated, and monitored a statewide virtual school system. Included in the legislation was a provision for adult literacy education programs to pilot test virtual courses for students in adult education. One of the purposes of the legislation was to create educational opportunities for the students in all geographical areas of the state that may not exist without the virtual school technology. This study examined the planning and development of this pilot program.

Planning and providing state virtual courses for adult literacy education students can be a challenging endeavor. As technology becomes more readily available to all individuals and becomes more sophisticated, states are rapidly developing their own virtual schools. Moore (2003) suggests that in his experience as a consultant, American educational practice is often characterized by impatience for moving to action, and implementing distance education programs without gaining adequate understanding for conducting successful online programs. He is concerned that professionals are quick to build programs and train teachers, while investing millions of dollars into equipment and software before reviewing the successes and failures of practice within the field.

As I began to explore models for state-run virtual schools, I typically found literature on "how to" offer virtual school programs along with case studies as examples of successful virtual schools. With the recent phenomenon of state-run virtual schools, there is a lack of research or critical literature yet available on the subject. Berge and Clark (2005) published a book, *Virtual Schools: Planning for Success*, in which they offer information on the benefits of virtual schools, advice on planning, policy, and marketing. They describe various approaches to virtual school planning but conclude by recommending a "follow-your-own-

path" approach (p. 19). This advice indicates to me that there is a greater need for more information about the planning and implementation of such programs. Hopefully this study contributes to the knowledge base in regard to the development of virtual schools.

In addition to the dearth of research about virtual schools, even less information is available about virtual school programs for adult literacy students. Project IDEAL, Improving Distance Education for Adult Learners, is a consortium of states working to implement distance education programs for adult basic learners. Askov, Petty, Johnston, and Young (2003) report on the development of these programs. In each case, the states are incorporating commercial products such as PLATO and other forms of computer assisted instruction for curriculum which is used both in classrooms and in distance education formats. The Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) has become involved with state planning for K-12 virtual schools, "focusing on what it takes to develop and provide high-quality online courses and teaching, and what state agencies need to do to provide the organization and structure to meet state academic goals" (SREB report). Although these consortiums are offering advice on "how to" plan virtual schools, there are still questions as to what is best for adult literacy education students, and what theoretical framework or model is most advantageous for guiding the development of virtual programs for these students.

Program Planning

Planning virtual school programs for adult literacy students raises three basic questions: Who provides adult literacy education in the United States?; What concerns and challenges do these providers face, such as funding, curriculum design, and access for adult literacy students?; How do providers represent the interests of adult literacy students as

stakeholders in the planning and development of the virtual school program? In this next section I will discuss each of these issues.

Providers of Adult Literacy Education

The providers of adult education in most states are two-year colleges, local school districts, correctional institutions, vocational or trade schools, nonprofit community-based organizations, and others (Apps, 1989). Through state legislation, the school districts in the state of this study are required to offer adult education services to individuals targeted by federal legislation. In accordance with the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-220), the state plan for adult education in which this study will be conducted targets the following individuals for service: (a) adults in the workforce who are untrained or undertrained, (b) adults requiring family literacy services, (c) adults with less than a high school education, (d) adults with less than a ninth-grade education, (e) adults with special learning needs, (f) adults who are criminal offenders in correctional institutions (within a five-year release period) and other institutionalized individuals, (g) single parents and displaced homemakers, (h) adults with limited English proficiency, and (i) low-income adults who are educationally disadvantaged in the ways mentioned above. Providers of adult literacy programs seek to serve these individuals in order meet their educational needs. Typically students in these programs have not graduated from high school and are seeking means to complete their education either by taking the GED or by earning a high school diploma by acquiring the necessary units of credit. If students have dropped out of high school having achieved a required number of credits they are eligible to enroll in adult education programs throughout the state to complete courses toward graduation. The

federal system of adult literacy helps to fund these students through state and local programs to either obtain a GED or finish high school.

Concerns and Challenges

Funding for adult literacy has long been a concern for providers of programs. Quigley (2001) suggests that planners of adult literacy programs must contend with many problems including the undependability of funding, the politics of planning, and the power of those who choose and make decisions about programs. Quigley traces funding problems of adult literacy education providers over the last several decades. For example he states, "federal funds fell from \$309 per enrollee in 1970, to \$95 in 1980, and to just \$66 per student in 1990" (p. 56). This amount spent for adult literacy participants can be compared with the expenditure of approximately \$6,000 for elementary and secondary students in the 1990's. Today the picture is much the same with larger amounts of money allotted to K-12 education as opposed to adult education. Along with the low amounts for funding available for the literacy programs, few full time jobs for teachers are also available. The lack of funding resources presents difficult challenges for those who provide educational programs for adult literacy participants.

Guy (2005) notes that adult literacy programs in the United States have been underfunded and understaffed for years. He states that in recent years, major policy initiatives "have caused a shift in priorities away from domestic to international policy," and as a result, "adult education—along with other domestic social programs—risks sharp cutbacks that will severely affect not only the level but also the scope of service" (p. 31). This in turn affects state budgets by limiting the amount of educational services that can be provided, especially to those adults who are most in need.

In addition to the development of virtual schools, the practice of incorporating more computer-assisted learning software programs in adult literacy programs has increased. This trend is largely due to funding issues. High school diploma and GED preparation in adult literacy programs involve expense and paid time for teaching personnel; therefore, providers are looking for supplemental and cost effective ways to provide this preparation, including distance education and computer-assisted instruction. The teacher's time spent with students is thought to be more effectively allotted with these two types of instruction, as computer-assisted instruction "provides" instruction in place of or in addition to a classroom teacher. Some would argue that with computer-assisted instruction or online courses offer the advantage of less teacher salary for the number of students served.

Many state and local officials view virtual schooling and computer-assisted instruction software programs as a welcome answer to the funding problem. Adult education programs are traditionally not able to hire as many certified teachers for instruction as K-12 programs; therefore, providing virtual courses is desirable. Officials also argue that online programs will help students with transportation problems and conflicting work schedules to find another avenue for completing a high school diploma. Participating in virtual courses makes educational opportunities available for these participants in their own homes or other places with Internet access.

Access to technology can be a significant problem for adult literacy students. Askov et al. (2003) describes the "digital divide" or the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" of technology for minority and marginalized populations, especially those with low-income. She points out, "Without access to and knowledge of the Internet and online learning, lowliterate adults have little chance to successfully bridge the divide" (p. 7). The Florida Virtual

School, according to Friend and Johnston (2005), employs staff specifically to address the problem of access for disadvantaged and minority groups. They state, "A major challenge has been to find ways to provide equal access as well as connectivity to those in need" (p. 110). Virtual school providers must continue to address the concern of access with low-literate learners.

Students' Interests

The problem that providers face when planning virtual school courses for adult literacy students is the difficulty in offering appropriate and adequate educational instruction for the student's learning needs. There may be difficulties in accessing equipment and the Internet. Online programs may conflict with the needs of the learners, in that these learners may not be self-directed, self-motivated, or independent. The populations that have dropped out of high school are often marginalized populations, needing more, not less, personal contact with a teacher. These qualities that are needed for successful participation in virtual education may not reflect the characteristics of adult literacy students. Askov et al. (2003) point out that despite potential challenges for adult basic education students in distance education, many states are now developing virtual schools as an alternative method for providing educational services.

Statement of the Problem

Research on planning successful virtual school programs for adult literacy participants is generally limited. Questions regarding effectiveness, planning on the state level, making decisions about funding and curriculum, implementing appropriate technology, providing training for teachers, and other concerns about practice yielded insufficient information in literature searches. Much of the knowledge we have about

distance education is centered on higher education, but less is known about adult literacy students who participate in alternative forms of education for high school completion.

My concern with the virtual school initiative is the planning process itself and how it shapes the development of the program. It is important to recognize the interests which are at stake in the planning process. Many adult education theorists have stressed the importance of conducting assessments to determine the needs and interests of clientele during the planning process for programs. Knowles (1980) recommends needs assessments of learners in order to provide effective programs. Sork and Caffarella (1989) also place value on needs assessments. Cervero and Wilson (2006) explain the importance of needs assessments from a different approach, recognizing that "multiple interests intersect in the planning of any program" (p. 111). In this approach, the interests of the organization, not just the clientele or learners are considered. Cervero and Wilson suggest that program planning is a social activity with relationships of power among those involved in the process. According to Cervero and Wilson (2006), "Planners always negotiate with their own power and negotiate between and among the political relationships of other people to make judgments about the features and outcomes of an educational program" (p. 88). This social-planning theory explores the ideas of what really matters in adult education program planning and whose interests are served in the planning process.

In light of the social-planning theory described by Cervero and Wilson (1994; 2006), it becomes important to recognize each of the stakeholders' interests in the planning process. Directors of adult education programs must address many concerns of funding, accountability, state and federal mandates, staff support, and teachers and learners' needs. Along with these concerns are differing ideologies, agendas and philosophies of those who

plan programs for adult students. It is reasonable to expect that differing opinions and power struggles will occur during the development of programs. With many stakeholders involved in the planning process such as policy makers, state and local directors, and teachers, it is desirable that all voices be represented at the planning table. This study examined this process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how stakeholder interests shape the planning and implementation of a state virtual school program for adult literacy students in one southern state. Three research questions guiding the study were:

- (1) What is the historical context of the virtual program for adult literacy students?
- (2) What are the interests of the stakeholders in the planning process?
- (3) How are the interests of stakeholders negotiated in the planning process?

Significance of the Study

Virtual schools have experienced tremendous growth in North America (Barbour, 2007). Adult literacy education programs across the United States are also offering more virtual and distance education opportunities as well (Askov et al., 2003). This study contributes to those who are engaged in the planning, teaching, and study of distance education for adult literacy students. This research is significant to others on three levels: the academic level, the practitioner level, and the participant level.

On the academic level this study contributes to what scholars know about planning theory for adult education programs. Research about how programs are developed and planned continually expands the knowledge base for adult education theorists. In addition to the need for updated information about program planning theory, there is a fundamental

need to develop theory for planning as it applies to distance education and virtual learning programs in particular. Decisions about effective curriculum models for distance education and understanding of how virtual schools can be developed to effectively address the literacy needs of adults is important.

At the practitioner level, the findings of this research assists policy makers, state officials, and program decision makers in planning, developing, and directing state level planning for virtual school programs. By recognizing the politics of planning and stakeholder interests, leaders can more effectively navigate the planning process. Implications from this study may be used in other states that are also developing virtual school programs for adult education. Information concerning the needs and interests of stakeholders in the planning process can be used to inform adult education providers as well as professional associations and state agencies. The study also contributes to the overall assessment of virtual school programs for adult education and literacy providers and may assist with the development and improvement of adult education programs.

At the participant level, the learners benefit from the results of this study as the research examines how their interests are represented in the program planning process for the state virtual school. As Cervero and Wilson (2006) so aptly state, "Educational programs matter because they create possible futures in the lives of people, organizations, and communities" (p. 91). As people gain greater access to the Internet, and as technology becomes more affordable, opportunities for students to engage in schooling through distance education programs will continue to expand. As this study seeks to understand how multiple stakeholders' interests are represented in the planning process for virtual programs, learners will benefit in an intrinsic and practical way as well.

Definition of Key Terms

Adult Literacy

Adult literacy has a variety of meanings ranging from a very restrictive one, which refers to those at a basic level, to treating it as an umbrella term for all those people who have not received at least a high school diploma. In this work, I used the term in its broadest sense, referring to adults who were no longer in a K-12 school or program, and who lacked a high school diploma or GED.

Curriculum

Curriculum also has a variety of meanings ranging from lessons for coursework for high school credits, to entire units for a yearly course. In this work, I used the term curriculum to refer to the content for the online high school courses which was provided primarily through the PLATO Learning System, and was utilized or modified by the content area teacher in the adult education virtual program.

PLATO Learning System

The PLATO Learning System is an integrated curriculum system, which is marketed to K–12 schools and colleges which provides customizable course content, assessment, curriculum management, and reporting capabilities through an online interface. In this work I refer to PLATO Learning as the commercial curriculum system utilized by planners and teachers of the adult education virtual program for course content.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the planning and implementation of a state virtual school program and for adult literacy students in one southern state. In this literature review I addressed three areas of focus for this study: adult literacy education, virtual and distance education, and program planning for education. In each of these areas I examined how research and theory contributed to the development of virtual programs for adult literacy education students.

In the first section I will provide an overview of adult literacy education in the United States. I will give the background of the federally funded system, discuss how policy impacts the provision of adult education programs on a state level, and finally discuss how these provisions impact the learners in adult literacy programs.

In the second section I will first examine literature about virtual education for adult literacy students with regard to three considerations: student characteristics, design of distance courses and theoretical approaches to learning in distance education including the behaviorist model and the constructivist model. Finally I will offer conclusions about these approaches apply to adult literacy learners.

In the third section, I will examine theoretical models for program planning with an emphasis on the work of Cervero and Wilson (1994; 2006). I will provide an overview of the key theoretical components of the Cervero and Wilson approach to educational

planning and discuss the major themes in the research studies that have been conducted using the Cervero and Wilson theory. Finally, I will discuss implications for the study and how the theory may be used to understand state-level educational planning.

Adult Literacy Education

Adult literacy education in the United States generally refers one of three overlapping systems (Beder, 1991). The first is the tutoring system represented by organizations such as Laubach Literacy Volunteers of America (now named ProLiteracy International). This system trains volunteer tutors to work with low literate adults. The second system is comprised of community-based organizations that emerge within the community to address problems of illiteracy. Often these organizations focus on collective action and embrace an emancipatory literacy philosophy. The third system, which is the largest, is the federally funded system of adult education. Most states supplement the federal program with local funds, along with providing technical support and regulation to the local providers of education.

Federal System

Federal legislation for adult literacy education began with Johnson's War on Poverty in the 1960s with the passage of the Adult Basic Education Act in 1966. Throughout the following decades, policy makers have enacted and amended varying legislative efforts to address the literacy needs of the nation. In 1998, significant changes to federal legislation for adult education occurred with the passage of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). The primary focus of the law became economic development with "Work First" initiatives for low-literate adults and their families rather than basic literacy education.

This comprehensive act is the regulating force for adult literacy education provided through public institutions in the United States.

In 2003 congress amended the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, reauthorizing Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). This law grants federal funding to states for adult literacy education. The purpose of the legislation is to assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency; and to help parents to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children. The term "adult education" refers to services or instruction below the postsecondary level for individuals who are 16 years of age and are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law, lack sufficient mastery of basic educational skills to function effectively in society, and do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent such as the GED (National Institute for Literacy, 2004).

Impacts of Policy on Adult Literacy Education

Hayes (1999) points out that in the preceding years, policy changes affected adult literacy education by making a shift from education first to a "Work First" approach for welfare recipients. The concern of many is that this policy has affected the way programs can provide quality education for adult literacy participants. The work first imitative tends to create a need for "quick fix" education, by providing short-term educational programs and then sending welfare recipients into the workforce, thereby reducing the welfare rolls.

Dirkx (1999) also addresses the shift in policy that affects adult literacy programs. Discussion about adult literacy and basic education, "rarely went beyond the creation of demonstration projects, specially funded programs, and a few state initiatives" (p. 83).

Dirkx believes that federal initiatives created programs were not much more than Band-Aids placed on "gaping wounds in our social and economic fabric" (p. 83).

While individuals are expected to move from government assistance to work, the role of adult education and training is minimized. In the Work First environment, welfare recipients are expected to locate work *before* pursuing any type of long-term education and training. As for those receiving assistance, more than half do not have a high school diploma or GED (Dirkx, 1999). However, these very individuals are expected to find employment before obtaining education. The Work First philosophy has forced programs to focus more specifically on job readiness skills and limit the amount of time spent on academic skills.

Belzer (2003) conducted a study of how WIA and welfare reform affects adult literacy education practice. The study investigated practitioners' perceptions of how WIA and welfare reform changed their practices at the program and classroom level. She found that WIA and welfare reform clearly put greater and different demands on programs, while at the same time did not provide extra resources for the programs. Teachers reported that testing demands created negative consequences for the both teachers and the students, noting that test preparation took time away from instruction that helped to address learners' goals and interests. Belzer concludes that "practitioners, policymakers, and researchers all have an important obligation to maximize the potential for reform by developing and implementing thoughtful and constructive policy that is truly aimed at improving the lives of the adults who seek to improve their skills" (p. 62).

Others have researched the affects of welfare reform such as Sparks (2001), who conducted a study that investigated how adult literacy teachers viewed the influence of

welfare reform on practice in one state. She found that the policy caused problems by increasing demands on the program providers without the benefit of additional resources, and limiting students' opportunities to learn. Sheared, McCabe and Umeki (2000) argue that many tenets of adult education are in direct conflict with the quick-fix approach currently being funded, in which work is emphasized over lifelong learning. *National Reporting System*

The American Institute for Research developed the National Reporting System (NRS) to provide a systematic and standardized way to measure learner outcomes, as mandated by WIA. The NRS uses a system of levels with score ranges matching commonly used standardized tests. (Belzer, 2001). The chief purpose of a federal reporting system is to measure the outcomes of the programs that provide literacy education and provide accountability to the taxpaying public. Assessment of performance changed with the 1998 Workforce Investment Act. With this act adult literacy programs are now expected to assist adults in gaining employment, helping adults improve family literacy, and helping adults gain a secondary credential (GED or high school diploma). The NRS is the system by which these goals can be tracked. Adult literacy providers are held accountable for meeting these goals. Although the purpose of the NRS is to track and research outcomes of adult literacy programs, much controversy has arisen over the methods used for creating these reports. According to Bingham, Ebert and Bell (2000), "Instead of assessing programs by the quality of their . . . programming, states are required to set up performance accountability systems and assess adult basic education programs on their success at achieving particular policy outcomes" (p. 2).

Bingham, Ebert and Bell (2000) argue that standardized tests alone do not provide sufficient information about outcomes of learners in adult literacy instruction. They maintain that tests do not capture the changes that matter to learners. In 1999, when policies concerning a mandatory reporting system were being considered, a listserv was created and moderated by David Rosen, former director of the Adult Literacy Resource Institute in Boston. Through the listserv many adult literacy researchers voiced their opposition to a mandatory reporting system. There were concerns that adult literacy programs would be conducted as businesses, rather than educational programs. *Approaches to Adult Literacy Education*

In a discussion of adult literacy education, Fingeret (1992) poses some basic questions concerning the notion of literacy: What is literacy? And who has the power in adult literacy education? Cervero (1985) asks the question, "Is a common definition of adult literacy possible" (p. 50)? Some view literacy as having functional reading, writing, and numeracy skills; others broaden the definition to include life and social skills as well. Scribner and Cole (2001) argue that literacy is a social achievement, not an individual ability, and therefore must be viewed from that perspective. Beder (1991) distinguishes between two categories of literacy definitions: an *absolute school* that uses grade levels and standards, and a *relativist school* that recognizes the context and social setting of adults. The relevant school "recognizes the realities of the learner's world and the necessity to make literacy education relevant to the world" (Quigley, 1997, p. 13). Both reflect different philosophical perspectives which influence ways in which adult educators approach literacy education.

In regard to who has the power in literacy education, Fingeret (1992) suggests that there is a continuum of learner participation ranging from the teacher depositing information into students, termed "banking education" by Freire (1970/2007), to learnercentered instruction where students share the power and responsibility for their learning by participating in a problem posing and dialogue approach to learning. While scholars have had much to say about the student-centered approach to learning, many educational programs for adult literacy instruction often use a skills based approach. Fingeret notes that although most instructors understand the problems with banking models of education they nonetheless "invoke its properties by using commercial curriculum materials that are irrelevant to students' lives and teaching in ways that focus on skills rather than on students' lives and culture" (p. 8).

Beder and Medina (2001), in a study of classroom dynamics of adult literacy classrooms, examine important issues around adult learning and instruction. They also identify a dichotomy in approaches to learning. The first general approach mentioned is discrete-skills instruction. The other approach is termed "making meaning instruction." According to Beder and Medina, discrete-skills instruction involves teacher-prepared and teacher-delivered lessons conveying factual information and recall from learners. This type of instruction incorporates commercially developed materials, and focuses on reading, writing and test preparation. In contrast, the focus on making meaning instruction is on higher-level abilities in addition to basic skills and the teacher is viewed as a facilitator. Beder and Medina's (2001) study examined 20 adult literacy classes in eight states. Of the 20 classes examined, 16 classes used discrete skills instruction and the other four incorporated making meaning instruction.

Beder and Medina (2001) also discuss the concept of participatory education. It is based on the idea that instruction should be centered on the learner's characteristics, backgrounds, needs, and goals (Beder, 1991; Fingeret, 1989). This theory challenges the idea that a learner must have prescribed treatment for his or her lack of literacy. In most adult literacy programs, the instructor individualizes the curriculum by using pre-tests followed by prescriptive assignments. Participatory literacy programs, according to Fingeret (1992) provide more relevant curriculum for students in that they are more connected to the students' culture and experience.

Benefits of Adult Literacy Programs

Although there are criticisms of the limitations of adult literacy programs, it is important to recognize the benefits of adult literacy programs as well. The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) conducts research on the effectiveness of adult literacy programs. In a major study through NCSALL, Beder (1999) investigated the outcomes and impacts of adult literacy education by examining 23 studies on the effectiveness of adult literacy programs. From these studies, the following conclusions were made about adult literacy education programs in the United States:

- (1) In general, it is likely that participants in adult literacy education receive gains in employment.
- (2) In general, participants in adult literacy education believe their jobs improve over time. However, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that participation in adult literacy education causes job improvement.
- (3) In general, it is likely that participation in adult literacy education results in earnings gain.
- (4) In general, adult literacy education has a positive influence on participants' continued education.
- (5) Although the evidence suggests that participants in welfare-sponsored (e.g. JOBS Program) adult literacy education do experience a reduction in welfare dependence, the evidence is inconclusive as to whether

adult literacy education in general reduces welfare dependence for participants.

- (6) Learners perceive that participation in adult literacy education improves their skills in reading, writing, and mathematics.
- (7) As measured by tests, the evidence is insufficient to determine whether or not participants in adult literacy education gain in basic skills.
- (8) In general, adult literacy education provides gains in GED acquisition for participants entering at the adult secondary (ASE) level.
- (9) Participation in adult literacy has a positive impact on learners' selfimage.
- (10) According to learners' self-reports, participation in adult literacy education has a positive impact on parents' involvement in their children's education.
- (11) Learners perceive that their personal goals are achieved through participation in adult literacy education. (p. 5)

In a study that examined learner's perspectives of adult literacy programs, Bingham, Ebert and Bell (2000) identified a variety of learner outcomes. They reported on two Tennessee studies that recognized outcomes other than employment such as social well being, personal well being, and physical well-being. An important outcome identified was the learner's sense of self. Participants expressed their feelings about a sense of accomplishment and the ability to express themselves in new ways.

In summary, adult literacy programs exist to provide education for adults that choose to return to school. While there are drawbacks and limitations to these programs, they still attempt to serve the literacy needs of adults. The approach to learning depends on those who develop and teach the programs. Learner-centered instruction, according to Fingeret (1992), should help students develop a "sense of their own strengths and power as they work together on common issues and concerns" (p. 11). Preferably the goal of adult literacy instruction should one of helping to empower the participants of these programs.

Virtual and Distance Education

The literature on distance education covers a wide range of information about learning at a distance with multiple issues and concerns. Distance education has been available in higher education for years, in varying formats from blended methods to entirely online. As a result, much research is available for study and review in this arena. More recently, however, virtual schools are now becoming available in many states for K-12 programs. Additionally, states are making virtual courses available to adult literacy students. Virtual schools are a more recent development; therefore less research in this arena is available.

Student Characteristics

Several studies have examined student characteristics for being successful distance learners. Roblyer and Marshall (2002) conducted a study that created and tested an instrument to be used for prediction of success for virtual high school (VHS) students. In an earlier study Rolblyer and Elbaum (2000) concluded that VHS courses have comparatively high dropout and failure rates. Implications from this study led to the Roblyer and Marshall study, in which nine constructs related to successful characteristics of VHS students were tested. The constructs were locus of control, internal versus external motivation, selfconfidence/self-esteem, responsibility, degree of experimentation (risk taking), time management, ability to set goals, achievement motivation, and self-reported computer/ technology skills. The findings indicated that the instrument could be a useful way of predicting student success. Implications for the study suggested that students needed three elements for success in online programs: pre-course counseling, structuring of courses, and support during the duration of courses.

Palloff and Pratt (2003) offer a list of qualities adapted from Illinois Online Network, suggesting that a virtual student must: (a) exhibit adequate computer skills and have access to the Internet; (b) be open minded about sharing life, work, and educational experiences as part of the learning process; (c) be able to communicate through writing; (d) not be hindered by the absence of visual cues which are present in face-to-face learning environments; (e) be self-motivated and self-disciplined; (f) be willing to commit time to his/her studies; and (g) have the ability to critically reflect and make decisions as part of the learning process. Buchanan (1999) indicates that qualities such as maturity, independence, self-discipline, and assertiveness are needed for success in distance education. Song, Singleton, Hill, and Koh (2004) offer a different perspective from the learners' point of view, indicating that "course design, learner motivation, time management, and comfortableness with online technologies impact the success of the online learning experience" (p. 59).

Some scholars have expressed concern that these qualities may not reflect the characteristics of adult literacy students. Askov, Petty, Johnson, and Young (2003) suggest that "successful distance learning students are likely to be self-motivated, be comfortable working independently, and possess strong study and organizational skills. Only a subset of adult basic learners possesses these characteristics" (p. 8). They point out that despite potential challenges for adult literacy education students in distance education many states are now developing virtual school programs as an alternative method for providing educational services for this population of students.

Design Issues

Other studies have examined design issues for developing virtual or distance courses. Hannafin, Hannafin, Land, and Oliver (1997) suggest a design of learning that incorporates several elements, including psychological, pedagogical, technological, cultural, and pragmatic foundations. Psychological foundations represent beliefs of how people learn. Theory about learning guides the way people plan for and practice instruction. Pedagogical foundations emphasize methods of instruction and are also tied to psychological epistemologies. Technological foundations emphasize the available media and current technology used in learning. Cultural foundations reflect the beliefs and values of those involved in the class and/or larger groups within society. Pragmatic foundations reflect the practical concerns. In addition to theoretical concerns, much literature about distance education addresses the practical issues involved in provided online learning such as costs, marketing, hardware and software choices. Hannafin et al. maintain that all of these foundational elements should be aligned when designing learning environments.

In a later article, Hannafin, Hill, Oliver, Glazer and Sharma (2003) provide an overview of research suggesting the importance of specific cognitive and learning factors in web-based distance learning. Cognitive factors were prior knowledge, metacognition, system knowledge and prior experiences, self-efficacy, learning styles, and motivation. Learning factors included learning context, opportunities for active learning, resources, tools, and scaffolds. Hannifin et al. recognized each of these factors as important and helpful for student learning in web based learning environments. Although these factors examined research primarily in regard to higher education, these same factors are also important in other distance education environments, such as virtual programs.

Clark (2003) presents an overview of virtual education and offers a description of empirical research of K-12 distance education. A continuing issue in K-12 distance learning has been whether distance learners achieve outcomes at least equal to conventional learners. Clark cites several research studies that revealed findings on academic success with virtual education as showing a marginal positive difference. In fact, the findings of several meta analysis revealed that in areas of academic success, "three in four studies showed 'no significant difference" between distance education and conventional education (p. 688). Clark calls for more research in this area, stressing the fact that policy makers are looking for a greater impact with virtual education.

Clark (2003) also reviewed literature concerning distance education including correspondence study, academic persistence, equitable access and participation, teachers and teaching, and infrastructure and policy. These studies incorporated both qualitative and descriptive case study research. Kirby and Driscoll's (1997) study, cited in Clark (2003), found that supporting roles for planning and instruction as well as classroom management and climate were all important factors maximizing course outcomes.

Friend and Johnston (2005) offer a descriptive account of the Florida Virtual School (FLVS), an institution that many have recognized as a leading pioneer in state virtual schools. Florida Virtual School's developers use Gagne's Nine Events for Instruction as a model for curriculum. These events are: (a) Gaining learners' attention, (b) Informing learners of the objectives, (c) Stimulation learners' recall of prior learning, (d) Presenting the stimulus to the learner, (e) Providing guidance to the learner, (f) Eliciting performance from the learner, (g) Providing feedback to the learner, (h) Assessing the performance of the learner, and (i) Enhancing the learners' retention of the information and transfer of the

information to other ideas and contexts. According to Friend and Johnston, this model helps to support a "constructivist, student-centered curriculum" (p. 108).

Theoretical Approaches to Learning

In addition to examining literature centered on student characteristics and design issues, it is important to look at how theoretical models help to shape the development of virtual and distance education. In this section I will discuss two general theoretical models or approaches to distance learning: the behaviorist model and the constructivist model. Others have suggested similar ways of classifying distance learning such as Keegan (2000) offering "two modes of distance education and training: group-based distance training and individual-based distance training" (p. 1). Rosen (2000), referring to general use of technology to support learning and teaching, divides learning into two broad categories: instructivist and constructivist. Each model suggests ways to think about distance education, with underlying theoretical perspectives.

Behaviorist Model. Much of what is considered distance education for adult literacy programs falls into the behavioral model category. Askov et al. (2003), referring to adult literacy programs, state that "most distance education efforts for adults in the United States involve selecting an existing classroom product (for example PLATO, Skills Tutor, or GED connection) and adapting it for distance use" (p. 2). She cites several statewide efforts to provide distance education for adult literacy learners including Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Illinois, Missouri, Florida, and California among others.

PLATO is presently a commercial curriculum providing computer-assisted instruction (CAI) for students, with instructor options for adding additional activities. It is interesting to note that historically, the PLATO system (Programmed Logic Automated
Teaching Operations) was originally developed at the University of Illinois in 1960. PLATO has since evolved and been sold to private companies. According to Garson (1999), the instructional lessons for PLATO were based on B. F. Skinner's behavioral learning model. The lessons include behavioral objectives, self-pacing, and active learner response to frequent prompts and questions. Elias and Merriam (2005) point out that "the use of behavioral objectives in educational settings is a direct outgrowth of behavioral psychology" (p. 93). Skinner's behavioral model involves "operant conditioning" where student behavior is modified through reinforcement. Dooley, Lindner, and Dooley (2005) describe Skinner's model as the basis for the "cognitive information processing" (CIP) developed by Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968). In the CIP model, "learners process information in the same way a computer does. Information is "input" from the environment through the senses, processed, stored in memory, and expressed, in the form of behaviors" (p. 39). The role of the teacher and student are well defined with a behavioral model of learning. According to Elias and Merriam (2005), "the role of the teacher is to design an environment that elicits desired behavior" (p. 93). The student's role is to exhibit a change in behavior after positive reinforcement. Behaviorism has been an underlying philosophy for much of adult and distance education using computer-assisted instruction.

There are both proponents and critics of the behavioral model of distance education. Elias and Merriam (2005) note that the controversy centers on two points: student satisfaction and retention of material. Research fails to prove the advantage or disadvantage of either with using programmed instruction. Numerous researchers have studied the effectiveness of computer-assisted instruction (CAI), including Kulik and Kulik (1991) Fletcher-Flinn and Gravett (1995) and Rachal (1995). In one study Rachal (1993)

reviewed twelve studies that examined CAI in terms of achievement gain. All of the studies were experimental in design or quasi-experimental in design with significant and nonsignificant results. Of the twelve studies, only two revealed statistical significant difference with pre and post testing of the participating groups. Rachel (1995) later conducted a meta-analysis of twenty-one quasi-experimental studies and again found no significant difference between the treatment and control groups using CAI. He pointed out ancillary benefits, however, with CAI such as student enjoyment, reduced attrition and improved learning time.

Dillon-Marable (2004) reviewed a group of studies examining CAI and concluded "the consistent recommendation across studies encouraged use of CAI. This recommendation persisted despite overwhelming evidence across programs that there was no significant difference or, at the best, mixed results regarding the effectiveness of CAI over traditional methods" (p. 18). While evidence suggests the mixed results of effectiveness of CAI, one then questions its usefulness in educational settings. Obviously other issues such as convenience to the teacher and program might be reasons why planners incorporate CAI in the curriculum.

Other scholars such as Granger and Bowman (2003) express concerns over student's limited decision making ability in prepackaged programs by pointing to Freire's (1970/2007) "banking" philosophy of education. Freire's most notable concern for the learner was the hegemonic control of the educational system towards the learner. Stites (2004) points out that the relevance of "programmed instruction" in adult literacy programs is questionable stating that "neobehaviorist instructional designs are

incompatible with adult learning theory and best practices in adult basic education" (p.113).

The Constructivist Model. The constructivist model of distance education could be termed the humanistic model in terms of theoretical frameworks because the focus is more on learner-centered rather than teacher-centered learning. There are essentially two aspects to this model that should be considered: the self-directedness of the learner and the social context of the learner. Elias and Merriam (2005) explain that "humanistic psychology developed from a reaction to behaviorism" (p. 115). Many educational psychologists believe that behaviorist approaches do not fully explain how and why people learn. They contend that critical and creative thinking is not observable, nor programmable (Dooley et al., 2005).

The concept of self-directed learning aligns adult education theory with distance education theory. Many well-known adult educators including Knowles (1975), Tough (1971), Brookfield (1984), Candy (1991) and Grow (1991) all advocated self-directed learning for adults. Self-directed learning focuses on the freedom and responsibility of individuals to direct and construct their own learning experiences. This self-directed approach fits well with distance education. Both Wedemeyer (1971) and Moore (1972) emphasized the autonomy of the learner in distance education. The ability to be selfdirected is often reported to be an important quality for success in online learning. Selfdirected learning, according to Grow (1991) "is the North Star of adult education" (p. 128). Describing it as a complex practice, Grow proposes a four-stage model for teaching that moves students from being dependent learners to becoming self-directed learners. The assumption is that the "goal of the educational process is to produce self-directed, lifelong

learners" (p. 127). Grow's model is rearticulated in Inoue's (2007) discussion of online education and lifelong learning. The implication is that lifelong learning, encompassing selfdirected learning, can and should be utilized in computer-mediated learning.

Moore (1972) advocates independence, autonomy, and self-direction in his discussion of distance education. He offers a theory for distance education which includes two dimensions: distance teaching and learner autonomy. According to Moore, distance and autonomy "are the twin foundations of independent learning" (p. 84). Moore (1973) also developed the theory of transactional distance. He suggested that the distance between the learning and the teacher is psychological rather than geographic. This distance refers to the communication, interaction, curriculum, and management of the program. It is a psychological space of potential misunderstandings that exists between the teacher and the learner. Distance education requires specialized teaching behaviors that are essential to lessen the transactional distance (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). With his emphasis on autonomy, self-directedness, and responsibility of the learner, Moore has continued to recognize its significance and implication for distance learning.

As compelling and appropriate as the notion of self-directed learning via distance education is, questions have been raised about its effectiveness, especially in regards to adult literacy learners. Candy (1991) cautions that "self-direction can never, and should never, replace the role of the teacher in every learning situation" (p. 3). Garrison (2003) addresses the problem of giving too much control to the learner, suggesting that selfdirected learning may not always be appropriate or in the student's best interests. He argues that students may not persist or achieve their education goals without appropriate support and guidance. Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) suggest that the

concept of self-directed learning raises new questions in the context of an online learning environment, and needs further exploration.

The constructivist model is often used educational settings, especially with the integration of technology whether in face-to-face settings or with online learning. Constructivist theory has two sides to it: cognitive constructivism and social constructivism. Piaget (1971) is credited with cognitive constructivist learning. He believed that people must "construct" their own knowledge while learning through experience, but did not emphasize social learning environments. Vygotsky (1978), on the other hand, also believed that knowledge is constructed but that it occurred in connection with others, such as the teacher or peers (Fosnot, 2005). Kaye and Volkers (2007) describe three Vygotskian concepts as being helpful in building online coursework: (a) collaborative experiences among students to advance through their own zone of proximal development, (b) social interaction that transforms socially shared activities into internalized cognitive processes, and (c) efficient instruction that helps students engage in activities with a supportive learning environment and appropriate guidance (Vygotsky, 1978).

Many proponents of student-centered learning build their arguments around Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist theory. Additionally much of distance education, especially in higher education, espouses student-centered and collaborative learning. Kaye and Volkers (2007) explain, "that, while higher education faculty can design successful curriculum, students must be directly involved in guiding their own journey toward learning" (p. 100). The constructivist approach is "active" in that each student is responsible for discovering, constructing, acquiring knowledge by active exploration along with interactive social collaboration with others (Crumpacker, 2001).

Palloff and Pratt (2003) build a case for online learning communities in their book, *The Virtual Student.* They argue that active involvement in community in online learning settings helps "the educational experience to be more inspired as strong relationships develop among students" (p. 15). They emphasize the student's need to belong to a group. In line with other's arguments for culturally relevant learning environments, this would imply that adult literacy students, especially if they are minority students, would benefit from online community connections as well.

Preece (2000) suggests that an online community includes four components: (a) people, including the students, instructor, administrators, and support staff among which there is social interaction; (b) purpose, which includes the shared involvement of an online class; (c) policies, which guide the structure of the course; and (d) computer system, which is the online site where instructor and students meet to conduct the business of the course. These components must be present in order for an online community to exist. Palloff and Pratt (2003) offer a description of community, stating that it is, "Engaging in collaborative learning and the reflective practice involved in transformative learning" (p. 17). A key element in an online community, according to Palloff and Pratt, is the socially constructed meaning of knowledge evidenced in online discussions whether they are asynchronous (at different times) or synchronous (together).

Hill (2002) also provides a helpful discussion for community building in web-based learning environments. She first argues for web-based instruction stating that it "provides unique opportunities for reaching learners in an anytime, anyplace orientation. Next, she defines a learning community as a "culture of learning in which everyone is involved in the collective and individual effort to understand" (p. 69). Finally Hill supports the importance

of building community in learning environments stating that it enables participants to establish working relationships, share ideas and benefits for group insight. Community also has the potential to influence whether or not learners continue to participate (Moore & Kearsley, 1996).

After reviewing literature about virtual education and distance education, it becomes evident that online learning offers alternative environment for learning. Within this environment learning can take place in many ways, just as in a classroom. The learning tools and techniques utilized by the teacher or curriculum designers are varied much like a face-to-face classroom. Many adult literacy classrooms offer individualized behavioral learning activities either in online courses or face-to-face. It is clear, however, that building community in the learning environment and providing social and culturally contextual experiences are equally if not more important if learning is to occur with adult literacy students.

Program Planning for Adult Education

Up to this point I have discussed the social context of the *learner* for both adult literacy distance education programs. Now I will discuss the social context of the *planner* of adult education programs. While many planning theories have taken a more prescriptive or linear approach, the Cervero and Wilson (1994; 2006) theory recognizes the social and political nature of planning. In this section I will describe three approaches that Cervero and Wilson have identified in their work to adult education planning (classical, naturalistic, and critical) then follow with an in-depth description of the Cervero and Wilson theoretical model. Finally I will review literature in which studies have researched Cervero and Wilson's theory of program planning.

The Classical Approach

According to Cervero and Wilson (1994), the *classical approach* began with Ralph Tyler's (1949) rationale, and continued with Knowles (1970/1980) theories, representing a rational technical approach to planning. Tyler's rationale is based on four fundamental questions, which should be answered in developing any curriculum and plan of instruction. They are: (a) What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?; (b) What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?; (c) How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?; and (d) How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? This rationale for planning has been the foundation of most educational programs in North American schools for over 50 years. It represents a rational, sequential approach to planning. Knowles (1970/1980) and Caffarella (1988)'s earlier planning models were also based on the technical-rational theory. The concern with the classical approach is that there is gap in planning theory and reality. Sork and Caffarella (1989) recognize that "there remain substantial gaps between what theorists say should be done and what practitioners do" (p. 234). Models of planning did not address all that "mattered" in terms of planning programs for adults, as well as the political and social aspects.

The Naturalistic Approach

The next approach described by Cervero and Wilson (1994) is the *naturalistic approach* introduced by Walker (1971). This approach offers a different look at how program planning is accomplished. Walker compares his naturalistic model with Tyler's (1949) rationale by arguing that although the traditional approach was viewed as the ideal model, it did not represent the actual practice of program planners. For example,

developing objectives at the beginning of the planning process as defined by the classical approach does not always happen. Walker explains, "In most cases when teachers or subject matter specialists work at curriculum development, the objectives they formulate are either a diversion from their work or an appendix to it, not an integral part of it" (p. 51). Walker describes his naturalistic approach to curriculum development as a series of decisions to be made throughout the planning process. It begins with a platform, which is an idea of *what* the curriculum should be, and then proceeds with deliberation about *how* the curriculum should be designed. Within this time of deliberation there are two types of designs being formed: the explicit, or purposeful, thought out decisions that area made about curriculum development, and the implicit, or automatic decisions that are made during the planning process. Walker (2003) maintains that good deliberation produces a course of action that will best suit the needs of the learner. He asserts that his model is practical and realistic; and the model bridges, "the gap between theory and practice" (p. 216).

Pennington and Green (1976) attempted to develop a substantive theory of program planning arriving at a model similar to the naturalistic model. They conducted qualitative research founded on "a minimum of predetermined assumptions" (p. 15). Their research generated several main clusters of activities of program development. The main clusters were: originating the idea, developing the idea, making a commitment, developing the program, teaching the course, and evaluating the impact. According to Pennington and Green, "Most planners gave lip service to the importance of a needs assessment, but very few followed through" (p. 20). Although Pennington and Green believed that needs assessments should not be neglected, in reality very few planners actually conducted them.

Pennington and Green (1976) also found that in actual practice, many discrepancies between traditional and naturalistic models existed. They discovered that actual practice reflected the lack of many elements usually called for in traditional models of program development, including needs assessment, systematic objectives, instructional design and comprehensive evaluation. Even though many of these elements were missing, the programs were considered successful. Both Walker's (1971) naturalistic model and the Pennington and Green's (1971) model are non-linear as opposed to the rational-technical approach by Knowles (1970) and Caffarella's (1988) model.

The Critical Approach

The third approach described by Cervero and Wilson (1994) is Forester's (1989) critical approach to planning. It provided a departure from traditional planning theories and added impetus to Cervero and Wilson's (1994; 2006) developing model. Forester was among the first to point out the political and social aspect of planning. Forester believes, "the technical problem-solving image of planning ... really sells planning practice short" (p. 6). He suggests that planners must be astute at recognizing and dealing with the political atmosphere that surrounds them as they plan. Planning is not an isolated activity; rather people are involved. The astute planner recognizes the currents and tensions of those involved, anticipates conflicts and deals with power struggles effectively in order to further the planning process. Forester maintains that the only way rational planning can take place is when one first recognizes the political nature of the activity of planning and works within realm of political understanding to achieve planning goals. According to Forester (1989), "if planners understand how relations of power shape the planning process, they can improve the quality of their analysis" (p. 27). Further if planners ignore

issues of power and politics in planning, they will undermine their own ability to influence others in the process.

Forester (1989) suggests that there is a continuum of decision-making that runs from an ideally rational approach to a high politically structured approach. Forester maintains that every planning situation is different, and that it is "rational" to plan differently under different situations. It is important for the decision-maker to be skilled in recognizing the differences and constraints of each situation and reacting accordingly.

In summary, critical planning theory advocates planning in a more practical way, while recognizing power struggles and the political dimensions of planning that exist. It also stresses and the need for planners to incorporate communication, negotiation, and action in their planning activities. Forester (1989) describes critical planning practice as, "technically skilled and politically sensitive," and "simultaneously an organizing and democratizing practice" (p. 162).

Cervero and Wilson Theory

The most important characteristic of the Cervero and Wilson (1994; 2006) theory is that it recognizes the *context* of planning in addition to the *process* of planning. It accounts for much of the social and political nature of planning that is missing from other models. In their theoretical model, Cervero and Wilson (2006) have used a metaphorical concept called the *planning table*. They refer to it as a "metaphor to focus attention on what matters in educational planning" (p. 6). The planning table can be a real, physical place or a metaphorical place where decisions are made about educational programs. In reality decisions are often not made sitting at a conference table but rather "with others in

conversations on telephones, through e-mail, and faxes, and sometimes privately in offices, hallways, and restrooms or at social gatherings" (p. 81).

Cervero and Wilson (2006) maintain that people plan educational programs that will change people's lives. Inherent in the planning process is the power that exists in relationships among those who are involved in planning. According to Cervero and Wilson, there are four dynamics take place between people at the planning table: (a) power relations either enable or constrain people's access to the table, (b) people represent other's interests at the table, (c) ethical commitments define who should be represented at the table, and (d) negotiation between people takes place at the table.

Power. Power is explained by Cervero and Wilson (2006) as the "capacity to act" (p. 85). These actions occur in and are based on socially structured relationships among people. According to Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1997) power is always present, is sometimes balanced or unbalanced, and is often negotiated. Foucault (1982) believes that power frames all human relationships. Cervero and Wilson explain that understanding power relationships, according to their theory, does not imply that power is coercive, but rather it can be constraining or enabling, and therefore is "always being negotiated at the planning table" (p. 87).

In much adult education literature there are references to hegemony, power, and the status quo. Hegemony refers to ways in which an individual or groups maintain power and control over others. Hegemony allows some individuals or groups to gain access to positions of authority while denying others that privilege. The concern of many researchers and scholars is that hegemonic practices and structures "normalize and reify the experiences of society, while negating the realities of others" (Sissel & Sheared, 2001, p. 4).

In reference to the planning table, these hegemonic practices can affect decisions that are being made for those who are to be educated. Apple (1996) maintains that there are "clear silences" in areas of education that do not critically address dynamics of power in regard to race, gender and class (p. 141).

Interests. The next tenet of Cervero and Wilson (2006) theory is the interests of those involved in the planning process. Interests are "centrally involved the exercise of power" (p. 255). People come to the planning table with a complex set of interests, motivations, and purposes that influence the planning process. In addition to educational outcomes, there are social and political outcomes as well. In many cases people at the planning table are representing the interests of others who may or may not be at that table. Very often these interests conflict with one another. Cervero and Wilson stress that the planner should represent the interests of the people who affected by the program. If the person is not at the planning table, then those who are should be a legitimate representative, be the best representative in the situation, and substantively represent the interests for those absent at the table. Cervero and Wilson point out that this last concern is especially important because often, learners in particular, may have little 'voice' in the process.

Ethical Responsibility. Another concept of the Cervero and Wilson (2006) theory is the ethics of those involved in planning. Planners at the table act in an ethical manner when they consider two questions. They are: Who benefits in what ways? And, whose interests should be represented at the planning table? Cervero and Wilson stress that ethical commitments are intricately embedded in the social and political relationships of those involved in planning. Ethics are necessary because "those with the most power can

exercise it to determine . . . educational and political outcomes" (p. 91). Ethical commitments, then, democratize the planning process and help to equalize asymmetrical power relations in the social, cultural, political systems in planning organizations.

Negotiation. A fourth tenet in the Cervero and Wilson (2006) theory is negotiation. They maintain that "power itself is always being negotiated at the planning table" (p. 87). Two outcomes occur in planning: (a) negotiations focus on decisions that are made in planning, and (b) negotiations either maintain or alter the social and political relationships of those involved in planning. Negotiation is necessary for democratic outcomes of the planning process. Cervero and Wilson (1994) define negotiation from Webster as a way to "confer, bargain, or discuss with a view to reaching an agreement" (p. 256). O'Flynn (2006), expresses the idea deliberative democracy in the following way: "A democratic system is deliberative when political decisions are arrived at through a process of public reasoning and discussion to which each citizen can freely contribute but is equally willing to listen to, and reflect upon, opposing views" (p. 7). The planning table, according to Cervero and Wilson, is a place where democratic negotiation of interests can and should take place. *Major Themes from Cervero and Wilson Studies*

Many researchers have recognized the work of Cervero and Wilson (1994; 2006) as a groundbreaking change to theories about program planning of adult education programs. For this next section I will attempt organize several studies according to the central concepts of Cervero and Wilson's planning theory. They are power, negotiation, interests, and responsibility.

Power. Several scholars have studied power that is negotiated in planning relationships. Maruatona (2001) conducted a dissertation study of planning literacy for a

national program in Botswana. His study concluded with five findings: that planners had historically worked with literacy, that the traditional program reproduced state hegemony, that state level planning reproduced the status quo, that the interests of the planners were more important that the learners, and that there was resistance against the hegemonic practices of the state. Hanscome and Cervero (2003) examined relationships of power and gender in a study of human resource managers. They found that male and female use of power was profoundly different and that the strategies used by respondents reflected gendered contexts of power. Despite efforts of HRD managers to ensure fairness, they still perpetuate discriminatory practices against women. In a dissertation study, Osborne (2006) investigated how interests and power relations influence the production of television news. She found that hegemony influences the decision making process, and that news choices reflect and reproduced the cultural views of the community.

A study by Rees, Cervero, Moshi, and Wilson (1997) investigated the use of power through the use of language and verbal interaction in program planning sessions. They found that planners use language to reposition their power in relationships, or to empower themselves. They concluded that planning demands the skillful and political use of language. McDonald (1996) considered whether or not community based planning for environmental education could be accomplished in an atmosphere of unequal power relationships. She found that through a democratic process, planners could find their voice and equalize the relationships of power in the process. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1998) examined how relationships of power exist in classrooms as compared to the wider social context. A comparative case study revealed that a classroom is not a neutral setting for

education. Instead, the classroom duplicates existing societal relations of power with regard to gender and race.

In a quantitative study, Yang, Cervero, Valentine, and Benson (1998) developed an instrument to measure adult educator's power and influence tactics in program planning practice. The Power and Influence Tactics Scale (POINTS) was developed to identify seven influencing tactics including reasoning, consulting, appealing, networking, bargaining, pressuring and counteracting. The study revealed that there is an underlying structure of patterns of power and influence tactics in program planning practice. Hendricks (2001) conducted another quantitative study using the POINTS instrument by surveying students and faculty of adult education graduate programs in North America. The study resulted in two findings: the POINTS instrument needed further refinement to increase reliability and that adult education planners should be cognizant of issues of power, conflict and influence in program planning.

Negotiation. Several case studies addressed the use of negotiation in planning contexts. Watkins and Tisdell (2006) examined how adult degree program administrators negotiate power and interests in higher education settings to create greater access for adult learners. This study combined two theories, the Cervero and Wilson theory along with Bourdieu's theory of social capital. They found that program planners drew on their social capital using their position, job titles, and formal degrees to negotiate and network with others to exert influence. A case study conducted by Umble, Cervero, and Langone (2001) examined the practices of negotiation in a continuing education course in public health. The findings of the study revealed that planning had to occur in a historical context to maintain policy. They found that power, interests, and relations are not static but a

continually renegotiated. Substantive negotiation helped to reorganize and implement the course amid personal, organization, and societal interests of those at the planning table. Hendricks (1996) found that negotiating institutional relationships in a nursing education program helped to better serve nursing students. Her intention was to help others recognize the interpersonal power dynamics of planning nursing programs.

Other studies examined the negotiation of planning programs. Drennon and Cervero (2002) explored the struggles of facilitators attempting to use democratic principles while conducting staff development for practitioners of adult literacy programs. They found that issues of power, group identity, and public identity were reproduced and transformed during the process of planning. Kleiber (1996) analyzed the social dynamics of negotiating curriculum development for a distance education program in higher education. She argued that distance education programs held inferior, marginalized positions in relation to regular higher education programs. She found that negotiation was needed to help balance the power for the development of online programs. In a study of pastors, Burns and Cervero (2002) investigated the politics of ministry. This study examined how pastors learn how to navigate politically in ministry environments. They found that ministry involves negotiating with others, developing trust, and knowing the organizational ropes, and learning the politics of ministry.

Interests and Responsibility. The question of whose interests are served in the planning process is an important issue in program planning. Several case studies with questions of stakeholder interests have been conducted using the Cervero and Wilson theory. Maclean, (1996) using a case study, examined medical education programs and determined that the educational planning process should serve the interests of both the

institution and the learners. In this study they considered factors such patient referrals to a medical school's teaching hospitals and clinics, quality of patient care and the need to continue the teaching institution. The conclusion of the study was that many stakeholders have interests in the educational program and that all aspects should be considered. In a quantitative study of continuing pharmacy education, Smith (2004) examined the potential conflict of interests when educational and promotional activities are integrated. This study revealed that commercial influence on educational programs has significant consequences on educational practice. She recommends that all stakeholders should engage in dialogue to deliver appropriate and unbiased pharmaceutical care.

Mills, Cervero, Langone and Wilson (1995) investigated interests and the power relationships in a case study of county extension agents. The study concluded that structural factors such as organizational culture, available resources, and power relationships either enabled or constrained program planners practice. Carter (1996) conducted an ethnographic study of a coalition whose purpose was to empower the community through the implementation of educational programs on HIV, AIDS and substance abuse. She found that there was "significantly more tension and noise in the coalition planning environment than previously accounted for" (p. 33). Political and ethical issues were highly evident as stakeholders worked out the planning process. Carter concluded that planners must use strategies that would ensure community interests in planning.

A case study reported by Scott and Bchmitt-Boshnick (1996) examined the conflicting interests and ethical dilemmas of planning community-based programs using a participatory model. The study looked at women's experiences with a non-profit

organization for community development. The stakeholders were board members, volunteers, and participants along with policy makers, funders and government programmers. The coordinator of the program was at the center of the political process trying to balance the interests of the women and the government. Sandlin and Cervero (2003) used a case study method to explore how ideologies about work and education are negotiated in two welfare-to-work classes. They found that when students questioned problematic issues, they were quickly led back to "safe zone" areas of discussion. This study raised issues of whose interests were being served. Archie-Booker, Cervero, and Langone (1999) examined the politics of culturally relevant AIDS prevention education. These programs have ignored the needs of the participants by overlooking cultural factors. This study found that the organizational structure of community-based education programs did not represent the interests of African-American women in planning decisions.

In each of these studies with the Cervero and Wilson (1994; 2006) theory, it is evident that relationships of power and negotiation of interests are present in the planning process. Hopefully ethical considerations are present as well, but in many cases they are not. Cervero and Wilson suggest that stakeholders must negotiate democratically to ensure that all stakeholder's interests are represented at the planning table. The idea of negotiating democratically is somewhat idealistic, however, because it assumes that all people wish to be democratic in their dealings with others. This would be true in an ideal world but is not necessarily true in the real world. Sometimes negotiation is not possible, nor are the interests of all stakeholders even considered. While the Cervero and Wilson theory accounts for the power relationships that exist in planning, it can only strive to

advise us on the "how to's" of negotiation within the political spheres of educational planning.

Implications for the Study

The Cervero and Wilson (1994; 2006) theory represents the theoretical framework for this study. With this theoretical framework I attempted to examine the planning process of the state virtual school. State level planning is a political undertaking especially in regard to adult literacy education. Literacy education has been a subject in the news media, a platform for politicians, and a concern for administrators and educators from preschool through adulthood. There are multiple stakeholder interests in the planning process. Examining how these interests are negotiated contributes to the goal of this study.

The Cervero and Wilson (1994; 2006) theory contributes to the state level planning process in several ways. There are three considerations that I believe are important for the planning process to work successfully. They are: knowing historical and social context of the program, addressing concerns of unequal power relations and hegemony, and recognizing the multiple stakeholders and their agendas at the planning table.

Historical and Social Context

It is important to recognize that programs in any given situation have histories and social contexts; therefore one cannot ignore that history. Cervero and Wilson (2006) argue that several program-planning models recognize the need for context but do not stress the importance the organization's history as well. They contend, "These planning models ... do not well describe how real people plan programs in socially organized historically evolving conditions" (p. 118). Umble, Cervero, and Langone (2001) found in their study that planning had to occur in a historical context to in order to maintain policy. State officials

involved in planning have a mandate to fulfill public policy demands in when planning educational programs. In the context of planning adult literacy education on a state level, it is important know the history of how programs have previously operated and be aware of how public policy governs these programs.

Unequal Power Relations

The other important concern of state level educational planning is the asymmetric distribution of power at the planning table. Cervero and Wilson (1994) note that, "Planners know that they are not free agents able to translate their own interests directly into purpose, content and format of a program. Rather their planning is always conducted within complex set of personal, organizational and social relationships of power" (p. 4). Hegemony has been described as power and control over others. The concern in state level planning is that the state continually reproduces its hegemonic power by controlling what is planned it and who is at the planning table. Does literacy education reflect the concerns of the learners or the state? Who is representing those interests? These are questions that need answers in state level planning.

Maruatona (2001) found in his study that planning outcomes did not challenge the hegemony of the state but instead reproduced the status quo. Furthermore, "it enabled the state to plan an expert-driven program" (p. 185). He describes the implementation of a literacy program in Botswana as being an expert-driven, technical process using materials developed by secondary teachers with no adult education training, using universal materials that would treat learners as passive consumers. This does not sound unlike many literacy programs in North America. Apple (2006), challenges the practice of emphasizing only one set of teaching strategies for literacy and reading education, which he stresses has

resulted from the No Child Left Behind Act. It is important to recognize the role of national legislation and its potential for determining the direction of educational programs; thereby reinforcing unequal power relationships in planning.

Stakeholders

Recognizing all of those stakeholders' interests requires understanding and critical reflection. Planners can overlook "below the surface" interests of those involved. Cervero and Wilson (2006) articulate this concept well by stating, "Of the complex sets of interests that people represent at the planning table, some are related to educational outcomes, whereas others are related to social and political outcomes" (p. 89). It is important to not be "politically naïve and practically ineffective" by ignoring the outcomes people wish to achieve in planning. Cervero and Wilson contend that this is "one of the fundamental blind spots of almost all planning theories, which is to assume that programs are only about educational outcomes" (p. 90).

To summarize this discussion of adult literacy education, virtual and distance education, and program planning, I have drawn several conclusions from the literature. They are as follows:

- (1) There is a lack of sufficient research about how to develop virtual and distance education programs for adult literacy participants and more is needed.
- (2) The social context for both learning and planning educational programs is important. Recognition of this context should be an essential part of planning the program.

- (3) Recognizing and working within the social context of education can help to equalize the power relationships that exist at the planning table and in the classroom, virtual or otherwise.
- (4) Power and political agendas, along with legislative mandates, impact the way providers can structure and offer adult literacy programs.
- (5) Providers of adult education and policy makers need to avoid "quick fixes" as an answer to serious problems involving illiterate adults and high school dropouts.
- (6) Virtual and distance education has the potential to help learners reach their educational goals by offering alternative learning opportunities if issues such as learner context, access, and appropriate learning technologies are addressed.

Virtual education for adult literacy students is expanding. Hopefully, as state planners initiate programs for this population, they will recognize the needs of these learners and work to implement effective programs. The question of who benefits in the planning process should be addressed if as we continue to develop adult literacy programs. Although providers of programs face many constraints, they should continually look for ways to plan meaningful and appropriate programs for participants.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how stakeholder interests shape the planning and implementation of a state virtual school program for adult literacy students in one southern state. The three research questions guiding the study were:

(1) What is the historical context of virtual program for adult literacy students?

- (2) What are the interests of the stakeholders in the planning process?
- (3) How are the interests of the stakeholders negotiated in the planning process?

This chapter is organized into six sections. First, I will discuss the research design of the study; second, I will describe the data sources; third, I will explain how data were collected; fourth, I will describe how data were analyzed; fifth, I will describe the validity and reliability of the study, and sixth, I will explain my subjectivity for the study.

Research Design

For this study I utilized a qualitative case study design to accomplish my research purpose. Merriam (2009) defines qualitative case study research as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). She further defines the case as "a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 40). A case study could be one person or one group such as a class, or it could be a school or program, or group of schools. The defining factor that makes it a case is the boundary around it. In the case of the virtual school program, the defining factor is the fact that it was a "program within a program"

with a specific distinction—being a virtual program within an adult education program thus giving it boundaries.

For this case study, I used a constructivist approach. This approach strives to examine people's lived experiences as multiple realities and is constructed through the research. Merriam (1998) suggests that knowledge gained through constructivist research is "inductive, hypothesis- or theory generating" (p. 4) as opposed to the deductive knowledge gained through theory testing. Most qualitative researchers adhere to the concept of constructed realities. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) sum it up in the following way stating, "Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationships between the researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (p. 10). According to Schwandt (1997), "Constructivists hold that knowledge of the world is not a simple reflection of what there is, but a set of social artifacts of what we make of what is there" (p. 20). The constructivist approach contributed to the understanding of the planning process from multiple points of view.

Sample Selection

The adult education virtual school program was piloted across the state. In order to learn how this program was planned, I used a snowball sampling technique to discover the key players in the planning process. Snowball sampling, according to Patton (2002), "is an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases . . . by asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information rich cases" (p. 237). For my sample, I began with key state officials who were involved in planning the virtual pilot program by conducting preliminary interviews with them. The following officials were interviewed:

- (1) the state coordinator of the adult education virtual program,
- (2) the director of the regular high school virtual program,
- (3) a formal evaluator of the adult education virtual program pilot,
- (4) the former state director of adult education who was responsible for initiating the adult education pilot.

After conducting these preliminary interviews, I looked for other additional sources for information. Patton (2002) states, "In most programs or systems, a few key names or incidents are mentioned repeatedly" (p. 237). He suggests that these key names become known as the snowballing process continues. The snowballing process helped to reveal who the other stakeholders were in this process. Other key persons involved in planning that I finally interviewed were:

- (5) the associate vice president of a technical college responsible for helping to initiate the pilot,
- (6) the consultant who helped to train the teachers,
- (7) the state technical coordinator responsible for online operations for the state,
- (8) the current state director of adult education,
- (9) a local county adult education director,
- (10) three adult education teachers responsible for developing and delivering online courses for the pilot program.

Data Sources

This case study utilized multiple forms of data collection. Collecting more than one type of data contributed to both the validity and the richness of the study. Glesne (2006) suggests that "ideally, the qualitative researcher draws on some combination of techniques to collect data, rather than a single technique" (p. 36). In addition to the combination of techniques used for data collection, I relied on the different perspectives of the participants of the study to provide data. Stake (1995) suggests that "two principal uses of case study are to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others" (p. 64). A case study helps to portray the multiple views of those involved in the case. For this study I gathered two primary types of data which included interviews and documents. A third data source, observations, was limited to one planning meeting that I was able to participate in and observe. The evaluator of the pilot observed other planning meetings and she also provided notes and documents from those meetings for me to study.

Interviews

Through the use of interviews I questioned administrators on how they planned and implemented the virtual school program on a state level. Additionally, I sought interviews with local adult education directors and teachers that were directly involved in course planning and curriculum decisions. Typically the directors would refer me to the teachers because the virtual pilot teachers were more involved in planning and implementation than the local directors. These interviews helped to gain insight in the decision-making process as the program was implemented.

According to Patton (2002), we interview people to gain others' perspectives: "We interview to find out what is in a on someone else's mind, to gather their stories" (p. 341). In this sense, as with other methods of data collection in qualitative research, the interviewer is the "primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). Therefore skillful interviewing is necessary for formal research. Patton (2002) maintains that "the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely

dependent on the interviewer" (p. 341). The interviews in this case provided a rich source of information, helping me to gain important insight in the minds the administrators of the program.

Interviews are generally one of the following: highly structured, semi structured, unstructured, or open-ended. Merriam (2009) suggests that most qualitative interviews are "more open-ended and less structured" (p. 90). Stake (1995) also recommends "a short list of issue oriented questions" (p. 65), that will help to explore each interviewee's unique experiences and special stories. An interview guide, according to Patton (2002), is a list of questions that are to be explored during the interview. It helps to make interviewing more systematic by "delimiting in advance the issues to be explored" (p. 343). In this case study, I used semistructured interviews with questions that were flexible and evolving. In several instances the questions evolved during the interviews and helped to yield important information for the study that had not been considered originally when developing the guide. I endeavored to ask questions that would help to answer my research questions, without leading the participants. In several cases I conducted follow up interviews to clarify missing information or uncertainty about specific events. The interview guide can be seen in Appendix A.

There were some important guidelines that I attempted to follow during the interviews. Asking good questions is essential in gaining good data. Patton (2002) describes six types of questions that are helpful for interviews. They are experience and behavior, opinion of values, feeling, knowledge, sensory, and background/demographic questions. For this study I concentrated on experience and behavior, knowledge, and background questions. Patton also recommends the interviewer should ask questions that

are clear and understandable. Questions that I tried to avoid were leading questions (where my personal bias might have interfered by influencing the way a participant answers the question); multiple questions in a single question (where the participant has to address too many issues at once); and yes or no questions that did not give a chance for explanation. Most of the participants were very easy to interview and described their experiences in detail; while some of the participants were more difficult to interview because their involvement in the case was more limited, and some of the state administrators were under time pressure, thus making their answers more succinct or restricted.

One concern for me was gaining access and then establishing trust and rapport at the beginning of an interview. Merriam (1998) suggests that "participants usually enjoy sharing their expertise with an interested and sympathetic listener" (p. 85). She further states that it is important to take a non-judgmental stance that is sensitive and respectful. This was especially important for me as the interviewer. I wanted each of the participants in my study to feel comfortable enough to "tell their stories" without feeling tense or strained. In some of the interviews, participants asked me to turn off the recorder while they discussed their experiences. The attributes of the interviewer play an important part in conducting good interviews. Glesne (2006) suggests that an interviewer be anticipatory before the interview (while gathering needed materials), be a learner during the interview, be analytic during and after the interview, and be nondirective while asking questions. She states, "to be non-directive is not to be a robot or impassive," suggesting that an interviewer's role should be warm and inviting without asking directive questions (p. 98). The relationship with the persons I interviewed was a delicate one, balancing my need for

information with their openness, or in some cases hesitation, to share with me. Merriam (2009) states that the "interview-respondent interaction is a complex phenomenon" requiring a nonjudgmental, respectful attitude (p. 109).

Document Collection

Documents were the second most important data set for this study. I was able to gather many important documents for this research including newspaper articles, letters, emails, minutes of meetings, records, historical documents, and public records. The document collection also included correspondence about the development of the virtual school program, legislative mandates, course curriculum, records of program results, and formal evaluation reports. The evaluator of the adult education virtual program supplied numerous documents, personal notes and emails, along with copies of surveys taken when she wrote the formal evaluation for the State Department of Education. These notes contributed valuable information for my study. Merriam (2009) states that documents are "a readymade source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator" (p. 139). Glesne (2006) points out that "documents and other unobtrusive measures provide both historical and contextual dimensions to your observations and interviews" (p. 68). Documents for this study helped to widen the breadth of information needed for the research questions.

Merriam (2009) suggests looking at documents with an open mind. For my study, this openness led to "serendipitous discoveries" in the decision-making processes for the virtual school program (p. 150). The documents were useful, not only in understanding what was apparent, but also led to other paths of inquiry. After collecting the documents I analyzed them in similar ways to the interviews to help gain insight from the data. Merriam

(2009) points out that "One of the greatest advantages of using documentary material is its stability" (p. 155). Documents provided a rich source of information for this case study. *Participant Observation*

Observing participants of the study was a third method that I used for data collection. Tedlock (2005) explains that "participant observation was created ... as an ethnographic field method for the study of small, homogeneous cultures" (p. 467). Anthropologists used this method because it yielded information from the native's point of view. Qualitative researchers in education have borrowed the methods of ethnographers to conduct research. Observation as a research tool is different from every day observation; however, it must be deliberate, systematic, valid and reliable (Merriam, 2009). The one key observation that I was able to do was observing a state staff development meeting where teachers were being trained on use of the software for the virtual program. This meeting yielded important information about the program and provided networking opportunities for me as a researcher, which later led to other significant interviews. Other opportunities for observation were not possible due to the fact that my research took place after many planning meetings had already occurred. However, I did gain access to observation notes of the capstone meeting of planners and stakeholders held the previous summer after the program was piloted, which had been completed by the program evaluator.

During the observation process of the staff development meeting, I took notes which I later analyzed. Merriam (2009) suggests three types of field notes: verbal descriptions of the settings, quotations of what people say, and observer's comments. During the observation I summarized what was happening, drew a diagram of the setting, and added other notes that came to mind later. I also kept a fieldwork journal, which

provided an introspective record of my experiences as a researcher. For me it was helpful to keep these notes over a period of time in order to help recall significant events during the research period. According to Merriam, this "joint collection and analysis of data is essential in qualitative research" (p. 131).

I chose to make this research project a case study because it examines a specific educational program, in this case, the virtual school pilot program for adult literacy students. Each of the above mentioned methods—interviewing, document collection, and observation—are typically used to conduct case study research. With my case study I collected, organized and analyzed data about the adult education virtual program. According to Patton (2002), case study data includes all the information one has about the case. The raw data from diverse sources can then be written into a story. Patton points out that "a skillfully crafted case reads like fine weaving" (p. 450). Each of the data sources of information contributes to a holistic, comprehensive representation of this study. Table 3.1 displays a summary of the data for this study.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data from this study, I used constant comparative analysis to answer my research questions. The constant comparative method, according to Bogdan and Biklan (2007), is a research design used with multi-data sources such as in a case study. Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally developed the method to support grounded theory research, which is theory that emerges from data. The constant comparative method is used widely in all forms of qualitative research. In this method, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), data collection, analysis, and theory development are closely related to one another. I used the Cervero and Wilson (2006) planning theory as a framework for this

study, not to test it deductively, but to inductively inform me of evidence concerning

stakeholders' interests in the development of the adult education virtual program through

data collection (Merriam, 2009).

Table 3.1

Description of Data

Data	Item	Number	Number
			of Pages
Interviews	Transcripts of interviews with state	5	74
	administrators		
	Transcripts of teachers	3	46
	Transcripts of local directors/administrators	2	28
	Transcripts of consultants	2	23
	Transcripts of students (used only in the final	8	65
	chapter)		
	Total interviews	20	
Documents	Book Chapter of State Virtual School History	1	16
	(Unpublished)		
	Adult Education Virtual Program Evaluation	1	25
	Report		
	High School Virtual Program Evaluation Report	1	36
	Copy of Legislation	1	15
	Virtual School Policy	1	12
	High School Redesign Report	1	34
	Evaluator's Surveys for Adult Education Pilot	20	93
	Emails	15	30
	News Articles	2	5
	Evaluator's Notes	1	15
Observation	Staff Development Meeting for Teachers	1	5
Notes	Evaluator's Observation Notes of Capstone	1	10
	Meeting		
Total Pages			532

Glaser (1978) recommends the following steps for qualitative research, which I followed in the analysis of my research:

- (1) Collected data
- (2) Observed key events and activities that helped to develop categories of focus
- (3) Wrote and described the categories
- (4) Worked on coding and writing as the categories emerged

According to Goetz and LeCompte (1981) this method "combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed" (p. 58). After the data was compiled, I examined the data to answer each of the three research questions. For each question I used constant comparative analysis. I recorded and classified the events, comparing them across categories in order to answer the research questions. After establishing categories and subcategories for each of the questions, I narrowed the categories down to approximately five for each of research questions. In some cases I discarded a category if there were not enough quotes for the interviews or information from the documents to substantiate a particular category or theme. Goetz and LeCompte suggest that, "As events are constantly compared with previous events, new topological dimensions, as well as new relationships, may be discovered" (p. 58). Continuous comparison and refinement throughout the data collection and analysis process contributed to the development of themes for each of the research questions.

Validity and Reliability

Merriam (2009) describes internal validity in qualitative research as "the question of how research findings match reality" (p. 213). She points out, however, that reality can vary based on one's point of view. The goal of the qualitative researcher, then, is to

"understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening" (p. 215). Merriam and Glesne (2006) offer several strategies that are useful for enhancing validity of the study. I have used seven of these strategies to ensure validity of this study:

- Triangulation: The use of multiple data sources contributed to the trustworthiness of the data.
- (2) Member checks: After writing a synopsis of the development of the virtual program I asked several of the participants to check it for accuracy. Their suggestions resulted only minor changes to the document.
- (3) Adequate engagement in data collection: Over period of two years, I engaged in preparation for research, data gathering, data analysis, writing and reviewing the information concerning this study.
- (4) Peer review/examination: In addition to my committee, I had several other peers in the field, who had previously completed doctoral programs serve as "sounding boards" to my research.
- (5) Clarification of researcher bias: I reflected on my own position and theoretical stance as I listened the participants, recording my insights in a researcher journal.
- (6) Rich, thick descriptions: The first research question is devoted to understanding the context of the study.
- (7) Maximum variation: For this case study I sought the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, examining diverse perspectives on the development of the virtual program.

Merriam (2009) suggests that traditional reliability "is the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (p. 221). She further states that "Replication of a qualitative study will not yield the same results, but this does not discredit the results of a particular study" (p. 221). More importantly, then, is the dependability and consistency of the study. The above mentioned strategies contributed to the reliability of my study.

A critique of case study research is that it is not generalizable. Stake (2005), however, argues that there is a naturalistic generalization that can be made with case studies. Narratives and descriptions can provide meaning in a contextual environment. Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that one can generalize from case studies depending on the case and how it is chosen. He suggests that the real life experiences found in case studies can inform others; thus, the information from this study can be used for others planning virtual programs for adult literacy students.

Subjectivity Statement

I have written about the concept of constructivism in relation to learning theory, and consider this approach as my research perspective as well. I believe that both learning and research take place in the context of socially constructed realities. For this reason I chose qualitative research as a method of learning about the issues that I consider important for planning educational programs.

As I stated in the beginning, I have been concerned for young adults who have dropped out of high school and need to complete their high school education. This concern takes place on many levels—as a practitioner, a parent, and finally a scholar. I have observed many young people, including two of my own children, struggle to finish high school. Although my children did thankfully graduate from high school, many of their
friends, acquaintances and others that I work with professionally did not complete their high school education.

As both a parent and an adult educator, I have had the opportunity to look at adult literacy education from more than one point of view. I worked for many years as a teacher in an adult education setting, until the time came when each of my own three children participated in an adult program at various times. These times felt very different as I made the transition from being a provider of the program to being a participant of the program, even if vicariously through my children. On one occasion I was observing a group of young adults in a drug recovery program. During the meeting the leader made an announcement for those interested to study for the GED online. Around the same time I had been involved in implementing the same GED online program at work. As I listened to the announcement, offering the program, it occurred to me that the world in which these young people lived was very far removed from the GED online program that I was quite familiar with as an adult educator. I wondered if we, as program planners and teachers, really understood the students we hoped to help educate. Did we have knowledge of the students' lives, issues, concerns, and learning problems? Were their interests truly represented as we planned programs? Were our programs effective and helpful for these young people? These are important questions for reflection as I complete this study.

I should also mention my interest in the use of educational technology, having worked in this arena for several years. I am especially interested in the potential of distance education for adult learners, recognizing that adults have busy lives and demanding responsibilities with jobs and families. Courses available through the Internet are becoming increasingly popular. As technology advances alternative educational

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possibilities become more attractive and available. I also recognize, however, that distance education presents its own set of challenges for low literate adults and may not always be appropriate for every individual.

Earlier I used my interest in art as a metaphor for creating a "portrait" with this research study. Others, such as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) also use the metaphor of drawing portraits in their work, *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, in which they describe qualitative analysis. Patton sums it up well when he eloquently states: "In the complex and multi-faceted analytical integration of disciplined science, creative artistry, and personal reflexivity, we mold interviews, observations, documents, and field notes into *findings*" (p. 432). Hopefully, this research presents a rich portrait of study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine how stakeholder interests shape the planning of a state virtual school program for adult literacy students in one southern state. Research questions guiding the study were:

(1) What is the historical context of the virtual program for adult literacy students?

(2) What are the interests of the stakeholders in the planning process?

(3) How are the interests of stakeholders negotiated in the planning process?

This chapter has three major sections. In the first section I will address the first research question by providing a history of the program and describing aspects of the program impacting its development. In the second and third sections I will address the other two research questions, explaining the findings related to each of these questions.

Throughout this discussion I will use pseudonyms for the individuals involved in planning. In addition I will use pseudonyms for specific locations such as cities, counties, and higher education institutions such as technical colleges to provide anonymity for all involved in this study. When quotes include the state's name, I will simply refer to the "state" in these instances. In order to help understand the persons described in this study I have included a list of the study participants in Table 4.1, giving their pseudonyms, titles, and role in the planning of the adult education virtual program. In addition to the table, I felt it was helpful to use titles with names depicting individual roles throughout the discussion (such as State Director Campbell) in order to add clarity to the discussion.

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Table 4.1Study Participants and Roles

Pseudonym	Title	Role	
Coordinator	Coordinator of	Ms. Thomas was the primary person	
Thomas	adult education	responsible for administering the adult	
	virtual program	education virtual program at the state level.	
State Director	Current state	Dr. Donovan was the current state director of	
Donovan	director of adult	adult education, replacing Dr. Campbell after	
	education	her departure. He acted in an advisory capacity	
		only for the adult education virtual program.	
State Director	Former state	Dr. Campbell was former the state director of	
Campbell	director of adult	adult education who had planned and initiated	
	education	the adult education virtual program.	
Virtual High	Director of the	Ms. Delany was the director for the high school	
School Director	High School	virtual program, responsible for developing and	
Delany	Virtual Program	implementing the statewide program.	
Technical	Technical	Ms. Taylor was the state technical coordinator,	
Coordinator	Coordinator for	responsible for making sure that all the virtual	
Taylor	the High School	programs were working properly.	
	Virtual Program		
Vice President	Vice President of	Ms. Davis was an associate vice president of	
Davis	South East	South East Technical College, responsible	
	Technical College	developing an online program for the local	
		county adult education program. She was also a	
		former vice president of PLATO Learning.	
Consultant	Consultant and	Ms. Nelson was a consultant and trainer, hired	
Nelson	trainer for	by Davis to set up the PLATO software, train the	
	teachers	teachers and helps modify curriculum. She was	
		also a former consultant for PLATO Learning.	
Evaluator Jones	Evaluator of the	Dr. Jones was a university professor, hired to	
	adult education	formally evaluate the adult education virtual	
	virtual program	program.	
Teacher Dennis	Teacher of virtual	Ms. Dennis was a science teacher, asked to teach	
	courses	courses for the adult education virtual program.	
Teacher King	Teacher of virtual	Ms. King was a teacher from a local adult	
	courses	education program who taught a government	
		and economics course.	
Teacher Canton	Teacher of virtual	Ms. Canton was a teacher from a local adult	
	courses	education program who taught a virtual	
		chemistry course.	
Local Director	Local adult	Ms. Eason was a local director of an adult	
Eason	education	education program. She was Ms. Dennis'	
	director	supervisor.	

Findings Related to Research Question One

The first question, "What is the historical context of the virtual program for adult literacy students?" attempts to identify the history of the program and how it impacted the development of the virtual program for adult education students. The first question helps to provide a context for the other two research questions. Through the interviews and documents I was able to establish the historical events occurring before and during the program development. Further, the data yielded information about certain aspects of the program which helped to understand the nature and character of the program. Four of these aspects influencing the program's development and mentioned most frequently in the data were the planners of the program, the participants, the funding and legislation, and the curriculum and management systems.

History of Development

The virtual program for adult education was implemented as a pilot program during the year 2007. However, this development was not an isolated case, as the state was simultaneously involved in the development of a state virtual school program for students enrolled in regular high schools. This high school virtual program began in the spring of 2006 as a pilot program, exploring the feasibility of a state virtual school. The adult education program started several months later. This discussion will focus primarily on the adult education virtual program, but because of the interrelated development and the confusion that might exist with the two, it is important to distinguish between the two programs by name: the adult education virtual program and the high school virtual program. At the end of the year 2007, state leaders discontinued the adult education

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virtual program as a separate program and merged it into the regular high school virtual

program. A timeline, followed by a discussion, is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 *Timeline*

Key Dates	Key Events			
2005	High School Design Commission recommends development of a			
	state virtual high school			
2006	 May - the State Department of Education pilots a virtual high 			
	school program during the summer			
	 December - state legislators introduce a bill to establish the state 			
	virtual high school with a provision for an adult education pilot			
2007	 January - planning, development and training meetings are 			
	conducted for teachers from adult education programs throughout			
	the state			
	 March - Phase I of the adult education virtual pilot is implemente May - virtual school legislation is signed by the governor June - an evaluation meeting is held for stakeholders involved in the adult education virtual pilot, at which time the decision to er 			
	the pilot is discussed			
	 August -Phase II is implemented 			
	 December - planners discontinue the adult education pilot when 			
	PLATO course licenses expire			
2008	 January - Adult education students are enrolled into regular high 			
	school virtual courses through adult education centers			

The adult education virtual program officially began in the year 2007 and operated throughout the year; however, several key events occurred preceding the time which led to the development of this program. Prior to the development of a virtual school state leaders began looking at effective strategies for educating the state's high school students. In 2005, the state superintendent of education convened a High School Redesign Commission to study the latest research on high school initiatives that promoted achievement. The purpose of the commission was to make recommendations for future state action. One of the recommendations from this report was a state virtual school. According to the report:

The state should mandate and fund alternative pathways to graduation to assist students who are behind academically and to foster individual progression through high school. Options should include the following:

- Virtual high schools to enhance classroom learning, equalize opportunities among districts, and promote individual progression through school;
- Content-recovery labs provided during or after the school day to enable students who have fallen behind to complete courses and get back on track. (High School Redesign Report, 2005)¹

With this recommendation, the State Department of Education staff began work on the development of a virtual high school program which was implemented in the summer of

2006. Virtual High School Director Delany explains:

We partnered together to develop the virtual school, the virtual program, so the Office of High School Redesign, which no longer exists, now provided grant money to these ten pilot sites to get them to participate in our pilot project.

Following the development of the high school virtual program, the Office of Adult Education at the State Department initiated a virtual pilot program of its own. Planners used adult education teachers to develop courses exclusively for adult education students throughout the state. Evaluator Jones explains how the high school virtual program preceded the adult education virtual pilot program:

The AE pilot described in this evaluation is related to a relatively new ... state virtual [high] school program ... The virtual high school program that was piloted in 2006 provides virtual courses for high school initial credit and for content recovery ... the aim [was] to develop a number of virtual high school programs for initial credit/content recovery and to pilot a series of

virtual courses for the AE population. (Evaluation Report, 2007, see reference note ¹)

The adult education virtual program was created specifically to address the needs of adult literacy students. Planners of the program implemented two official phases in 2007; Phase I in the spring and Phase II in the fall. At the end of Phase II in December, the separate program for adult education ended and students began taking courses through the virtual high school program in January 2008. They would continue to enroll through local adult education programs but would participate in classes along with other high school students. Teachers employed by the high school virtual program taught the courses to both sets of students and adult education teachers were no longer involved in teaching virtual courses.

Planners

There were several key individuals involved in planning the adult education virtual pilot program. Two of the original planners were the former state director of adult education, Dr. Campbell, and the director of the high school virtual program, Ms. Delany. Ms. Delany formed a task force working to establish a state virtual school. She later invited State Director Campbell, to be part of this task force. According to Dr. Campbell:

I joined her task force consisting of maybe four people from the state department. The very first task force, and then it grew a little bit larger to about 10 or 12, and what we did was we started looking at piloting, two summers ago, high school diploma classes online.

In addition to the State Department's efforts, another organization, South East Technical College had been successfully developing and implementing virtual courses for adult education students using PLATO Learning courseware. A third stakeholder and the leader of this initiative was Vice President Davis. Prior to her position with the technical college, Davis had worked as the vice president of education for PLATO Learning. This former experience contributed to her leadership in utilizing PLATO courseware for the county's local adult education program. Based on South East Technical College's successful use of PLATO for virtual courses, State Director Campbell choose to collaborate with this planner to develop the adult education pilot. According to Dr. Campbell:

So, what happened was, we did a demonstration grant with [South East Tech], and they used the PLATO platform. Because [Vice President Davis], who is very, very bright, and very familiar with the curriculum, she used to work with PLATO. So it worked out really well ... so we started piloting a program.

Evaluator Jones explains the collaboration between the planners and the organizations in

her report as well:

During the 2007 spring semester, [South East Technical College] and the State Department of Education (SDE) collaborated to establish a pilot project to test the feasibility of extending virtual online courses to Adult Education (AE) centers across the state. [South East Tech] provided expertise and organizational support. (Evaluation Report, 2007, see reference note ¹)

A successful track record with adult education students became the basis for which State

Director Campbell chose to use the South East Technical College model for the pilot.

Evaluator Jones explains:

Based on its experience and expertise in setting up online courses and ongoing work with a diverse adult population, [South East Tech] was selected to assist in the implementation of the AE pilot. [South East Tech] maintains up-to-date facilities and has been in the forefront of development and utilization of individualized computer-based courses for both instruction and remediation. (Evaluation Report, 2007, see reference note ¹) A fourth planner in the adult education pilot was a former consultant for PLATO, Ms. Nelson. She was hired to set up the program, help with curriculum development, and train the teachers. Consultant Nelson worked independently, no longer associated with PLATO. She had previously trained teachers and managed software for the South East Technical College program. Consultant Nelson describes her role in the beginning:

She [Vice President Davis] was the one who really initially got me involved because ... I knew the PLATO software, I had been training the teachers in the field at [South East Tech] and in some of the high schools that were using PLATO for credit recovery, so when the adult pilot was taking off, she had suggested that they get somebody like myself, who knew the product, who could come in and help them to implement the program, in the adult ed sites around [the state].

A fifth planner in the adult education pilot was a state coordinator, Ms. Thomas, from the Office of Adult Education in the State Department. Ms. Thomas was not involved in the original negotiations for the adult education virtual pilot, but later became the leader and coordinator of the program, following State Director Campbell's unexpected departure early in 2007. Describing her lack of early involvement, Coordinator Thomas states:

Our former director, [Dr. Campbell], unbeknownst to me, met with [Ms. Delaney], who is now the director of e-Learning because there is now an office of e-Learning that was established sometime earlier this school year . . . and she talked with . . . [Vice President Davis] who also works for the Technical College.

When Dr. Campbell left the position of State Director of Adult Education,

Coordinator Thomas became the chief person responsible for the adult education pilot program. The incoming State Director of Adult Education, Dr. Donovan, did not involve himself in the detailed operation of the adult education virtual pilot program. Instead he delegated the majority of the management of the program to Ms. Thomas. One other less prominent planner was Technical Coordinator Taylor, who worked closely with Director Delany in the high school virtual program. She assisted in all technical operations of program management.

Participants

Participants in the virtual program included local adult education directors and teachers from various local programs throughout the state. The participants also included the students in enrolled in county adult education programs. State officials originally chose seven programs as pilot sites to offer online courses for students statewide.

Local Directors. Typically directors were not as closely involved in the program development as the teachers were, but their supporting role helped to shape the virtual program. Their role included identifying teachers for virtual courses, attending planning meetings and helping to make course decisions. According to State Director Campbell:

We started piloting the program, we selected the adult ed programs that we felt could pull it off that had good leaders, good adult ed directors that would shepherd the process so to speak, and they would be very helpful.

Five of the local programs had also been part of the high school virtual pilot program as well. A description of the selection process for the seven sites, including adult education directors, teachers, and students was included in the formal evaluation report. Evaluator Jones explains why these participants were selected:

AE directors in seven sites agreed to work with the SDE and [South East Tech] to identify a variety of courses, course instructors, and students who would be willing to participate in the development and evaluation of the selected on-line virtual computer courses. Five of the seven sites that were selected had a history of virtual programs and had participated in the original high school virtual summer program. (Evaluation Report, 2007, see reference note¹)

During the second phase of the pilot that operated in the fall semester, additional local programs were included in the pilot and more courses were added to the program. Some of the original sites did not participate in the second phase.

Teachers. Seven adult education teachers were eventually included to be trained to use the PLATO Learning System, help develop course curriculum, and begin teaching students virtually. The teachers consisted of part and full-time staff from the seven local adult education programs. Teachers were paid a stipend of \$2000 in addition to their regular salary to teach the virtual courses.

Each of these teachers participated in an initial training session held in January, 2007. During the first meeting the consultant and other state leaders introduced the teachers to the PLATO system and gave teachers the opportunity to choose the courses they wished to teach. The three teachers that were interviewed for this study provided similar descriptions of the first planning meetings. Teacher King states:

They talked a little bit about the history of online classes, PLATO in particular and then they showed us some of the things that you could do with PLATO and then we actually started in with, you know, getting logins and username information and looking at some of the online curriculum and choosing classes.

Teacher Dennis states:

We all went to [South East Tech] because they had run a one program pilot . . . mostly the directors and the potential teachers all went to [South East Tech] and got a real quick orientation to the PLATO software which is what they have chosen to use as the curriculum.

Teacher Canton describes how she began with the pilot program:

There were several meetings [at South East Tech] . . . I thought they were good informational meetings, and good getting started type meetings . . . she

basically showed us PLATO and showed us content available and showed us how to navigate in the system.

All of the teachers described how they became involved in the adult education virtual pilot. Involvement, for these teachers, meant learning new software, choosing which course to teach, and developing that course. One teacher in particular, Ms. Dennis, became involved in course development and later provided informal training for the other teachers because of her adeptness and experience with PLATO. These activities took place before and during the pilot program once it started.

Students. The students of the adult education virtual program comprised a group that had dropped out of their regular high schools. Most of the students were between the ages of 17 and 21 years of age, but some were older. Students qualified for enrollment in the program if they had enough high school credits and were actively participating in adult education programs. The students coming to adult education programs frequently had problems with literacy or other issues that hindered them from graduating from high school. Teachers and administrators described the differences of adult education students. Teacher King states:

A lot of our students in [our county] are students that need to be kind of hand led through a process and have proven, they've got a track record of having issues with follow-through. They haven't finished high school in a traditional manner.

Evaluator Jones provided a similar description of the students in her interview. She stressed the challenges of adult education students compared to traditional high school students. She states:

A virtual program for adults offers many of the same benefits as the program designed for high school students. At the same time, adult students have

different challenges and barriers which make designing an adult virtual program somewhat different.

Barriers for adult education students include the lack of home computers and e-mail access in rural communities, and difficulty with work habits, time management skills, and communication skills. Director Campbell mentioned the literacy problem with adult education students stating, "most adult ed students are poor readers and most are at least two years behind in their academic levels."

Clearly the students in adult education represented a special population—students that had been at risk in high school, those that had dropped out for various reasons, students that had trouble with follow-through and completion, and students that may have had learning difficulties or disabilities. Furthermore, these students frequently had economic problems, resulting in barriers to education such as lack of access to computer technology, lack of adequate transportation to adult education centers or libraries, and lack of childcare for their children. These barriers presented special challenges for the planners of the adult education virtual program.

Funding and Legislation

Funding for the adult education pilot program was achieved through several means. Initially funding was provided through the State Office of Adult Education. Several partners provided funds from their sources to purchase the PLATO Learning software. According to Dr. Campbell:

We did partner with [Director Delany], where she was primarily using Florida Virtual courses, and just buying them for use in the State, and then we also used PLATO because we hooked up with [South East Tech], and I gave [South East Tech] a grant, a demonstration grant, so that they could use PLATO, and use it in their adult ed center. Virtual High School Director Delany also helped to provide funds from her office. Vice President Davis from South East Tech paid for the cost of the services of Consultant Nelson, to help provide technical support and teacher training. During the second phase of the pilot, the State Office of Adult Education picked up the cost for teacher training.

Before state leaders began implementing the adult education virtual pilot early in 2007, they had initiated legislation which would provide regulation and funding for an official state virtual school program. This money would provide sustainability for the high school virtual program, and also included a provision to test pilot adult education virtual courses. The bill also called for a formal evaluation of the adult education pilot at the end of the year. The legislation, which was signed into law by the governor, states:

Through the use of an online pilot program, the State Department of Education shall examine the feasibility of providing services of the State Virtual School Program to students enrolled in adult education programs and shall make recommendations to the General Assembly. (Virtual School Legislation, 2007, see reference note ¹)

The law provided approximately 3.6 million dollars in funding for the state virtual high school which included the provision for adult education programs. The purpose of the law was to establish a virtual school program that would provide consistent high quality education for the students of the state utilizing technology-delivered courses. Essentially the lawmakers of the state wanted to provide more learning options for students. According to one news article the new law would, "give students greater flexibility to earn graduation credits online, and would also allow them to take courses that wouldn't normally be offered in their attendance zones" (Newspaper Article, 2007, see reference

note ¹). The governor also believed, as many of the lawmakers did, that online learning contributed to the student's use of technology, stating:

This bill will not only open up choices that wouldn't normally be available to students, but it also provides an important opportunity for more students to interact via the Internet, which in this changing world will become an increasingly important learning tool. (Newspaper Article, 2007, see reference note ¹)

Other important elements of the law included the establishment of policies for online courses and curriculum; regulations for private and homeschooled students; policies for teacher qualifications and employment; and policies for supervision, monitoring, assessment, and evaluation of enrolled students. This law presently regulates the state virtual high school and provides funds for the ongoing program.

Curriculum and Management Systems

Program planners choose the PLATO Learning System as the curriculum program for the pilot because it was modular in nature and could be constructed to fit state standards and requirements of high school courses. Additionally PLATO was the system that South East Technical Colleges had successfully used to provide courses for their adult education students. For this reason State Director Campbell wanted to use this model for the adult education virtual program pilot and replicate it statewide.

Evaluator Jones explains:

The PLATO Learning System was selected as the appropriate software package for the pilot because it offers a student management system and flexibility in the course content that could be matched with national and state high school curriculum standards. PLATO also offers diagnostics, remediation, and individualized record keeping for students in each course (Evaluation Report, 2007, see reference note ¹).

The modular nature of PLATO was advantageous in planning and developing courseware. Many of the planners and teachers that worked with PLATO agreed that the ability to change and rearrange the modules was an asset. Vice President Davis explains:

You can do it plug and play, and that's how most people use it . . . if you know the content of it . . . you can literally pull out at the modular level and put it back together in there in those course models.

Teacher Dennis helped to develop several science courses using PLATO modules. She explains its use similarly:

PLATO has a set of courses called PLATO courses . . . and the materials are divided into units and there are pre-made unit tests. The other thing that PLATO has done is they have included a lot of offline activities, like optional activities, to make up for any gaps that may be in the PLATO curriculum.

In addition to choosing PLATO for software and curriculum, the program planners

utilized Blackboard for the online management system. Technical Coordinator Taylor

managed the Blackboard system for the high school virtual program. Adult education

teachers and students had to use the Blackboard system to access the PLATO courseware.

The Blackboard management system was more complicated than the PLATO system,

requiring more in depth orientation and training for both teachers and students. Director

Delany explains:

Having a great orientation on that [Blackboard] management system really takes a lot of time, versus Plato where you can just go in and log in and click and go through the lessons. [With] Blackboard, there is a discussion board that you have to go to, there is place where you have to upload files, those are things that take a little bit more of an advanced student to do in the Blackboard system verses something that's already built and ready to go, just click and answer. Teachers had some difficulty navigating two systems; however, Blackboard was the interface used by the high school virtual program and therefore used by the teachers of the adult education virtual program as well. Both systems required training and support for teachers and students. During the pilot year period teachers communicated frequently to support one another in use of both systems and to explore more efficient methods for student orientation to the courses. With these systems in place, state leaders tested and implemented the adult education virtual program for students across the state.

Findings Related to Research Question Two

Data analysis of the interviews and documents revealed five recurring themes in response to research question two, "What are the interests of the stakeholders in the planning process?" These five themes are: establishing credibility, utilizing innovation, monitoring cost benefit, providing teacher preparation, and maximizing student success with the program. The five themes representing interests were not equally shared among the stakeholders. For example, administrators in the state office worked with local directors and teachers in developing the program, but their individual interests differed depending on their position in program development. State administrators had more concerns about funding and program management, whereas teachers were more concerned with student success using the courseware. At times these varying interests were in conflict among the stakeholders and those with authority exercised power in making choices about which interest would be served. The resulting choices affected the overall planning, development, and final outcomes of the program. The five themes representing stakeholders' interests, and which of those interests were most important to individual stakeholders, are summarized in Table 4.3.

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Table 4.3Themes Representing Stakeholders' Interests

Theme	Sub Theme	Stakeholder
Establishing	Providing Standardized	State Directors Campbell &
Credibility	Curriculum	Donovan
	Improving Public Perception	Campbell & Donovan
Utilizing	Providing Alternative	State Director Campbell, Vice
Innovation	Opportunities	President Davis
	Increasing Student Engagement	Director Delany, Teachers, Technical Coordinator Taylor
	Providing an Efficient Delivery	Campbell, Taylor, Delany,
	System	Coordinator Thomas
Monitoring Cost	Acquiring Funds	Campbell, Davis, Delany
Denent	Working with Limitations	Campbell, Davis, Thomas, Donovan
	Merging the Program	Thomas, Donovan, Delany
Providing Teacher	Rushing Preparation Time	Thomas
Preparation	Training Adult Education	Thomas,
	Teachers	Consultant Nelson, Teachers
	Preparing Curriculum	Teachers, Nelson
Maximizing	Reducing the Dropout Rate	Campbell, Delany, Davis
Student Success	Identifying Characteristics for	Teachers, Evaluator Jones
	Success	
	Addressing Needs of Adult	Teachers, Evaluator Jones
	Education Students	

Establishing Credibility

One of the concerns among program planners was the desire for credible adult literacy programs throughout the state. Several planners believed that an online program would help to address the concern for credibility, especially in rural areas where adult literacy programs were weak or not up to the same standards as in more populated areas of the state. The theme of credibility centered on two basic subthemes: providing a standardized curriculum and improving public perception. *Providing Standardized Curriculum.* Several individuals expressed interest in a more standard curriculum that could be made available with computerized learning modules through online courses. Many of the stakeholders believed the need for consistent quality programs for adult literacy education students was extremely important, especially where local programs had difficulty in providing programs which were up to par. To achieve this goal, a virtual program was considered to be an answer to the problem of standardizing the curriculum. State legislation reiterated the general assembly's interest in using a virtual program to offer a consistent curriculum. The following are words from the legislative document:

The General Assembly finds that . . . using technology to deliver instruction can provide effective alternatives for credit recovery, meeting graduation requirements, resolving scheduling conflicts, delivering curriculum content when there is a shortage of certified personnel, providing a more flexible and individualized instructional pace, and offering low-incidence courses. (State Virtual Legislation, 2007, see reference note ¹)

Many of the stakeholders had concerns about the lack of standards in adult education courses that were being offered throughout the state. They believed an online program available to students from any geographic location throughout the state would provide them an equal opportunity in terms of course standards and expectations. State Director Campbell explains:

The reason I did it, the reason behind the entire thing was . . . to clean up adult ed's high school curriculum, because right now, even today, it's all over the map. First of all, we don't have the expertise to write curriculums at the State Department of Education, we don't have the money to have curriculum writers to write it for adult ed, so I wanted to make everybody use the same curriculum, one-size-fits-all, and use this curriculum, or you're not going to go for a high school diploma program.

Administrators from the statehouse to local directors voiced enthusiasm for a standard high school curriculum via virtual courses in adult education. The comments were consistent: a virtual school would answer the need for standardized adult education high school courses. The following statements present their arguments.

Coordinator Thomas states:

The legislature was looking at the State department establishing a competency based learning system ... so their answer ... is virtual school and it's still in a pilot phase and adult ed is part of the pilot ... and in reality adult ed has always wanted to make sure our courses were up to standards.

Coordinator Thomas adds another statement about standards:

It was always [Dr. Campbell's plan], and [Dr. Donavon] agrees with this 100 percent, that we want our high school diplomas to be up to standard, you know our high school diploma courses to be based on standards and this [virtual program] seems a sure way to make that happen.

In a separate interview State Director Donovan reiterates his concern for a standardized

high school curriculum with the following:

I would really like to see us have a standardized high school curriculum in adult education . . . If we had a standardized curriculum that every district used then no matter where you went you would know they were getting the same thing. Just like the virtual adult ed class, if you're in [the south] or if you are in [another county] take that same thing and you have to meet the same standards.

Outside of the State Department of education Vice President Davis at South East Technical

College reiterates a similar belief in standardizing the curriculum through the adult

education virtual pilot program:

The adult ed pilot, we got involved with that, because [Dr. Campbell] wanted to try to move toward adult ed and again to establish a unit is a unit is a unit to whether it's in [the south] or it's here. When asked about her interests for adult education students in the virtual program, Local Director Eason makes comparable remarks:

What my main interest was, was making sure that the students got the same sort of curriculum that was required for [the State] verses what they were doing with the virtual schools because they used the PLATO system . . . so I wanted to make sure our students got what was required of them.

The statement, "making sure students got what was required" sums up the general feeling of the administrators and planners of the program. They considered completion of equal requirements for a high school diploma to be essential. Local Director Eason further explains:

I think it was [Dr. Campbell], because some of the small adult ed programs were not able to have individual subject area teachers . . . they would have one teacher teaching a diploma class in a lab setting and then they would have certified teachers sign off on that credit slip . . . she wanted to get more consistency across the state with the diploma.

These remarks reflect a concern that adult education students should complete the same requirements as other high school students across the state in order to receive a diploma.

Improving Public Perception. Closely tied to standardization of the curriculum was the need for a credible public perception for adult literacy education programs. State leaders were deeply concerned over the perception that adult education

programs offered substandard courses to students. In the words of State Director

Dr. Campbell:

Our curriculum had a horrible, horrible reputation as being a diploma factory, a diploma mill, you could just go to adult ed, you could follow the mill and get a high school diploma. I was painfully aware of that, superintendents voiced that to me, State Department officials voiced that to me, my own colleagues at the State Department of Education did not have a whole lot of credibility in adult education. It is interesting to note that both state directors of adult education, the former and the present, had the same concern about credibility for adult education. As state leaders they had faced disparagement over the quality of adult education programs from other administrators. State leaders believed that a standardized curriculum would improve credibility or public perception. State Director Donovan states:

Well I think it gives a lot more credibility to the units that we are earning if the adult ed kids are doing the exact same thing as the high school kids. Sometimes we get a little bit of grief because the traditional adult ed students do not have to put in as many classroom hours as a high school student . . . with this virtual program being the exact same thing as the regular high school kids, I think adds a lot of credibility to the units.

The model that planners adopted for the adult education virtual program was based on the program at South East Technical College. In order to establish accountability and consequently credibility, Vice President Davis had earlier introduced the PLATO Learning System as a model that would help to provide a standard curriculum. She explains:

We took certain courses where PLATO had strengths . . . and we took it apart and made course models for adult ed courses so they could go through methodically the objectives and master them . . . so there was a degree of accountability that I had.

Clearly the stakeholders had a strong interest in developing a program that would enhance the quality of adult education courses, making them on par with state standards and equal to other high school courses across the state. The virtual courses utilizing PLATO modules appeared to answer the concern of standardization, thus making adult education programs more credible to the public and other administrators. To this end, planners relied primarily on the PLATO system of computer-assisted modules, which could be structured to align with state standards.

Utilizing Innovation

A second theme indicating the interests of stakeholders was innovation. Planners wanted to utilize innovative technology to provide online courses for adult education students. The theme of innovation centered on three subthemes or categories: providing alternative opportunities for students, increasing engagement of students, and providing an efficient delivery system for students.

Providing Alternative Opportunities. There were many discussions about providing alternative opportunities through technology for adult education students. This was, in fact, the primary reason that state officials worked to develop the virtual program. One of the issues for adult education students was the need for "seat time" in high school credit courses. Some believed that returning adults should not have to spend the same amount of time sitting in a classroom setting to complete coursework. With a virtual course, required "seat time" could be reduced or eliminated. Virtual courses provided an alternative to time in the classroom. State Director Campbell states:

We wanted to provide additional opportunities or choices or options for the students other than in a bricks and mortar setting... they could go to the library, they could go to vocational rehabilitation, they could go virtually anywhere.

In another remark about alternative opportunities for adult students, Campbell states:

Kids now are so techie as opposed to 10 years ago. We've got 16,000 adult ed students enrolled in adult ed that are 17 to 21 years of age that should be in the regular school system ... I wanted to have an opportunity to offer those students that are techie an opportunity to eliminate seat time ... so they can get in and get out and get on with their lives.

State Director Donovan provides a similar remark about alternative opportunities for students:

We see it as an opportunity, it's just another tool that we have in adult education to reach people. Because not everybody's made to sit in a seat for four or five hours a day in a class you know, but they can sit in front of the computer at home by themselves . . . if you can get to the same point, and do the same thing, why hold you back, why make you sit there?

Remarks from teachers also reveal interest in alternative learning opportunities for

their students. Teacher Dennis describes how she believes virtual courses help provide

alternative opportunities for students:

I think it has a lot of potential to do a lot of good, I mean, especially with the smaller adult ed programs that can't have a teacher in every subject... but I think some of it is flexibility and as students become more and more technologically literate.

Teacher King explains how alternative resources provided through the online

program helped her students. She states:

I was really, really promoting that. I said if you want to take economics let's just do it online. And it was fun, the program information was more current, the examples and statistics that they had, the books that we had that were falling apart.

Both time and resources were an issue for state leaders of the adult education virtual program. Alternative opportunities with virtual courses could potentially provide better resources and eliminate class time for students. This interest was especially attractive to both state leaders and teachers planning the virtual program.

Increasing Student Engagement. Several of the stakeholders were highly interested in utilizing innovative technologies to engage students in more satisfactory learning activities. This interest was particularly important to leaders of the high school virtual program, but their interest in innovation impacted the adult education virtual program as well. Opinions varied on how technology would keep students from being bored, but the primary interest was keeping them engaged. Several remarks referred to student engagement and the boredom factor. Virtual High School Director Delany describes today's students:

They are, they're bored. They really are bored ... the state [virtual school] ... is trying to be innovative and trying to come up with different ideas for these students to grow beyond the boredom in classrooms.

Vice President Davis of South East Technical College made remarks about student engagement with the PLATO system and Florida Virtual courses. She believed that adult education students were bored with Florida Virtual courses, which they had tried with adult education students, along with PLATO Learning. She comments on how PLATO was more engaging for students:

My guys are having trouble with Virtual, Florida Virtual was boring, it's very project based, but if you are somebody who's never had a lot of success in school and you're just faced with reading that screen all the time, it's boring and they're not usually as strong of a reader either, so that was a big thing.

Technical Coordinator Taylor expresses her opinion about the PLATO system and student

engagement. She believed it was helpful to keep students "entertained." She states:

The PLATO that they [South East Tech] used was an older version than the one that we use now. The one that we use now has a lot more audio and color. I believe that the students enjoy it more; I know that that's probably not a word that students would use with PLATO. But I think it keeps them entertained more . . . what I've seen with the students, it creates a better curriculum, to keep them entertained.

In another instance Virtual School Director Delaney describes her belief that teachers

should use technology in their lessons to promote student engagement. She again

mentions the boredom factor:

Yes, it's boredom, and the reason that's another part of my job is the teacher technology proficiency which is to provide to them the requirements of

teacher technology provision and using that stuff in the classroom. They don't know how to integrate it into a lesson. So that's the problem, and until that's done, you're not going to keep the interest of the student.

Providing an Efficient Delivery System. A third subtheme of innovation was the delivery system. Stakeholders were interested in utilizing an efficient system of delivery for the virtual courses. In discussions concerning the system, I encountered an array of opinions and conflicts among planners. The issues were: the PLATO system and licenses, e-mail, and other technical problems. Conflicts occurred between planners in two camps: the state high school virtual program group and the South East Technical College group. Conflicts occurred over choices with technology, and how technical problems could be resolved.

PLATO was the learning system that South East Technical College was using and consequently planners adopted it for the pilot. Interest in the PLATO system originated with two stakeholders: Vice President Davis and Consultant Nelson. Both were former employees of PLATO and therefore quite familiar with its capabilities. The following remarks reveal their interest. Davis explains:

I first chose PLATO because I could take it apart and put it back together many, many ways and that is the basis of our cooperation around here. PLATO is a pretty extensive software package; the majority of the original PLATO was all developed and engineered by one software guru who was a psychometrician.

Consultant Nelson promoted PLATO although she stressed that she worked independently from the company. In her interview, she states:

PLATO software is excellent and they have grown as a company. It's been around for 45 years, so it's been around for a long time, but because of that they have not created all of the software themselves so for example the social studies was purchased as a third party program, it's an excellent program. The PLATO Company offered two choices of systems. One was a client-hosted model that could be hosted on a local server. This meant that the purchasers of this model could use it indefinitely, with no future expense. The other choice was a PLATO or web hosted system available only through the web, requiring yearly licenses. Confusion occurred about licensing for the program. The program planners purchased PLATO's web hosted version, but understood the licenses to be perpetual. Coordinator Thomas explains:

But they bought licenses, seats, in PLATO ... and [Director Delany] was under the impression that the state [high school virtual] was going to be able to use the seats too, but it didn't work out that way. It was just that the seats were available to [South East Tech] and adult ed ... we actually thought that the courses that we bought in PLATO, we had bought into perpetuity... But these weren't purchased that way so that was a misconception and they did end.

Consultant Nelson offers a similar explanation about the PLATO systems. She explains:

What [South East Tech] purchased, they purchased a client hosted system, which meant they bought the rights to that software for forever. There was a perpetual license, they don't have to pay a yearly fee and [Vice President Davis] purposely bought it that way so that we could alter it and we would have it forever.

Director Delany had the mistaken impression that she could use these perpetual licenses with the high school virtual program. When she found that she could not, she later purchased other licenses with PLATO. High School Director Delany explains the licensing issue from her perspective:

The courses, the purchase of the courses expired, so they [adult education] had the choice of either continuing on with it or going with the ones that we [high school] currently have in usage. The adult ed courses that we split with them were a slightly different platform than what ours is, ours is completely online where the other one is . . . housed on a system right there in the school.

The PLATO licensing issue caused confusion and conflict among stakeholders. It also impacted future decisions concerning the adult education virtual program.

Other concerns were e-mail capability. In setting up the system, Consultant Nelson thought the Blackboard system would provide student e-mail but this component was not available. Lack of student e-mail was a problem for those involved in the adult education program and there were several references to this issue. Consultant Nelson states:

We decided to use the state's Blackboard [system] . . . we thought it would be, going to be a communication tool that the students could use with communication. Because the assumption was that everybody could get email through Blackboard, because that's what we had at the college. Well the State doesn't allow the students to have e-mail through that. So that kind of put a crimp in everything because they didn't have a communication tool to really be able to indicate back-and-forth with their teachers.

One problem was that local school networks blocked outside e-mail such as Yahoo or AOL

and if students chose to work on virtual courses in computer labs at the local adult

education centers they could not receive mail. Teacher King explains:

One of the big things with us, and I think with all of the districts was that, having the district using their server and having sites with firewalls, we had to work along with the technology department, to get certain things through, explain it to our technology people so that they could get certain things through, just e-mails that were coming through originally.

Coordinator Thomas remarks on the e-mail problem:

Some of the barriers were that students didn't have e-mail addresses and then working within the school districts, they wouldn't let the kids have email addresses if they were only coming . . . to do their virtual and they weren't doing anything at home which most of our kids don't do it at home, they come to adult ed and use the adult ed computers. Without an e-mail address, you can't do virtual learning, because you can't communicate with the teacher.

Evaluator Jones also mentioned the e-mail problem in her interview:

Now one of the things that came up at the end, as far as communication . . . there was also a problem with e-mail. The suggestion was . . . it would be helpful if they came up with an e-mail system for anyone who was part of the virtual school program.

I asked Technical Coordinator Taylor about the problem with e-mail for adult education

students. She provided the following explanation from her perspective:

Blackboard is a learning management system, it's not an e-mail system at all and so no, Blackboard does not have e-mail, you have to have a separate email system such as in Novell or the Microsoft version. But Blackboard itself does not provide e-mail. And that's really a misconception that a lot of people have ... So we do not provide e-mail addresses for students.

She also had concerns about the legalities of e-mail that are problematic in school districts

for students under age. She explains:

There's many different legalities to providing an e-mail address to a student, the first one is how do you control the spam, how do you control who sends e-mails to the students, what if the students receive pornography e-mails? The provider of it is pretty much responsible for the student so we do not do that.

The two stakeholders that were responsible for the technical aspects of the program were Technical Coordinator Taylor and Consultant Nelson. Their jobs were to help keep the systems running smoothly. Both of these stakeholders had similar interests in the program by maintaining technical efficiency, but were coming from two different arenas. At times there was a conflict in interests, especially with the e-mail situation. Consultant Nelson describes her role solving the technical issues:

I was a technical person [that] could at least make sure that everything was going properly and I was invited to help some of the districts and the surrounding schools to make sure that their technology was proficient to run the PLATO software. Technical Coordinator Taylor explained her role and responsibility with the high school virtual program:

I was not involved with that [political] side of it, I was mainly involved in this side of getting things up and running, making sure that we had teachers that were trained, that the teachers had their course curriculum; the students were where they needed to be.

Both of the technical people had a responsibility to maintain the systems of their respective programs. At times conflict occurred between the two and had to be resolved to ensure and efficient delivery system for the program. The adult education virtual program was dependent on the high school virtual program's technical managers because the system was delivered through the state. From the adult education perspective, planners were concerned that adult students would give up if they could not solve their technology problems or communicate effectively with the teachers; therefore providing an efficient delivery system was an ongoing concern.

Monitoring Cost Benefit

A third major theme indicating interests of the stakeholders that emerged through analysis of data was the cost benefit of the adult education virtual program. The cost of producing the program was on the minds of planners at all stages of planning and implementation and impacted key decisions that would affect the outcome of the program. Discussions about cost benefit and funding centered on three subthemes: acquiring funds, working with limitations, and merging the program because of cost benefit.

Acquiring Funds. Acquisition of funds was a necessary task for implementation of the adult education virtual program. In the interviews, planners expressed how they addressed the issues of funding and cost benefit for the program. Because funds for adult

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literacy education are often limited, administrators were quite skilled with finding ways to

fund their programs. Several of the leaders described how they worked with funds to

develop the program. Vice President Davis described her approach to program planning:

Well I figured early on if you wanted people to do something or to change, you had to have money to cause that to come about so I found out if you wanted to accomplish something, you had to somehow get your hand, hands on the purse strings.

Several of the planners were well versed with grant writing and used this method to obtain

funds for all aspects of the program. Vice President Davis explains how she wrote grants to

purchase the PLATO courseware:

What we did with it early on, is combining lots of different funds . . . I had three different pots so I got busy, I wrote a grant for a community technology center and funded PLATO learning between us and one of the rural areas and then pooled some of the other monies to kind of deal with the campus and with Tech Prep.

State Director Campbell worked closely with South East Technical College to provide grant

funds to help initiate the adult education virtual pilot. She explains:

We did a demonstration grant with [South East Tech], and they used the PLATO platform. Because [Vice President Davis], who is very, very bright, and very familiar with the curriculum, she used to work with PLATO, so it worked out really well.

Coordinator Thomas explains the initial cost from her perspective:

[Director Campbell] knew they had sort of a wrap on it and so she and [Director Delany] ... were working with trying to get the virtual school established. They worked something out where [Ms. Delany] put in some money, and [Dr. Campbell] put in some money ... they bought licenses, seats, in PLATO. Vice President Davis wrote an additional grant to pay for the cost of bringing a consultant to train teachers and manipulate the PLATO program. She explains:

I knew [Consultant Nelson] could make it do whatever I wanted it to do. I knew what I wanted it to do, I don't necessarily know how to make do it, [Ms. Nelson] is wonderful. So I wrote another grant, got [Ms. Nelson] in here, we would put her out training in the districts and adult ed.

Writing state legislation was another way in which planners worked to acquire program funds. In her interview, Director Campbell described how state officials drafted legislation to secure funding for programs. She explains how they must prove fiscal impact:

The first question is they want to know is what the fiscal impact... many times, the superintendent will determine whether they want to push it or not. And if they don't push it, they may throw it in the trash or ... they'll ask what [is] the fiscal impact, in other words, how much money is it going to cost us, and what's the need for it.

The planners of the adult education virtual pilot recognized the need to acquire funding for developing a new program, and this interest was of great concern, especially because many local programs had limited resources for high school credit adult education programs.

Working with Limitations. In many rural adult education programs funds were extremely limited and the cost of providing certified teachers for high school credit courses was a problem. Producing high school credit programs for adult education is an expensive undertaking for local programs because they do not receive the same funding as a regular high school program. Working with the limited funds that are available to adult literacy programs was a problem that program planners referred to often. Many of the stakeholders remarked on funding limitations. State officials believed that virtual programs would reduce the cost of providing high school programs in rural areas. Coordinator Thomas explains: I mean it's so complicated; you can't have a certified teacher, because you can't pay a certified teacher just to hang around in case somebody shows up wanting a course. That's why we thought a virtual school would be a good fit.

Teacher Canton explains how virtual courses would benefit small programs in terms of the

cost factor:

As far as the number of teachers that are certified to teach, we do have more teachers than what a small program would have, and I can see how this would be a really good thing for a small program that didn't have all the certified teachers in all the different fields.

State Director Donovan describes how, in his opinion, high school credit programs were

not financially feasible through adult education:

It doesn't make sense and programs may still allow people to come in and still try to earn all 24 units in adult ed. But that doesn't make any sense financially and not that many people are going to commit to stay enrolled in adult ed that long to finish 24 units.

In many areas local school districts either did not have the money for adult education or

would not commit money to adult education programs, therefore these programs had to

rely solely on federal funds supplied through the state office to support their programs.

This lack of local commitment was a problem which Dr. Donovan explains:

Yes, since we are part of the public schools, and in some of the school districts . . . the adult ed program gets a lot of support locally. . . There's still a lot of districts that say whatever money you get from the state is what you run your adult ed program on . . . everything goes back to the local district and how committed they are and what their resources are.

In addition to limited funds for adult education programs, students participating in these programs also had limited personal resources such as computer equipment, transportation, and childcare. Evaluator Jones refers to a discussion among planners of how programs might help to provide for the students: The idea was that students could work from home or from the library, but ... there are all these problems if they're going to do it offsite. And getting to the site, of course with adult education learner's transportation and childcare and all those kinds of things, you know, and so there was some talk about how to get these folks connected ... maybe at home during the time that they have the class. But nobody knew exactly who might be responsible for that and how much money that would cost and what that would be worth it.

In her interview Technical Coordinator Taylor expresses her wish that they had an

unlimited budget to help adult education students:

[If] we had an unlimited budget and unlimited manpower and we could pretty much do what we felt like we needed to do. If we lived in that imaginative world than I would say it might be best to keep them [adult education students] separate because of the timeframe that they work in and you could have different people focusing with a different group of students even on a smaller scale within a classroom.

Limited funds for adult education were discussed in many instances throughout the interviews. These areas included lack of funding for high school adult education programs and lack of resources for the students themselves. Stakeholders recognized the problems associated with providing a high school program through adult literacy education. The interest was in how to provide this program in the most cost efficient manner.

Merging the Program. Limited funds for adult literacy eventually became a motivation for planners to begin thinking about merging the adult education virtual program with the high school virtual program. After experimentation with the pilot program for several months, many stakeholders believed that a merger would be the best course in terms of cost efficiency. Teacher Davis made the following comments about struggles with funding limitations:

I think piggybacking on the state virtual school is great . . . they have some money now, too, so they can actually buy things. I'm trying to design virtual

classes for free, but within that I have courses solely for adult ed students designed with them in mind.

Although it was hoped that a virtual school for adult education would help to provide a more equitable program for adult education students across the state, it did not in fact, work out ideally. One of the problems during the pilot was that students did not register equally for courses and enrollment was very high in some courses while much lower in other courses. Thus some of the adult education teachers were being paid to work with large numbers of students while other teachers were paid the same with few students enrolled in courses. This was a contributing reason to the decision to end the adult education virtual pilot as a separate program. Coordinator Thomas explains:

We decided not to [continue] because, well, several reasons. Mainly I didn't feel that we were able to provide teachers and pay teachers to do the virtual learning when we had no idea how many students they were going to end up having. I ended up paying the eight teachers \$2000 each, and one teacher had 35 students and one had three.

In another comment she reiterates this concern to program coordinators who complained about having to work extra time when students had not completed their courses in a timely manner:

I said, "you know, none of this in the pay has been equitable. Your teacher actually had three students whereas, and she's only having to work this extra time, where I had one teacher who had 35 students so none of it can be equitable."

State Director Donovan expresses his reasoning for discontinuing a separate virtual program with adult literacy teachers. When asked about his thoughts concerning the merging of adult literacy students with the high school virtual program he states:
I think probably it was a simple seamless transition to just go ahead and just join the regular program because the virtual program is getting a lot of attention in the legislature, they are providing funding, and if we are hooked onto their wagon, we don't have to go out begging money for our own funding to try run the thing . . . I think it's to our benefit. And so far, I don't think it's costing us any extra money to be included in that program, 'cause in the past, we were having to pay those extra teachers separately.

Virtual High School Director Delaney states why a merge with the virtual high school would

benefit in terms of cost. She explains:

They [the PLATO courses] were only a year-long license and they [adult education leaders] can extend those but at this point as far as funding goes they didn't have enough funding to continue on with that and it really didn't make much sense to pay for additional licenses when they could use ours free. It would benefit the adult ed program more to work with us rather than run that on their own.

In the end, the cost benefit was a major contributing reason as to why state officials decided to discontinue the adult education program and merge adult students into the high school virtual program. The licenses would require renewal and the adult education teachers would need training and stipends if the program were to continue. State leaders believed this choice would best address program costs for adult education students.

Providing Teacher Preparation

A fourth theme emerging from the data was teacher preparation for the adult education virtual program. This theme was of particular concern to the teachers, but other stakeholders discussed teacher preparation as well. The teachers actually had multiple roles in the virtual program. In addition to learning the PLATO software and the Blackboard management system, they helped to plan and develop the online courses. The teachers attended several training meetings, beginning at South East Technical College in January and continuing as the pilot program progressed. They reported that they stayed in close communication to support each other and the students. These discussions of teacher preparation centered on three subthemes: rushing teacher preparation, training adult education teachers, and preparing curriculum.

Rushing Teacher Preparation. One of the concerns that quickly became evident was how the teachers had to hurry to prepare for the virtual pilot. Several of the stakeholders agreed this was a problem. The program was already behind schedule because there was a lapse of time when the Director of Adult Education left her position at the State Department of Education. Also, the teachers in most cases did not have previous training in online learning; therefore, sufficient training was necessary and had to be completed in time to begin the pilot program. Coordinator Thomas explains:

That's how we started out. Now we had seven teachers who had never done anything with virtual learning. So they were trained on the PLATO software and Blackboard, which was the way that they were to communicate with each other.

A chief complaint was the short amount of time they had to make these preparations. The following remarks help to explain what individuals thought about the training. Consultant Nelson, whose job was to train the teachers in the use of PLATO and to assist in curriculum development by modifying the modules, states:

We only had a couple of weeks to get it off the ground. It wasn't how any of us would like to have started the whole project, we would've liked to have had more time to set it up and do training and let the teachers have experience, it was rush, rush, rush kind of thing.

She further explains:

It was such a quick turnaround ... I did the tech part ... with them in the PLATO system. I was their resource that way so if they didn't have to learn

how to modify the courses, I did that part of it, but they looked at the courses and told me what to do.

Each teacher mentioned the training and the problem with rushing to get the program

started. Teacher Dennis states:

One of the biggest problems with the pilot was that people, teachers, were not given a lot of time to look over the material before we started enrolling students . . . I think people really felt that had been thrown into the deep end of the pool really fast.

Teacher King expressed similar concerns about the preparation. She stated that teachers not only had to learn software and enroll students but also to finish by a deadline. The deadline was twofold: students needed to complete courses on time and planners were required to give a progress report to the state legislature. She explains:

If I'm remembering right we had an original start date in the middle of March and then we realized that that was just was not going to be enough time to promote this with students, and register them, and get them started. But then we were having a real time crunch because we knew that it had to be finished by a certain point. I remember that deadlines and timing was a big initial issue of, how can we do this where students have enough time, but we also needed to meet the deadlines of this pilot program.

Teacher Canton also felt rushed. She explains:

I don't remember off the top of my head the exact start date. I remember that it felt like it was coming way too quickly and they gave us a little tiny bit of extra time before we started. That was one thing I think we all felt like we weren't ready to start and we started.

Clearly the administrators and teachers recognized the problem of rushing to begin the program, but the constraints of preparation time were limiting, therefore the decision to move ahead with the pilot took place in spite of this problem.

Training Adult Education Teachers. Training adult education teachers to use technology was a concern of the state planners. It was the responsibility of the local directors to choose teachers that had an aptitude with technology in order to adequately work with online courses. The teachers required support throughout the pilot period. To achieve the needed training and support a consultant was hired. Most of the comments reflected approval of the support that was provided. Coordinator Thomas states:

[Consultant Nelson] was invaluable throughout the whole project and we actually paid her for our second phase of the pilot anyway ... So the teachers were trained on how to use PLATO, how to enter their students. She was their contact, their consultant for any technological issues because it was online, and she knew how to help them set up their classes.

Teacher Canton described the support in the startup process and during the training

sessions. She also mentions how everyone felt inexperienced, including state

administrators. She says:

I thought we had excellent support as far as helping us with our wide range of expertise. We were never put down for asking stupid questions, you know that kind of thing, because we were all new to the game; even the people that were helping us, you know [Coordinator Thomas], it was new to her.

Vice President Davis described her role in bringing in the trainer. She recognized that adult

education teachers did not have previous experience with technology and needed the extra

support:

I paid [Consultant Nelson]; I paid her to work with everybody in all the adult ed [programs]. She had a lot of the hands-on, the one-on-one with people and I think that goes a long way in this business because the typical adult ed teacher may not be the biggest technology guru either. . . So the teachers were actually more of a challenge in the first pilot than the students were. Evaluator Jones reiterates teacher's comments about the support they received for training:

And the teachers however, were writing back to me, saying one of the best things was [Consultant Nelson's] help, so they weren't able to say that the training that they got from her was not positive, because we saw that quite a bit in the comments, in comments that were even unsolicited in that area.

Preparing Curriculum. It was apparent that training the teachers involved two tasks:

training them with technology and helping them develop curriculum for their courses. Both

of these tasks were important to planners and the training centered on both concerns.

Evaluator Jones suggested that there were two ends of the spectrum; training teachers to

use technology and making sure the teachers were knowledgeable with the curriculum as

well. She states:

Some of the problems were getting the right faculty, getting them trained. You might have a really good English IV teacher that you need, but they were not good on computers and had trouble manipulating Blackboard. You have other people that were really good with the technology, but they weren't really qualified to teach the Chemistry course.

Vice President Davis believed that curriculum should take precedence over technology

when training teachers. She explains:

Service is the key to making it happen so often people put everything into, all their resources in buying software and they don't provide a supportive services. And a supportive services nowadays really isn't even a techie part of it, it's the curriculum piece of it, and by the way, it is the technology.

Davis makes further comments about curriculum and technology training issues:

When I was with PLATO, I had 150 consultants working for me and the best ones that I had, were first and foremost curriculum people and, by the way, they did technology well. The technology facilitates itself. That's just my bias and I think teachers can buy in when they see that something can do a better job on the curriculum side. In regard to curriculum development there were references to the excessive amount of time involved in preparing the courses and the task of aligning PLATO modules to state standards. Some of the teachers welcomed the task of learning how to manipulate PLATO and working on curriculum. Teacher King spoke of her preparation for the course as being "a lot of work" but also that she enjoyed the time spent on the task, and what she gained from the training. She explains:

I had to do a lot of, you know, just kind of matching this template of curriculum they had with our standards. . . so we can choose, pick and choose a little bit more. . . I didn't mind them a lot but it ended up being a lot of work, it was a lot of work! But it was fun and it really gave me, in retrospect, it really gave me the hands-on with, how to manipulate PLATO.

Teacher Dennis also enjoyed experimenting with putting together the courses, but

suggested that not all of the teachers wanted to put both time and effort into preparation.

Additionally she spent time training other teachers after the pilot began. She explains:

We got like a two hour long introduction to PLATO . . . [and] I wrote to Consultant Nelson and said, "hey, I'm familiar with PLATO, I'm used to designing my own learning paths, can you just get me those privileges so I can mess with these curricula a little bit."

There was one voice that complained about the teacher training meetings. Local Director

Eason said the training was not well organized with teachers having the responsibility of

aligning curriculum to state standards. She explains:

At the trainings, they weren't as good as I thought they should have been; because there was some confusion . . . there was some trouble with setting up. Like I said, the curriculum piece and PLATO was designed for a certain location, then here we were in [our state] trying to use that curriculum that they had already set up, and so . . . the teachers had to go in and do some editing and take out some topics, and supplement the curriculum. There was obviously extra work on the teacher's part in preparing curriculum although PLATO had been purchased as the curriculum program. A pre-packaged curriculum such as PLATO was not set up to meet the state standards; therefore, the burden fell to the teachers to provide the additions and modifications to the PLATO modules. Each of the issues—rushing training, training with technology, and developing curriculum—were mentioned in the interviews as concerns for those involved in preparing teachers for the adult education virtual program. Teacher Canton sums up the issues in one of her comments:

Like I said given the push that we had, I can't say enough good about the support that we had, because we had excellent support. It was not that we weren't supported, it was just that some of us didn't know what we were doing and we were learning new stuff and trying to implement something quickly. And you'd like to look prepared when you start, not like you don't know what you're doing.

Being prepared was clearly a concern of teachers and other stakeholders. Although time was an issue, the teachers worked to overcome these obstacles in addition to their regular teaching positions in adult education. The burden of training the teachers fell to one person, in particular, Consultant Nelson. The majority agreed that her support was most helpful.

Maximizing Student Success

The fifth theme indicating stakeholder interest that emerged from the data analysis was maximizing student success. Stakeholders frequently expressed concern for student success with the program in the interviews. It is important to note that while everyone was interested in student success, ideas of what constituted student success and how to achieve that success differed. The discussions focused on three subthemes: reducing the dropout

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rate, identifying characteristics for success, and addressing adult education students' needs for success.

Reducing the Dropout Rate. One of the principal goals of the state virtual school was to provide a program that would address the high school dropout rate and target at risk students in order to help them succeed. This goal was mentioned in several documents and by many of the stakeholders during interviews. This was one of the original purposes for creating a state virtual school. Director Delany provides the following explanation:

Well the reason was because we had students, the law states anyone under the age of 21 can participate in the virtual school and so students that drop out can be anywhere be 17 to 21, so that's your high school diploma track students, if we can get them in an adult ed center, then that would be the focus to help them and that would be to keep them on track for graduation ... if you can't keep them in school, that's our next recourse to try to get them back and to get a high school diploma and that was the adult ed focus.

Coordinator Thomas provides a similar statement about how the state wanted to target at

risk students for the virtual school. She states:

Well they included adult ed ... because they knew that some students were going to go that route before, you know they're going to go to high school, drop out, into adult ed, and then maybe onto to [higher education].

Evaluator Jones mentions the dropout rate in the evaluation report:

Successful implementation for an AE virtual course included such indicators as the ability to: (1) serve a more diverse student population; (2) address the needs of both rural and urban high school dropouts . . . a virtual AE program may be an essential tool to meet the legislative mandates for improving the dropout rate. (Evaluation Report, 2007, see reference note¹)

Helping students to succeed by not dropping out was an apparent interest of most of the stakeholders. Furthermore comments and documents articulated the purpose which was to help students at risk. During the planning and implementation of the adult education virtual program, however, differing opinions on how to help at risk students to succeed became evident.

Identifying Characteristics for Success. Discussions about student success revealed different perspectives in several cases. For example, planners considered student's age to be a factor impacting student success for online learning. Some believed the older students would fare better because of their maturity, and others felt that the younger students were more adept with technology, and therefore would function better in an online environment. The following two quotes express this contrast. State Director Donovan states:

Well as I mentioned earlier, I think it takes a special person to take a class virtually, someone has been out of school 20 years, they're not really probably a candidate . . . I think most of the people taking these virtual courses are these younger kids that have good computer skills . . . The older adult is going to be challenged.

On the other hand Teacher Canton had worked with older students in her chemistry class, finding that younger students did not have the persistence to finish the online course. She explains:

And that was one problem that we had begun to address ... trying to ensure that the people we had were good candidates for virtual high school. Because a lot of the younger students might think, oh good, I can do this at home, I don't have to come to school. And they might not really be good candidates for it ... But I think the older student is a good fit for this too, who has a family and working and trying to fit us into their schedule.

In all cases, stakeholders believed that one of the most important characteristics necessary for successful online was self-motivation. There were several comments about student misconceptions of online courses. Students tended to assume the courses were easier and if they lacked self-motivation they were not successful. Consultant Nelson states: And I think, just like in any situation, students think, oh, its online, it's going to be easier. But it isn't and I think they have to realize they have to be selfmotivated and self-directed and the type of student that you sometimes have in adult education is not always focused enough to be able to handle an online course unless they come into the Center on a regular basis.

Teacher Dennis explains the lack of self-motivation for adult education students in certain

instances, stating:

Our students have a low frustration tolerance and if they were the kind of students who asked for help when they needed it, and were self-starters, they probably wouldn't be our students. I mean we have some definitely who have those skills but that's a skill set that a lot of them don't have.

Teacher Canton had concerns for the students' ability to work independently as well. She

also uses the term, "self-starters," recognizing that these characteristics were deficient in

many adult education students. She explains:

I think lots of students were thinking, they had this wonderful idea that I can just do it at home and it's going to be so easy and they don't have a teacher to teach them right handy, they do have a teacher, but it's not a flesh and blood teacher right there with them and so they get frustrated, and if they're not a self-starter and highly motivated they'll put it off and not work at home.

Opinions about characteristics for success with online learning were evident from the

teachers and the consultant. The teachers tended to be more in touch with the students

enrolled in the virtual courses and provided more descriptions about student

characteristics for success.

Adapting for Needs of Adult Education Students. The third subtheme centered on how the online program would meet the needs of the adult education students. Recognizing that students had, in most cases dropped out of high school or possibly failed, there was concern about how the virtual program would address their need to succeed. There were remarks about students' reading ability and how it could be helped. State Director Campbell explains:

My concern is too, is that most of our adult ed students dropped out because they are poor readers, so it is hard for them to keep up with regular ed, in the regular curriculum. I'm not saying water it down, but I am saying that's got to be, first and foremost addressed, but adult ed needs to address that.

The PLATO curriculum provided features to address student reading problems. Vice President Davis explained how adult education students from their programs had more success using the read aloud feature as opposed to Florida Virtual software which had been used previously. She describes how the PLATO program helped the students understand written information. She states:

They hated the Florida Virtual software at first, because a lot of them just couldn't read well enough at first to deal with it, and they liked the PLATO piece because it could be voiced, most of it could be voiced. And we just got better results using the PLATO.

Vice President Davis offers an additional perspective on how to effectively help adult education students succeed. She believed that persons responsible for the program could make the difference for adult education students. She states:

I think there's huge promise in online learning for adults, I've seen it happen; I've seen it firsthand all over this United States to varying degrees. Its effectiveness depends on the adults in charge . . . It takes a particular kind of person to really deal effectively with adult ed students and I always figured that with adult students you need to err on the side of cutting them whatever break you can cut them to keep them interested and involved.

When stakeholders considered merging the adult education virtual program with the high school virtual program the local teachers and directors expressed much concern for adult students. Several people worried that administrators and teachers in the high school program would not have the experience or willingness to provide extra help for adult education students in their courses. Consultant Nelson states:

I guess the biggest problem is that the students themselves are so different, a high school student taking this for credit is very different than an adult ed student taking it . . . I think it was the fear of the adult ed teachers as well. Will these teachers take into account the differing needs an adult ed student as opposed to a high school student? And will they be more likely to give them additional support and help?

Coordinator Thomas also voiced this concern, stating:

That was one of the conversations that came up: If we decide to go with the regular virtual school and we don't do our own, our students will have to do a lot more work . . . So, yeah, we had a discussion and there was concern about adult ed losing its adult-edness, and you know about the teachers that are going to be working with our students not maybe knowing the adult learner.

The teachers articulated concerns for adult education students' needs. Teacher Canton did

not believe the high school virtual program was the best fit for her students. She states:

I think it's harder for our adult ed students in the virtual program the way it is now. I think having an adult ed teacher is a good thing for an adult ed student. They have different sets of problems and I think the adult ed teacher deals with those a little bit differently than the virtual teacher does. It's hard to know where uniformity ought to start or stop and flexibility ought to start or stop. Just from our standpoint I don't think the virtual school, the way it is now, has as much potential to help our students, as the old way did.

Teacher King worried that teachers in the high school program would not show regard or

sympathy for the adult student. She states:

Because we were involved in the pilot program, I think we had a lot more leeway ... We don't have that leeway [now]... We are dealing with teachers now who are servicing regular student bodies, and so I don't know how much sympathy they have towards the adult learner.

Not all of the stakeholders believed that adult education students needed special accommodations or treatment. When I asked Virtual High School Director Delany how the high school virtual program was addressing adult education students' needs, she replied that they had employed some of the former adult education teachers. She also stated that certified high school teachers were fully qualified to teach all students. She states:

We have hired in some of the adult ed instructors as full time instructors for us . . . If you've got a degree in you know your social sciences, and you have your certification in 9-12 or 6-8, then why shouldn't you be able to teach that whole range?

When asked about adult education students' needs, Technical Coordinator Taylor stated that the high school virtual program did not differentiate between high school and adult education students or make special accommodations for adult education students in the courses. She states:

We do not make special accommodations for adults ed students as any other students, in other words, we make accommodations quite often by giving extensions for students who need it, so if they need an extension then they can certainly request one, and we'll go from there. But again that's not just pertaining to adult ed students.

It is clear that planners had different beliefs on how adult education students' needs should be addressed in order to help them achieve success. Most of the adult education teachers were concerned about students being merged in the regular high school virtual program. In addition to the teachers, other stakeholders also expressed concerned for adult students succeeding in the regular high school program after the adult education virtual program was discontinued. It is interesting to note that the virtual program originated with a purpose of reducing dropout rates and helping at risk students. Conflicting interests were evident among the stakeholders, however, as to how adult education students would be most successful.

Findings Related to Research Question Three

In this section I will address the research question, "How are the interests of stakeholders negotiated in the planning process?" Through data analysis I was able to identify five methods that stakeholders used to negotiate their particular interests in the planning process. The methods were: forming partnerships, entering in discussion, making executive decisions, engaging in problem solving, and filling a leadership vacuum. It is important to note that negotiations were often associated with specific events during the development of the program. In the discussion I will describe some of these events and explain how negotiations impacted decisions that stakeholders made throughout the pilot period of the adult education virtual program. Table 4.4 displays a summary of the five themes demonstrating how stakeholders negotiated their interests.

Forming Partnerships

The first theme is forming partnerships. This action occurred more in the beginning stages of the planning and development of the virtual program. Partnering between individuals and groups helped to establish a base for implementing the program. In the beginning, several stakeholders entered into formal partnerships to collaborate and bring together expertise and financial support for the program. At a later time when teachers became involved in the planning, they for created more informal partnerships to support one another. These partnerships were classified in two subcategories: formal partnerships with state administrators and informal partnerships with local teachers.

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Table 4.4Themes Demonstrating Stakeholders' Negotiations

Theme	Sub Themes	Stakeholders
Forming partnerships	Establishing Formal	State Director Campbell,
	Partnerships	State Director Delany,
		Vice President Davis
	Establishing Informal	Teachers
	Partnerships	
Entering Discussion	Attaining Consensus	Coordinator Thomas,
		Director Delany,
	Using Persuasion	Delany, Thomas
Making Executive	Choosing Participants	Campbell, Davis, Thomas,
Decisions		Local Director Eason
	Choosing Curriculum	Campbell, Davis, Delany
	Establishing Policy	Campbell, Davis, Delany, Thomas,
		State Director Donovan
Engaging in Problem	Experimenting	Davis, Delany, Thomas,
Solving		Technical Coordinator Taylor,
		Consultant Nelson, Teachers
	Troubleshooting	Thomas, Taylor, Nelson, Teachers
Filling a Leadership	Filling a Local Leadership	Vice President Davis
Vacuum	Vacuum	
	Filling State Leadership	Donovan, Thomas
	Vacuum	Delany

Establishing Formal Partnerships. When state leaders began planning the virtual school program for adult education, several groups worked together to initiate the program. As mentioned earlier discussions, state leaders chose to model the program after the South East Technical College program that existed previously. This meant that leaders from the State Department of Education would work further with officials from that county. In doing so, they formed partnerships with each other. The following remarks demonstrate how the stakeholders partnered together to plan the program. Coordinator Thomas

explains how groups from South East Technical College community had previously worked together to help the adult education program succeed. She states:

One of the things they wanted to look at was how to bring all these groups together and come up with—even the businesses that were interested in this, a seamless kind of transition for students from high school to college.

In addition to groups working together in that community, state leaders also formed

alliances with that group. State Director Campbell had worked closely with Vice President

Davis and her group at South East Technical College previously. She partnered with State

Director Delany from the Office of Technology stating, "We did partner with Director

Delaney." In a separate interview Director Delany explains how she, in turn, partnered with

State Director Campbell to begin work on the adult education virtual program:

One of our pilot sites . . . was currently offering some of the courses they had to adult learners, so after talking with them, we partnered with [Director Campbell], and [Campbell] paid for half of the seats and we paid for half of the seats to do the adult ed study.

In another comment Delany states:

We partnered together to develop the virtual school, the virtual program, so the Office of High School Redesign which no long exists now provided grant money to these ten pilot sites to get them to participate in our pilot project.

Another way in which state administrators partnered together was to travel as a

group with Vice President Davis to another state to study successful virtual programs in

other states. Davis explains how she conducted a group to visit a Texas program:

I did take all of our superintendents, our president, and adult ed director . . . to Texas to look at an adult ed program . . . [Director Campbell] went with us. They had virtually reduced their dropouts to next to nothing and it was a huge Hispanic population . . . I was familiar with the program. So we took folks from the State Department to try to start making a case for getting some flexibility here. State Director Campbell also mentions the Texas trip:

In between those times I went and traveled to Texas to look at the credit recovery program and I also looked at the virtual program to get an idea of how it works and whatever, how to put together a student contract, student policies and procedures for a virtual learning.

The initial program planners clearly worked together, establishing formal partnerships to achieve their goals and interests in developing the program. One of teachers also recognized state level partnerships at the first teacher meeting. Ms. King describes how leaders worked together, although they represented different groups. She states:

[Consultant Nelson] was the person who did most of the talking but they also had a couple of PLATO representatives there and I believe that [Director Delany] came at some point.... It seemed to me that everybody was working together but now I've learned that everybody was in different kind of sectors or departments.

Establishing Informal Partnerships. In addition to partnerships formed by state leaders and administrators, the teachers also mentioned ways in which they worked together or partnered between groups during the start up phase of the program. These partnerships continued as the program developed during the year. After the first formal training meetings occurred there were subsequent teacher meetings that evolved informally. Teacher Canton describes how teachers worked together and supported one another. She explains:

We got together and tried to iron out some of our problems, and it was interesting when we all got together and there wasn't anybody training us and we were just trying to get together and iron out problems, all of those heads getting together had a lot of ideas so you can get a lot of thoughts when you get all these people working together. The teachers lived in different areas of the state, but kept in close contact during the year-long pilot period to work together, especially when there was a need to communicate about student progress or issues with the software. Each of the teachers mentioned how helpful it was to be work together as they worked with course curriculum and students.

Teacher Canton explains:

Yes and if somebody was taking government, I knew . . . the government teacher and . . . if Johnny had a problem with government and couldn't get it, and he tried to e-mail [his teacher] and couldn't get her, I would e-mail [her].

Teacher King makes a similar statement:

So if something came up if a student in [another city] had a particular problem I could contact [his teacher] or [Teacher Dennis] . . . and talk about an individual student and maybe at the same time mention one of theirs so we were able to accomplish a lot.

Teacher Dennis mentioned her communication with Teacher Canton, the chemistry

teacher, describing how she worked with Dennis' Biology students:

And the other thing in [another city] that I haven't seen in other places is that their teacher was a chemistry teacher, and so when the students would come to work on Biology, they would come to her room and she and I would communicate a lot.

It is apparent that partnering together was a productive way of negotiating individual interests among stakeholders. Partnering occurred at several levels among stakeholders, from top-level state leaders to local level teachers. State leaders established formal partnerships to support the program development. Teachers engaged in informal partnerships to support instruction. State planners negotiated their interests in developing the alternative virtual program by partnering while teachers negotiated their interests in teacher preparation and student success by partnering.

Entering Discussion

Throughout the development of the adult education virtual program much discussion occurred. These discussions occurred during public meetings, behind closed doors, and through phone calls and e-mail exchanges. Identifying certain methods of discussions helped to understand ways in which discussions were used to negotiate the interests of the stakeholders. Furthermore these discussion methods were used among stakeholders to lend strength to the decisions that were made concerning the program's progress. Two of the discussion methods were that were most obviously used to negotiate interests were: attaining public consensus and persuasion.

Attaining Consensus. Some state leaders believed that making decisions based on public consensus was important and necessary. Making decisions based on group consent helped to add strength to those choices. Director Campbell expressed her support of group choices about software, especially among teachers. She explains her belief, stating:

I didn't want to make that decision at the state level, because I wasn't the one using the stuff, you've got to give teachers the opportunity to weigh in and provide valuable input. They're the ones that used it. They know a lot more than, say, administrators do about that.

In another place during the interview she reiterates her belief in public consensus:

Well, we at the state level, we involved all of the teachers in all various disciplines . . . we wanted to make sure that the teachers had input and say so, and empower them. So, if you empower them, they'll support it. And so that was why I was a big believer and a big advocate, a huge advocate, of getting the people that are in the trenches involved, I think it's real important to do that. I think that's important with anything on a statewide application, you've got to get people involved.

During the initial training meetings there was an expressed need for public consensus.

Teachers were asked to participate in the discussions and make choices about courses and

curriculum. Teacher King gives an example of this discussion:

I got to look at some of the social studies, the education, so I got to see some of the history classes and get to choose which one we would like to be part of the pilot program. We were going to choose one that we were going to open up to the state ... so that they would have a certified teacher that they would represent ... I chose economics.

Teacher Canton explains the course that she would teach and the dynamics of the meeting.

Their discussion included brainstorming to address logistical issues. They state:

I was a chemistry teacher for the whole state and how I would get a chemistry test to other people, and how were we going to record the grades, and just all the logistics of doing it virtually. We went over that, we brainstormed because when you start working on this, there are things that come up that you hadn't thought about so we tried to figure out all these different logistical problems.

After the first phase of the pilot there was an evaluation meeting in which stakeholders discussed the program and provided consensus through discussion. Most of the stakeholders were present during this meeting. At that time teachers were asked to return a completed survey that was part of the formal evaluation of the adult education virtual program. In addition to a written a survey, a general public discussion ensued. During this meeting the pivotal discussion of discontinuing the adult education virtual program occurred. Several stakeholders remarked about this meeting in the interviews. Evaluator Jones describes who attended the meeting, stating:

Some of the people that came brought their written stuff... From some of the sites; we had the full cadre of people... whoever might have been in charge of adult education for that site, their director, their technology specialist, who helped with the training, and the teachers.

Coordinator Thomas describes the discussion that occurred and who was in attendance:

I had some talk back and forth at our first meeting . . . [Those that were there were] . . . the virtual teachers . . . the directors that were involved, [Director Delany] came . . . [Consultant Nelson] was there, who was our consultant, [Vice President Davis] from [South East Tech] did not come, I wanted her to come, [Evaluator Jones] was there, so she could get some data.

Local Director Eason also mentioned the meeting, remembering that most of the discussion

centered on stakeholders agreeing to merge the adult education program with the high

school virtual program. She explains:

It [the meeting] was here in the auditorium . . . it seems like I remember everyone wanting to go with the state, go with the state virtual, because of how much work was involved on the adult ed end. And at the time I think everyone wanted to go with the state.

Consultant Nelson describes the discussion about the merger as well:

We had a meeting, they hadn't fully decided to go that way, but that was the impression that everybody was getting, that it was going to be, that all of the students would be going under the state virtual school, and they were concerned, they were all concerned.

Before the evaluation meeting, state leaders were already considering discontinuing the adult education virtual program. However, they used public discussion by asking the group to form a consensus about the decision so that all stakeholders would support the decision to merge the program. In this way they negotiated their interests to support their ongoing decisions.

Using Persuasion. A second type of discussion used by stakeholders to negotiate their interests was persuasion. One of the most obvious ways this occurred was through discussions between state officials as they considered discontinuing the program. Although planners had been considering options previously, State Director Delany of the high school virtual program spoke persuasively to stakeholders during the evaluation meeting in June. She made a convincing argument to stakeholders to end the separate program for adult education and suggested that adult education students join the high school virtual program. She maintained that two programs were unnecessary. One of the teachers present at the meeting, Ms. Dennis, explains:

It was this summer, there was a coming together, I guess a capstone meeting for the first session and some of the people from the state virtual school were there, there is now an office of virtual learning inside the state department and [Director Delany] is in charge of that and she stood up and said, "So, why, when we have a virtual school, why are we creating another virtual school?," and I think that was part of the discussion.

Prior to the June meeting, Coordinator Thomas and Director Delany had regular discussions about the adult education virtual program. Although Ms. Thomas did not directly say that Ms. Delany was persuading her to join the high school program, her comments imply that the discussion proceeded in that direction. Thomas described some of the problems of the adult education virtual program and how she and Delany had ongoing discussions about these problems. Several times during the interview Thomas mentioned how she and Director Delany had been talking all along. She states:

It was a huge management problem. And there was another teacher that did not communicate well, so see I don't have time in my position to manage that. I knew that if we went with the virtual school, well [Director Delany] and I had been talking all along.

After deciding to make the program transition, Coordinator Thomas again mentions the ongoing discussion:

We did a new virtual learner training in September, I mean August, so that they could take part in September . . . And then in my future plans in late November, we are going to transition, 'cause [Delany] and I had been talking. One other remark depicts how Director Delany worked to help convince Coordinator Thomas that this was the best course of action. In this case, Ms. Thomas was persuaded that the high school virtual program would be the best answer for adult education students, with Ms. Delany helping the adult education program. Thomas explains:

But I feel like that the virtual school has done everything they can to work with us. They had five enrollment periods this year. I think that's wonderful ... They've done, you know [Director Delany], she's done everything she can to bend over backwards to help us.

After several months of working with a program that she did not initiate, Coordinator Thomas was convinced that a merger was the best solution. Her decision was impacted in part by the persuasiveness of Director Delany, who offered her a more viable solution for adult education students—that is joining the regular high school virtual program. In addition to being personally convinced, Coordinator Thomas also persuaded State Director Donovan that this was, in fact, the best solution for the virtual program.

Making Executive Decisions

A third form of negotiating interests by state leaders was to make executive decisions without necessarily soliciting the input of others. Similar to partnering, many of the executive decisions were connected to events as the program developed. They took place at different stages of development, including the time preceding the program's start, and at the time when state leaders decided the end the program. Examples of executive decision-making can be seen through stakeholder comments. Planners made numerous decisions throughout the duration of the program; however comments focused on three particular decisions: executive decisions about choosing participants, choosing curriculum, and establishing policy. *Choosing Participants.* One the ways administrators made executive decisions was to decide who would participate. State leaders choose local directors and programs, in turn, local program directors made choices about teachers. Coordinator Thomas explains how the state director chose the sites to participate, unsure why the decision was made:

Seven sites that were chosen for several reasons . . . I'm not sure how [Director Campbell] chose them, but anyway, we choose seven. Each one of those seven was to provide one teacher who would be the virtual teacher for one course and any student within those seven programs could take one of the virtual courses.

On the other hand State Director Campbell presents her reasoning behind the executive

decision:

We started piloting the program, we selected the adult ed programs that we felt could pull it off that had good leaders, good adult ed directors that would shepherd the process so to speak, and they would be very helpful.

Ms Dennis explains how her director made the decision to recruit her to teach the

courses for the virtual program:

The state department of adult education contacted certain programs and asked if they would be part of a pilot and then [my director] came and asked me if I would be interested in being an instructor, involved in that program.

Ms. King gives a similar description:

Well, the original approach was, [my director] approached me and said, well I've got this new project, it's a virtual school that we are going to try to get on board in the pilot program. So we went to the original training.

In each of these cases, leaders were making executive decisions to plan the program.

They had an interest in providing virtual program that would benefit students. They

were also interested in providing an efficient delivery system; therefore state

leaders were motivated to choose local programs and people that would be the most competent in program delivery.

Choosing Curriculum. A second example of executive decision-making was when leaders made choices about the curriculum and the delivery platform. Vice President Davis explains how she made a decision along with Dr. Campbell to choose the PLATO delivery platform for the program:

I'm never one to mind about making the decisions, [Director Campbell] and I just went ahead and made the decision to go ahead and keep it with the platform that we had here, but the subscription model, that was the only way that PLATO wanted to sell it to the state.

This executive decision later caused confusion over PLATO licenses. Coordinator Thomas explained that both she and Director Delany had misunderstood which delivery platform had been chosen for the adult education virtual program.

Establishing Policy. Stakeholders also had to make decisions about policy. One of the concerns impacting students was the age issue. State Legislation for the virtual school had decreed that only students ages 17 -21 could be served through the virtual school, including adult education students. This became a problem for students in some adult education programs because in certain instances students pursuing high school diplomas were older. Coordinator Thomas explains:

So the second phase of the pilot, what we didn't realize in the first phase of the pilot, was that we were only supposed to be using these courses for students who were 21 and under. We didn't realize that.

Thomas further explains how Director Delany addressed the issue by making an executive decision, stating:

And when they wrote it, the legislation, they really weren't thinking about that we might have students that were over 21 doing their high school diploma. Now, since this time [Virtual High School Director Delany] has said, "you can put anybody in it you want." [Director Donovan], he talked to somebody . . . in an office here at the state department, and they said, "No, absolutely not, you have to stick to what the legislation says." [Director Delany] said, "No you don't, we're in a pilot, we're going to do what we want to do."

One of the teachers, Ms. Canton, also mentioned the age problem of her students and how a

decision was made concerning the students. She states:

When we first started in the spring we had some older students ... By the fall, sometime in the fall, they said that we couldn't let these older students take the course, and so that cut out a big number of our students and then later they came back and said well you can. So there was little bit of yes you can, no you can't.

Clearly making executive decisions was a way that stakeholders negotiated their particular interests during the planning and implementation of the adult education virtual program. Through executive decisions state administrators advanced their interests in the program. Administrators in authority had the power to make these types of decisions; however, other stakeholders such as teachers were not able to negotiate in this way. Their means of negotiation were limited to other methods.

Engaging in Problem Solving

A fourth method of stakeholder negotiation occurred through problem solving. Implementing the virtual program for adult learners presented a broad spectrum of problems to be solved in order to make the virtual program a success. There were multiple issues that planners had to address at both state and local levels. Stakeholder interests determined which problems were deemed important and worthy of attention. For example, state administrators typically worked to address issues involving cost, teacher training, and delivery system; on the other hand, teachers worked to solve problems with curriculum, student access, and student completion which led to student success. Stakeholders worked through problems that emerged as the program progressed; however not all worked on the same problems. Interests in the program determined ways in which planners would work to resolve problems. Problem solving practices could be placed into two sub-categories: experimenting and troubleshooting.

Experimenting. All of the program planners experimented during the planning process by trying different solutions to problems. State planners were interested in providing structure for the delivery system. The newness of the program dictated the necessity to experiment with various solutions in the developmental stages. Vice President Davis explains:

And we just kind of created our own structures because I felt like that there were not structures out there at that time, that were what we needed, and we didn't really have a model to go on and so we just sort of winged it.

Also concerned with the delivery system, State Director Delany mentioned the structure of the program. She discussed how working with a pilot program often involved experimenting with different methods, reviewing and, making changes. She explains:

So there were just structural program things that needed to happen and questions that weren't asked by people. And that usually happens during a pilot and then you work it out at the end once you get your review. And you say, okay let's see, let's lay this all out and here's what we can change and how we can make this better.

Finding a solution to a problem was achieved through experimentation, according to State Director Delany. This was particularly true with technology and online learning. Her interest experimenting with technology is evident in her comments. She explains how working with technology was an ongoing, evolving effort, stating:

You can't be afraid of whatever it is you want to try, you've got to experiment with different ways of doing one thing. There is never one way to do anything online. There is always 25 ways of doing it. Which way is best for that course or particular content is what you have to figure out.

Planners also demonstrated problem solving through experimentation when they acquired a registration system for the virtual program. In the interest of providing an efficient delivery system, Technical Coordinator Taylor explains how they discovered through trial and error that a registration system was necessary, stating:

There were loads, there were things that we did right, things that we did wrong, there were things that we have learned from it, changed as we went along . . . one of the things that we changed, once we had budget money, we ended up adding a registration system, which is definitely something we needed.

The e-mail problem was a reoccurring theme in the interviews and was mentioned several times by stakeholders. The training consultant, program coordinator, and teachers all worked with this particular problem. State and local planners experimented with ways to solve problems with e-mail communication for students. Eventually state leaders addressed the issue by simply requiring all local programs to furnish student e-mail addresses. Coordinator Thompson describes this solution:

Okay, so the virtual school program guidelines for each program was they had to be able to provide those e-mail addresses, they had to provide a virtual learning coordinator . . . They have to because they need one point of contact for me and for troubleshooting, with the virtual school people.

With this directive, teachers at the local level had to resolve student e-mail issues. Ms. King described how she helped students acquire e-mail accounts. She states:

What I started to do, so we wouldn't have that problem is, when a student came on, as part of the orientation I just gave everybody a Yahoo account, because Yahoo seem to be safe and it went through. So everybody was just automatically registered for Yahoo and my home e-mail is Yahoo so I use that a lot for communication with students. It just made things easier.

Ms. Canton described how she experimented with e-mail solutions at the local level. They also tried, unsuccessfully, the web conferencing software, Elluminate, utilized by the high school virtual program. Some of the problems were solved, such as e-mail; others were not resolved. Ms. Canton used the term "modify and adjust in adult ed" expressing how they experimented with solutions to problems:

Well one thing is when you're working with multiple districts, there are multiple approaches to different things, for example, students in the regular high school have an e-mail account, in adult ed they don't. And there are e-mails that are blocked, like Hotmail and Yahoo, are blocked if you're trying to use the school system, and so there were some e-mails that we tried to use for communication that we couldn't use. The Elluminate sessions—we never could get them to work . . . But modify and adjust in adult ed, so we got most everything worked out even if it wasn't completely settled, we were able to figure out a way around the problem.

Troubleshooting. A second subcategory of problem solving was troubleshooting.

Teachers, in particular, negotiated their interest in student success by troubleshooting the technical problems presented by PLATO software. There were problems that occurred with student access and blocked pop ups. Teacher Dennis' solution to the problem was to create instructions to navigate the system. She explains:

I've made a little Inspiration flowchart that kind of shows them ... some of the common hurdles that students run into ... and so you talk about that, and say, "yes, it's designed to do this, now you have to go back and relook at the material ... [and] access any offline assignments.

In another statement she explains:

PLATO requires pop ups, and there are so many layers of pop up blockers now, and people don't even know how many pop up blockers they have . . . That was one of the other headaches with people working at home . . . 'cause I was like, "If I could just go to your house, I could make this work!"

Teacher Canton explains how they were constantly working to solve problems, stating:

We brainstormed because when you start working on this, there are things that come up that you hadn't thought about so we tried to figure out all these different logistical problems . . . we had a number of meetings, and after the first meeting, we'd go home and try some things, and then find out some problems and then we bring those problems back to try to get them solved.

Problem solving was an ongoing activity for the planners working with the adult education virtual program. There were many issues that needed resolution in order to achieve program success. Depending on interests in the program, planners gave time and attention to what their stake in the program was; therefore, problem solving was a method in which stakeholders negotiated their individual interests.

Filling a Leadership Vacuum

A fifth way in which stakeholders negotiated their interests in the adult education virtual program was in filling a leadership vacuum. A leadership vacuum occurs when individuals who have knowledge and experience leave a program, creating a vacuum of strong leadership. This vacuum was evident in several instances with the adult education virtual program. Individuals who assumed leadership roles had to negotiate their interests as they filled the vacuum. Filling the leadership vacuum occurred before and during the adult education virtual pilot program. There were two junctures at which leaders filled the leadership vacuum: local level and state level.

Filling a Local Leadership Vacuum. The first vacuum of leadership preceded the development of the adult education virtual program but impacted its beginning. Vice

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President Davis assumed a leadership role for adult education on the local level when State Director Campbell refused to fund South East County's adult education program because of its lack of compliance with state requirements. She explains the county's position at the time:

After we agreed to assume the program, then I got the results of [Director Campbell's] audit of adult ed. She had refused any longer to pay the salary of the adult ed director and it kind of went downhill from there. They had suspended the ability of [South East County] to issue an adult ed diploma.

As a result of the audit, the leadership of the adult education program shifted to South East

Technical College. Vice President Davis had a relatively short amount of time to develop a

new adult education program on the college campus. She explains:

There are three superintendents ... [Director Campbell] had called them and said they were going to get a bad audit. One of the superintendents ... really strongly influenced the others that it would just be good for them to move it out and that it would be good to be on this campus.

At this point Vice President Davis began to develop an adult education virtual program. She

used her resources, including the PLATO Learning System, former teacher colleagues, and

her associate, Consultant Nelson, to start a virtual program on campus for adult education.

All of this occurred as a result of the leadership vacuum occurring at the county level. Vice

President Davis explains her role in providing new leadership, stating:

We agreed to assume the program. . . We had no staff and it was an interesting scenario, because we developed some protocols for advising students and we all volunteered to advise students and they all came out of the woodwork.

She also explains:

I had from September until October to come up with a curriculum because you can only keep students in the program for so long without a curriculum ... A diploma had to be a diploma ... and the only way I could approach that was online. So one of the things with PLATO Learning ... I ended up going with them.

A vacuum of leadership resulted when county officials gave up the administration of the local adult education program through the school district and allowed it to be assumed by the technical college. Vice President Davis filled the leadership vacuum by developing a program on the campus of South East Technical College.

Filling a State Leadership Vacuum. A second vacuum of leadership occurred when Director Campbell left her position as state director of adult education. This occurred at the same time leaders were planning to initiate the adult education virtual program. Director Campbell had been working with Director Delany and when she left it created a vacuum of leadership which others had to step in and fill. The role of program management fell to Coordinator Thomas, who had already been acting in a secondary leadership role. According the Dr. Campbell, Ms. Thomas had attended earlier meetings in her place, as needed. Dr. Campbell explains:

I was on her [Director Delany's] committee and I was with her to help, because I was the state director of adult ed, so she included—fortunately she included adult ed... But at this point, because of [Director Delany] and her leadership, I was asked right from the get go, to come in, and so, [Coordinator Thomas] served in my place at the meetings that I didn't go to.

When Dr. Campbell left, Coordinator Thomas was required to fill the vacuum of leadership by continuing to implement the adult education virtual pilot program. Filling the leadership role was an uncertain task, for Ms. Thomas who lacked experience, especially with technology. She had many difficult decisions to make concerning the virtual program. These difficult decisions that were necessary to fill the leadership vacuum impacted the direction of the program. In fact, Ms. Thomas made the decision to end the program in the few short months after its beginning, due to management problems. In Ms. Thomas' words, she states:

I had already decided to do it [merge with high school virtual program] and actually ... I don't know that if we had had, if [Director Donovan] knew more, if [Director Campbell] was still on board, [Dr. Campbell] would have been making all these decisions. But it just fell to me, but because I was here, and working with it.

State Director Delany also recognized leadership vacuum with adult education state leaders, and stepped up to help fill the vacuum. She was clearly willing to take a strong leadership role, by absorbing the adult education students in the high school program. She explains:

It struggled because of guidance and leadership from that area, but you know, and for it, I think, as with any pilot in the very beginning people not knowing what to do, not having that kind of training or that support to, especially in adult centers that are located everywhere, and don't have access to e-mail for students and things like that—there are some barriers that adult ed has to overcome before they're capable of doing this full fledge.

The incoming state director of adult education did not fill the leadership vacuum for the

adult education pilot. He preferred to leave the decision making to Coordinator Thomas

and State Director Delany, taking a less authoritative role in the virtual program. He states:

We meet weekly, and so I've been getting more information with her along the way to, but basically it's been a combination of [Coordinator Thomas] and [Director Delany], head of the eLearning office and then [Ms. Thomas] keeps me updated, of what's going on, of what we need to do differently.

Others recognized the leadership vacuum as well. Evaluator Jones remarked on the leadership role Coordinator Thomas had to fill, stating, "But then [Ms. Thomas] came in and she had lots of other things to deal with. It landed in her lap and she was needing to work with people who had gotten it started." One of the teachers adds a further remark indicating inexperience with leadership concerning the virtual pilot program. Ms. King tells how Coordinator Thomas said "we were building that plane as we flew it." One other individual, Consultant Nelson, mentioned the confusion that occurred during the leadership transition after Director Campbell left. She states:

[Vice President Davis] suggested that I work with them, and then [Director Campbell] left—when it all settled down, they asked if I could do the training for the teachers and I said sure . . . there was a lot of confusion after that time, because we were supposed to start, I believe, in January I think that meeting happened in January, we were supposed to start in February but I don't believe we started until the end of March, when everything ended up.

In the two instances described on both the local and state level, when leadership roles were vacated, there was a resulting vacuum of leadership. Consequently others filled the vacuum by assuming roles of authority and power while negotiating their interests in the virtual program.

The study of program planning, in the case of the state virtual school, revealed that the strategies people used are tied to the amount of power that they have, and are often based on their positions in the system. As could be seen in table 4.4, those at the state level negotiated their interests by engaging in formal partnerships, where as the teachers formed informal partnerships. Similarly, planners at the state office tended to negotiate their interests by making executive decisions, while the consultants and teachers at the local levels negotiated their interests more with discussion and problem solving. Filling a leadership vacuum occurred at both the state and local levels, but those who engaged in this action also had positions of authority and were accustomed to taking the lead, such as State Director Delany and Vice President Davis. In certain instances state leaders let others

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fill a leadership vacuum, such as when Coordinator Thomas made the decision to merge the adult education virtual program with the high school virtual program, thus allowing others to provide leadership for adult education students in virtual courses. Stakeholders engaged in these different actions to shape the ongoing planning and eventual outcome of the virtual program.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter has five sections: a summary of findings, conclusions and discussion, implications for practice and policy, recommendations for future research, and a final note.

Summary of Findings

This study sought to examine how stakeholder interests shape the planning of a state virtual school program for adult literacy students in one southern state. Research questions guiding the study were:

- (1) What is the historical context of the virtual program for adult literacy students?
- (2) What are the interests of the stakeholders in the planning process?
- (3) How are the interests of stakeholders negotiated in the planning process?

A qualitative case study was used to address these questions. Data were collected through interviews of persons involved in planning the adult education virtual school program and from documents relative to the program. Participants in the study included state directors, local directors of adult education, teachers, and other individuals involved in planning and implementing the virtual program. Interview questions were directed at examining participant's roles, interests and actions in the planning process.

The purpose of the first research question was to gain an understanding of the history and context of the program and to provide a description of several aspects of the program impacting its development. The program aspects influencing development were:
the planners of the program; participants; funding and legislation; and curriculum and management systems.

Like most public programs, the evolution of the virtual program for adult education students was not a simple straightforward case. Its development involved several stakeholders working to implement virtual opportunities in more than one arena. Initially state leaders piloted a high school virtual program for regular high school students. From the beginnings of this program a secondary pilot emerged as a result stakeholders' interest in creating an alternative virtual program for adult education students. The two programs were closely tied together with state leaders simultaneously making decisions about both programs in certain instances. Furthermore, the decisions were often experimental in nature as planners worked with new and emerging technologies that are typical with many virtual programs developing nationwide.

The second research question sought to identify the interests of the stakeholders involved in the planning and development of the adult education virtual program. Five themes emerged from the data including: establishing credibility, utilizing innovation, monitoring cost benefit, providing teacher preparation, and maximizing student success with the virtual program.

Within each of these themes there were subthemes. Establishing credibility had two subthemes of providing a standardized curriculum and improving public perception by offering virtual courses. Utilizing innovation had three subthemes of providing alternative opportunities, increasing student engagement, and providing an efficient delivery system with virtual courses. Monitoring the cost benefit of the program included subthemes of acquiring funds to support the program, working with limitations in adult literacy

programs, and merging the adult education program with the high school program when it became more cost efficient. Providing teacher preparation had three subthemes of rushing teacher preparation, training the adult education teachers, and preparing curriculum for the courses. Maximizing student success included three subthemes. The first was reducing the dropout rate, identifying characteristics for success, and addressing the needs adult education students.

The third research question examined ways in which the stakeholders negotiated their interests in developing the adult education virtual school program. The methods most frequently used in negotiation were: forming partnerships, entering discussion, making executive decisions, engaging in problem solving, and filling a leadership vacuum.

These themes also had subthemes. Forming partnerships included establishing both formal and informal partnerships in ways that impacted program development. Discussion included two subthemes of forming public consensus and using persuasion especially in regard to certain decisions. Making executive decisions centered on choosing participants for the pilot program, choosing curriculum that would be used, and establishing policies as the program developed. The theme of engaging in problem solving included subthemes of experimenting and troubleshooting, particularly with technical issues. Filling a leadership vacuum was evident on both the local and state levels.

Reviewing each of the themes reveals that planning and implementing a virtual program was no easy task for both state and local leaders. At all stages of the development, stakeholders had to make many decisions. The most complicated turn of events occurred when the original leader, the state director of adult education, who was the driving force behind the development of the adult education virtual program, left her position at the

state department. This created a void of leadership at the very time the program was being implemented. Throughout the process stakeholders negotiated their varying interests to determine the virtual program's direction and final outcome.

Conclusions and Discussion

There were three major conclusions that I was able to draw from this study concerning the planning and implementation of a statewide virtual program for adult education students. First, there were differences in the way power and authority were distributed among the stakeholders resulting in asymmetrical relationships. Second, the stakeholders' attitudes toward technology influenced their interests in the planning process of the virtual program. Third, the needs of the students conflicted with the needs of the educational organization providing the program.

Asymmetrical Power Relationships

The first conclusion of this study is that there was a clear difference of power between state leaders, local leaders, and teachers of the adult education virtual program. Cervero and Wilson (2006) describe these asymmetrical relationships, stating that power is "distributed to people by virtue of their position and participation in . . . organizational relationships" (p. 85). Based on position in the program, individuals had more or less power to make choices concerning the program. In the case of the virtual program, state leaders made executive decisions concerning curriculum, program direction, and policy, generally without the input of teachers, and the students whom they represented. Thus teacher and student interests were not always represented at the planning table.

Scholars recognize that there is a continuum of negotiation that exists at the planning table (Forester, 1989; Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 2006; Newman, 2006). Forester

(1989) and Cervero and Wilson (1994) refer to the different types of negotiations as strategies in the planning process, Yang, Cervero, Valentine and Benson (1998) refer to these actions as tactics. The important point is that there are different actions that planners use to negotiate for their particular interests and there are varying levels of agreement and disagreement between stakeholders.

In this study, examples of more equal relationships occurred when the State Director Campbell, Vice President Davis, and Virtual High School Director Delany initially formed partnerships to jointly serve on the task force, travel to other programs, and draft legislation to develop the virtual school program. During that time there was more equality in the negotiations. They shared financial resources and agreed on policy. This part of the continuum is described as consultation, when the common interests of the stakeholders outweigh their differences (Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Newman, 2006). This is similar to the theme of partnering described in this study.

The next stage of the continuum is bargaining, when parties do not agree on all matters but find common ground for decisions (Cervero & Wilson, 2006). This is similar to discussion and problem solving in this study. An example of bargaining occurred during the evaluation meeting in June. The group was asked to report on their progress with the program and to consider future direction of the program. They formed a consensus during the discussion about joining adult education students with the regular high school virtual program. Although there were concerns about adult education student needs, most stakeholders eventually agreed on the decision. Newman (2006) describes this strategy of negotiation as "the process whereby two or more parties with both common and conflicting interests come together to talk with a view to reaching an agreement (p.129).

In this study I observed discussion, consensus, and persuasion were actions used by stakeholders. Problem solving was an ongoing activity during the year, especially for those responsible for technical operations.

A third stage of the continuum is disputes (Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Newman, 2006). Newman explains this type of negotiation as "a process in which parties whose conflicting interests outweigh any common ones . . . each with a view to furthering its own interests" (p.131). Disputes were more evident when Virtual High School Director Delany learned that the PLATO licenses she had planned to use indefinitely would expire. At that point, along with State Director Campbell's departure, the earlier partnerships that existed between her and Vice President Davis began to break down. Later, instead of continuing to support the adult education virtual pilot program, Ms. Delany persuaded Coordinator Thomas that merging the program would be the best solution for program management. Ms. Delany stated in her interview that the adult education program struggled because of lack of leadership. She was a more powerful force, persuading others to include the adult education students in the high school program. In Dr. Campbell's absence, those with more powerful leadership abilities filled the leadership vacuum.

State leaders exercised unequal power relationships when they chose to merge the program. This was evident when State Director Donovan and Coordinator Thomas decided to discontinue the pilot, no longer utilizing adult education teachers for the virtual courses. Ms. Thomas mentioned in her interview that they made the decision before the public meeting in June. As a result of that decision, the teachers later expressed regret that they could no longer teach the courses and some eventually stopped promoting the high school virtual courses for their adult education students.

Cervero and Wilson (2006) explain that "power both enables and constrains action" (p. 86). In this particular case the teachers, and students as well, were constrained as the decision was made to change the way they would participate in the virtual program, by ceasing to use adult education teachers for the pilot program. The teachers had less power and say so for this executive decision.

One other example of constrained action was with the student e-mail situation. The planners of the adult education virtual program had to rely on the technical staff from the high school virtual program, and the staff would not provide an e-mail solution for the adult education students. Technical Coordinator Taylor stated that concern for legalities was the reason why they would not provide student e-mail from the state office. While this might have been a legitimate reason, the decision caused a disadvantage for Consultant Nelson and Coordinator Thomas as well as the teachers of the virtual program.

In addition to decisions and choices about program direction, hegemony existed in the curriculum choices made by state leaders when they decided to use PLATO for the curriculum. Computer-assisted instruction typifies an expert-driven or skills-based approach described by Maruatona (2001). In his study of literacy programs in Botswana, he argued that an expert-driven curriculum did not include students in their learning choices and further tended to reproduce hegemonic practices of the state. Elias and Merriam (2005) suggest that a behavioral approach to learning prevails in most adult literacy programs across America. This was true in the adult education virtual program. According to the science teacher, students were often bored with PLATO modules. She reported that students were more invested in the courses when she added additional assignments based on student interest. Adult education planners tended not to use

constructivist courses which would include project-based assignments, instead preferring the PLATO curriculum which provided a more standardized skills-based curriculum. The standardized curriculum was a great interest of state leaders as mentioned in the findings. Nevertheless, a skills-based curriculum does not necessarily represent best practice for adult literacy programs (Beder & Medina, 2001; Stites, 2004). Others suggest that the design of technology itself in adult education very often creates a technology-driven pedagogy rather than a learner-driven one (Imel, 1998; Dillon-Marable 2004). Although it has been argued that constructivist or project-based learning is more difficult for adult literacy students, the teachers of this study demonstrated that when students were given support they were able to complete project-based assignments.

Stakeholders' Interests in Technology

A second conclusion of this study was that the different stakeholders' interests in the virtual program appeared to be influenced by their attitudes about technology, impacting the way they promoted the use of technology in educational settings. In his work, *Diffusion of Innovation*, Rogers (2003) describes innovators of technology as being venturesome, "due to a desire for the rash, the daring, and the risky" (p. 283). State Director Campbell and Virtual High School Director Delany, in particular, were enthusiastic about the use of technology and online programs, as was Vice President Davis. High on their list of interests was the use of innovation with technology. In contrast, when State Director Donovan and Coordinator Thomas assumed the leadership of the program, their less enthusiastic responses and approaches toward technology affected the direction of the program. Ms. Thomas expressed her uncertainly and inexperience as she directed the virtual program, making it clear that she was learning along the way while Dr. Donovan

believed that younger students, not including him, were more adept with technology and were more inclined to embrace virtual learning. Additionally he stayed distant from the decision making process with the virtual program.

In a study of teacher's use of technology, Becker (2000) found that teachers who had better technical skills tended to use computers in more sophisticated ways with students than teachers with limited technical skills, and "no personal investment in using computers" (p. 7). He recognized that adopting technology for personal use affected attitudes toward teaching with technology. Similarly the planners and administrators in this study showed more or less enthusiasm for the virtual program depending on their former experience with technology. Vice President Davis was a former vice president of PLATO Learning and Virtual High School Director Delany was a former computer engineer. State Director Campbell had previously implemented numerous technology programs during her years as a local director. All three had extensive experience with technology innovation and interest in providing online programs through the establishment of a state virtual program.

Virtual High School Director Delany was a strong advocate for incorporating the newest technology in virtual programs. She was also impatient with teachers who resisted the use of technology in their classrooms. Vice President Davis, on the other hand, was more moderate about teachers' attitudes toward technology. She was concerned for adult literacy teachers who needed time to adopt technology as a tool for teaching. Vice President Davis concluded that the best teachers were "curriculum people and, by the way, they did technology well." Davis also expressed her belief that constantly changing

technology "or constantly going with the latest and greatest" was discouraging for adult education teachers.

In this study, several stakeholders were particularly concerned about the short training time for teachers. In a study of Australia's distance education programs for adult education, Askov, Petty, Johnson and Young (2003) point out that in the United States, "less emphasis has been placed on the professional development for teachers and teacher leaders" for online instruction in adult education programs (p. 64). They stress the importance of teacher preparation if teachers are going to comfortable with technology and help their students in a virtual program. Both administrators and teachers must be receptive of technology as a tool for learning in order to adequately plan for and provide virtual learning opportunities for adult education students.

Adult Literacy Students' Needs vs. Organizational Needs

A final conclusion of this study is that the needs of adult literacy students were in conflict with the needs of the organization in the decision-making process. This was particularly evident when stakeholders merged the program with regular high school students in the interest of taking full advantage of the high school virtual program's monetary and management resources. In so doing, state leaders placed less regard on the needs of adult education students by not providing additional services through the state's adult education programs.

A complaint of the teachers was that they could not monitor the adult students in their programs once they were enrolled in the regular high school virtual courses. The monitoring and support that existed in the adult education virtual program was particularly helpful for adult education students. Hannafin, Hill, Glazer and Sharma (2003)

list scaffolds as one of several learning factors that influence student success in a web based learning environment. Scaffolds are defined as "assistance that is initially provided to support the learner" (p. 252). When adult education instructors were teaching the virtual courses, this support was available; but much less so when the program changed. Moore and Kearsley (1996) contend that specialized teaching behaviors are necessary to lessen the transactional distance, which is a psychological space of potential misunderstanding between teacher and students. This distance increased when students were not connected the adult education teachers. While it could be argued that the students did have help after joining the high school virtual program, the comments from teachers in this study suggest that the more personalized attention given to adult education students was lost.

Examining the organizational needs revealed that the state office of adult education had its own set of issues and needs to contend with while providing programs for citizens of the state, and answering to the demands of the federal system of adult education. Maclean (1996) suggests that educational planning should serve both institutional and learner interests. In this case the state organization is required to provide programs for students with a limited budget and staff. Coordinator Thomas complained that management of the virtual program drained her time and resources while caring for other responsibilities in the state office. Sparks (2001) argues that federal policy places too many demands on program providers without adding additional resources, consequently limiting students' learning opportunities. In this case, the management and cost of the program became too demanding for state leaders. Umble, Cervero and Langone (2001) noted in their study that the historical context and needs of the organization were as important as the students they served if they were to maintain policy demands. In the state office,

leaders were tied to multiple management and reporting responsibilities with a shrinking staff and budget; therefore it was expedient, according to State Director Donovan, to "hook onto their wagon" referring to the high school virtual program in order to use their resources.

The question is who benefits in this scenario? In this study most of the stakeholders recognized that adult education students had additional learning needs in order to achieve success in an online environment. All of the stakeholders who worked directly with adult education students or programs recognized the greater needs of adult education students in comparison to the average high school students. The adult education teachers gave extra support to the students in the adult education program. The only two persons not as openly concerned for adult education students were Virtual High School Director Delany and Technical Coordinator Taylor, the two most directly involved with the high school virtual program. Cervero and Wilson (1994; 2006) argue that planners should always consider two questions for the sake of ethical commitments: "Who should benefit?" and "Whose interests should be represented at the planning tables?" (p. 92). In this case the ethical commitment to the adult education students should be considered in a virtual program.

Dirkx (1999) argues that the system of federally funded adult literacy education provides limited program initiatives. Often both providers and students of adult literacy education can be found on the margins of the educational system. In this case, what began as a program to address the needs of at risk students with the aim of alleviating the dropout rate finally became a marginalized effort for the students with the most need.

The study of the adult education virtual program was complex. It was helpful to examine the numerous interests of stakeholder concerns for producing an online program

at the state level. Observing how different stakeholders negotiated their interests reveals that planning such a program was not an easy task. Many of the planners' actions were positive and helpful, such as partnering or consultation, and helped to establish this program initially. As the program progressed, however, other actions such as executive decisions without input of others caused conflicts or disputes, resulting in the breakdown of communication and partnerships, and ultimately resulting in the end of the program that was designed solely for adult education students.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The conclusions of this study suggest several implications for others who undertake the task of planning a virtual program for adult learners. Planning a virtual program for students who have historically experienced failure implies a need to address several issues. First, it is important for persons involved in the planning process to recognize that it is a social and political activity and that the planning and development of a virtual program revolves around the interests of multiple stakeholders. (Forester, 1989; Newman, 2006; Cervero & Wilson, 2006).

The results of this study suggest that it is important for planners to be more aware of the social and political atmosphere of planning from state to local levels. In several instances stakeholders were unaware of others' interests in the program as they made decisions about the direction of the program. An example of lack of awareness occurred when the state director did not know of the teachers' concerns about being unable to monitor adult education students who were enrolled in the high school program. More communication and awareness could help to address concerns such as these. On the other hand, teachers were unaware of the cost of the program and management demands placed

on administrators. General awareness and improved communication could result in a stronger system and a more well-planned organization.

When breakdowns in communication occurred and various stakeholders and groups ceased working with each other, the program faltered. Therefore it is important for planners to work together, staying more aware of other stakeholders' interests in order to achieve a successful program outcome. Program planning has the potential to be more effective if state leaders make efforts to involve all stakeholders in the planning process, including teachers who are, as Dr. Campbell described, "in the trenches." Although students were not part of the planning process in this case, the teachers were the best representatives of students' interests at the planning table. Ongoing discussion among stakeholders, concerning problems and solutions for developing the virtual program, provides a more democratic approach for problem solving and program planning (Forester, 1989, Cervero & Wilson, 2006).

Second, state leaders should make informed decisions in the development of technology-based programs for virtual learning. In this study, several planners admitted that their inexperience with online learning contributed to the experimental nature of the program's development. When state leaders planned the program, making decisions without experience in instructional technology, it became problematic. Program planners should incorporate research of best practices for online learning and adult learning into the planning process.

In an article on policy and practice considerations for virtual schools, Blomeyer and Dawson (2005) suggest several organizations "who have sought to provide guidance for policymakers and decision makers" concerning the development of virtual schools (p. 61).

These organizations include the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL), an organization that explores research and policy for high quality online learning for students; the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), an organization which provides publications and reports for online learning; and the North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL), an organization that conducts research on policy and practice and offers technical assistance for online learning. Additionally Project IDEAL (Improving Distance Education for Adult Learners) provides resources for states working to provide online learning for adult education programs. These and other resources help to inform program planners and policymakers of best practices for virtual learning.

A third implication from this study is that planners and administrators should provide adequate preparation time for teachers of online courses. In this case, problems emerged when the teacher training was too rushed, costing the program in terms of quality, management, and student success. In a description of lessons learned from the leaders of the Virtual High School, Pape, Adams, and Ribeiro (2005) state that "students and teachers succeed when given training, infrastructure, and support" (p. 131). Askov et al. (2003) support this same argument, suggesting that "states need to develop training plans and ongoing support to help teachers acquire the skills to effectively support learners" (p. 65).

Clearly it is essential that planners develop adequate professional development for adult education teachers involved in teaching online courses. According to Moore and Kearsley, (1996) distance education requires specialized teaching behaviors that are essential to lessen the transactional distance. Davis and Roblyer (2005) suggest that not only do students need to possess a special set of skills that enables them to be successful

with online courses but "teachers also require a unique set of skills" (p. 400). Cavanaugh, Gillan, Kromrey, Hess, and Blomeyer (2004) state that "there has been very little formal preparation available addressing the unique nature of online instruction and very little time for teachers to develop their expertise as online instructors" (p. 16). They maintain that professional development will contribute to student success.

A fourth implication from the results of this study is that planners should make every effort to address the needs of adult literacy students, recognizing their additional barriers to learning. When adult education students were placed in the high school virtual program, the lack of accommodations for these students reduced their chances for successful completion of online course work. Students fared better, according to the adult education teachers, when they were provided extra support. Additionally teachers should have some knowledge and experience in adult education if they work with low literacy students. In this study, the director of the high school virtual program believed that being certified in the content area was all that was needed to teach the virtual courses, even when adult education students were included. I suggest that these teachers should have additional training in order to help adult education students succeed. Many adult educators have studied and presented models of adult learning, such as Knowles (1970), Freire (1970), Grow (1991), and others. Ideally, teachers working with adult literacy students should have some knowledge of these models and experience in the field of adult education.

A fifth implication from the findings of this study is that planners must contend with the organizational needs of the programs providing learning in order to adequately provide sustainable programs. When the state leaders decided to discontinue the program because

of funding and management issues, it was clear that they were responding to constraints on their own resources as an organization. It is important to recognize that organizations have needs and interests that must be attended to, if the organization is to efficiently provide educational programs for learners. Concerns such as funding, federal reporting requirements, and policy guidelines are all historical and contextual interests of the organization (Umble, Cervero and Langone, 2001). Policymakers must consider the burden of producing adult literacy programs on state and local offices and how federal and state guidelines impact programs, recognizing the often-limited resources available for adult education programs.

The federal government should continue to support national research initiatives for adult literacy learning across the nation. It is hoped that the government will once again establish national research centers such as the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), which ended research dissemination in 2007 as federal funds were eliminated. There should be more national research, not less. According to Hopkins, Monaghan and Hansman (2009), one way of ensuring that legislation is favorable towards federal and state systems of adult literacy programs is for adult educators to "become active in local civic groups as well as national organizations that support adult education's involvement in national policy development" (p. 223). This is another way in which stakeholders' interests could be represented at the planning table (Cervero & Wilson, 2006).

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations that I would offer for future research. Continuing research of effective methods for adult literacy students in online programs is

important because of the absence of such research. Similar studies such as this in other states would add to the findings of this study. Questions examining how other virtual programs were planned, what their successes and failures were, and how were they similar or different are questions that could be considered.

This study focused on stakeholder interests in the planning process; therefore including the perspectives of students was outside the scope of this study. More extensive studies that reflect the students' perspectives who take the virtual courses would contribute to knowledge of distance learning in adult education. Surveys or interviews of the students would reveal more information of their needs, barriers or failures, and successes with online learning.

One of the most important stakeholder interests in this study was student success, revealing inconclusive understanding of what promotes success for adult literacy students. Studies that investigate reasons for students' success would be helpful. Other research could focus on student success related to the building of community in online learning environments for adult literacy programs. Very few programs include this aspect of learning because distance learning is largely asynchronous in adult literacy programs online, in which commercial products are used for curriculum. Studies of programs with more synchronous and blended learning for adult literacy programs would be important.

Another conclusion of this study was that stakeholders' attitudes toward technology impacted their interests in planning virtual learning programs and decisions made concerning the program. It would be interesting to further investigate how administrators' attitudes impact the planning of technology programs for adult learners. Studies have been conducted on teachers' attitudes toward utilizing technology; similarly studies could

investigate how administrators of adult education programs adopt or support technology and online learning.

It would also be especially helpful to research adult literacy education teacher's experiences with staff development in regard to training and preparation for online learning. The findings of this study revealed concerns about lack of time for training and preparation; therefore more extensive research could examine these issues to a greater degree. Additionally, I noted that all of the persons involved in planning and teaching the adult education virtual school were women, with the exception of one person. I would be interested in knowing why more women are involved in planning and teaching online courses as opposed to men, particularly in adult literacy education. A critical study of feminist perspectives of teaching in virtual environments would be intriguing.

Finally in this study, the productivity of planning and development appeared when stakeholders partnered together to plan and share resources for monetary support as well. It would be helpful to study ways in which state and local leaders form alliances and collaborative efforts to develop virtual programs or schools. Examining these dynamics from a constructivist viewpoint would be helpful. Examining "what works" from the planning perspective would be most useful.

A Final Note

What is the current status of the virtual program for adult literacy students? As of this writing, I recently followed up with teachers and directors of the three programs in which the study is based. Presently two of the adult education programs have few, if any adult education students enrolled in the state high school virtual program. The two reasons most often cited for adult students not enrolling in the state high school virtual program

were complaints of courses being too difficult and lack of student interest. These directors felt that the high school virtual program, in general, did not meet the needs of their adult education students.

The third local adult education program, however, is utilizing the state high school virtual program. The coordinator (who was formerly one of the teachers in the adult education virtual program) reported that several adult education students from their program are successfully completing courses and graduating, although with fewer students than before in the adult education pilot. She explained that they had implemented several policy changes for students entering the high school virtual program, such as being more selective with students, screening potential students for reading levels, and obtaining regular progress reports from the high school virtual teachers. Although a smaller number of students are being served, the potential to help adult education students through virtual school programs still exists even though the program has changed.

As stakeholders engage in planning virtual learning programs, it helps to recognize that all stakeholders bring something to the table. Askov et al. (2003) state the following with respect to planning online programs:

The issues are complex in that they involve decision-making for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. It is important that these three groups work together and inform each other of findings and discoveries about what works ... All stakeholders need to be involved. (p. 73)

It is my belief that the only successful way to develop a virtual program for adult education students is to combine the energies of many groups working democratically to achieve the shared goal of student success, that is helping adult literacy students become

high school graduates. Finally, as a reminder of the students who are served through adult literacy virtual education programs, I chose to end this manuscript with an alternative representation of student voices from a qualitative study that I conducted as a precursor to my study of stakeholder interests. Commeryas and Kelly (2002) refer to "found poems" as a way of communicating "what is most telling and compelling in someone else's recorded language" (p. 101). From interviews of students who participated in the adult education virtual program, I combined several quotes to make a poem. This data was not included in this study but I believe that it is highly significant in regard to the lives we affect by planning programs.

Voices of Students Taking Virtual Courses in Adult Education

I LOVE computers. I mean I love everything about computers I'm not really the type of person that likes to just look at a book all day, The first time I used a computer, I learned how to write a check. Looking up information, downloading videos, Now just using my computer more for research—

You know Google is my best friend, www.ask jeeves. com is my best friend Google Map, Google Earth, You've got videos, music, just pretty much anything. It's crazy, I know it was crazy, It teaches more, it makes sure that you understand, It keeps my attention; it talked to you, it explained piece by piece You could work more at your own pace, because I wanted to learn more, But like on my own time.

I'm trying to get into the military, and I'm trying to make a deadline, Get my high school diploma and then the Air Force. You know I'm trying to get it done without a lot of mistakes—

And I just really need to stay on track, I got to stay focused and do what I got to do, I took that online, I was delighted to be online getting a credit. Yes.

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REFERENCE NOTES

¹In order to mask the identity of the state involved in this effort, it became impossible to cite certain reports, since those reports identify the state. Consequently I have created alternate titles for the two reports, one piece of legislation, and a newspaper article. These titles are: High School Redesign Report, 2005; Evaluation Report, 2007; State Virtual Legislation, 2007; and State Newspaper Article, 2007.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant Information

Pseudonym: ______Title: ______

General Questions

- 1. Please briefly describe your position.
- 2. Please describe your role with the virtual school program.
- 3. When did you first hear about the virtual school?
- 4. What did you think about the program?
- 5. Who helped to initiate the virtual school?
- 6. Who were the strongest proponents of the program?
- 7. Who is currently involved in the planning the program?
- 8. What obstacles did you encounter in planning the virtual school program?
- 9. How did the planners decide on software for the program?
- 10. Who helped to decide which curriculum to use for the virtual school?
- 11. How is the program funded?
- 12. Who manages the cost of the program?
- 13. What concerns do you have for adult literacy students in the program?
- 14. What might you do differently to plan the program?
- 15. What changes do you anticipate in the coming year?
- 16. Why are these changes being made?
- 17. Is there other information that you wish to provide?