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'Whose Goals Am I Meeting?' Policy and Practice Dilemmas in Adult Basic Education (ABE) in the Era of Accountability

Alma Hallulli Biba
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"WHOSE GOALS AM I MEETING?" POLICY AND PRACTICE DILEMMAS IN ADULT

BASIC EDUCATION (ABE) IN THE ERA OF ACCOUNTABILITY

A Dissertation Presented

by

ALMA HALLULLI BIBA

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ABSTRACT

"WHOSE GOALS AM I MEETING?" POLICY AND PRACTICE DILEMMAS IN

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION (ABE) IN THE ERA OF ACCOUNTABILITY

December 2016

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For the last two decades, federal legislation and Massachusetts' state ABE policies have linked adult learners' educational outcomes to performance systems and accountability requirements. These outcomes, represented as 'goals', reflect an emphasis on return-on-investment strategies and outcome-based accountability measures. Greatest emphasis is placed on that subset of adult learners' goals that are easily measured, attainable, and that are associated with public outcomes. This dissertation, in contrast, seeks to understand the goal setting process from the perspective of learners and local ABE stakeholders. Using a novel, mixed-method approach, this dissertation presents ABE learners' goal setting as a decision problem in order to reveal and disentangle the conflicting preferences fueled by outcome-based accountability requirements.

The study consists of two thematically related components. A descriptive phase explores internal and external determinants that influence learner goal setting. Findings from this phase inform the exploratory stage of the study, in which I apply a decision analytic framework to identify ABE learners' and teachers' preferences and gain insights into stakeholder involvement.

This study contributes to both the scholarly literature and practice and policy related to adult basic education by assisting the debate on policies that promote mutual or multiple stakeholders' accountability, involving discussions on how learners' perspectives can drive performance at the local level. The study demonstrates that the ABE goal setting problem is amenable to decision analysis, and that findings derived from application of specific decision-analytic methods aid in identifying stakeholder preferences and gain insights into stakeholder involvement. Findings generated by this study provide a useful addition to the growing literature of decision modeling in education. Additionally, it has opened new avenues for comparative research in ABE across states to examine the relationship between implementation of local accountability policies and learners' goal setting.

DEDICATION

To my daughters, Amanda and Ashley Biba. May you always be dedicated to education.

No struggle is big enough to stop you from achieving your dreams.

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit" Zechariah 4:6

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is a commitment to those that struggle every day to get a voice and stand up for themselves. In particular, this study is a commitment to Adult Basic Education students, who inspired me to be an adult educator and allowed me to be part of their journey and transformation. Their voices transpire this study.

This dissertation would have not been possible without the extended collaboration of the directors and ABE faculty at the study site. Their interest, understanding and dedication to the study opened a new world to the researcher in me. I am indebted to their generosity and positive encouragement they extended while I was conducting this study.

I would like to particularly acknowledge my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Michael Johnson, for his continuous support and dedication to this project. I am particularly grateful for the time and the attention he devoted to the study and all the valuable suggestions and ideas he shared. I would also like to acknowledge my other committee members, Dr. Ann Withorn, for the inspiration she instilled in me in dedicating this study to the lives of the adult learners and Dr. Lorna Rivera, for all of her valuable feedback and shared commitment to Adult Basic Education policy and practice.

A special thank you goes also to Dr. Kathleen Thoma, a colleague from the University of Florida, for the fruitful exchange of ideas while on our dissertation journeys. I would also like to acknowledge all of my professors and faculty in the Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs at the University of Massachusetts Boston, for their outstanding teaching and endless support.

A heartfelt appreciation goes to my family: first and foremost I would like to acknowledge my mother and father, Elpiniqi and Perparim Hallulli, who instilled in me the

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Adult Basic Education (ABE) has long been associated with the pathway of expanding

adult learners[1] opportunities into sustaining state and national economic growth (Benseman and

Coming, 2008). Benefits attributed to participating in ABE – including better paid jobs, better

educational outcomes, intergenerational literacy, inclusiveness and civic responsibility – have

portrayed it as a "door opener" for many learners who otherwise had experienced difficulty or

had little access to traditional education (Demetrion, 1997). These benefits appear to have

influenced federal and state policy, casting ABE as the alternative path to the American dream of

prosperity and entry into the middle class (Fingeret and Danin, 1991; Lestz, Demetrion, and

Smith, 1994; Demetrion and Gruner, 1995; Demetrion, 1997).

Greater documented support for participation in ABE has been recently associated with

the achievement of personal goals and learning outcomes for many of the participants in ABE

classes (Fingeret and Danin, 1992). Researchers have long sought to identify and report the

sources of motivation and aspirations that bring adult learners to ABE programs (Fingeret, 1992;

Fingeret and Danin 1991; Lytle, 1991; Demetrion and Grunner, 1995; Demetrion, 1996 & 1997).

However, participation in ABE cannot be seen as a sole causal factor for adult learners to be

"removed" from welfare, secure a job, or achieve stable upward mobility (Chisman, 1989, 1990;

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[1] A note about terminology here: ABE participants and ABE learners are used interchangeably here. Although in different educational settings various ABE classes are offered, this research has addressed only adult learners enrolled in HiSET classes (General Educational Diploma), ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and Family Literacy Education.

More and Starvrianos, 1995, Demetrion, 1997). While these outcomes are important to adult learners, as stated, they often represent a "quantum leap" of skill attainment, for adults that not only face personal and individual barriers, but also have to adopt with understaffed and underfunded local programs (Demetrion, 1997).

For the last two decades, federal legislation and Massachusetts' state ABE policies have linked adult learners' educational outcomes to performance systems and accountability requirements. These outcomes, represented as *learners' goals*, reflect an emphasis on return-on-investment strategies and outcome-based accountability measures. Greatest emphasis is placed on that subset of adult learners' goals that are easily measured, attainable, and that are associated with public outcomes. This dissertation, in contrast, seeks to understand the goal setting process from the perspective of learners and local ABE stakeholders with an interest in it. Using a novel, mixed-methods approach, this dissertation considers ABE learners' goal setting as a decision problem in order to reveal and reconcile the conflicting preferences fueled by outcome-based accountability requirements.

This dissertation answers the following questions: *Which goals do participants in ABE programs see as fundamental and how congruent are ABE stakeholders' perspectives on learner goal setting?* The main objective of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the ABE learners' goals; another objective, co-equal in importance is to gain insights in stakeholder involvement in goal setting process and reveal stakeholder preferences.

This study is particularly important for Massachusetts ABE state policy, given recent trends in the federal ABE legislation. In the last two decades, the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) has made learners' goal setting and outcome assessment a centerpiece of data reporting and accountability requirements. Local programs are therefore required to set primary

and secondary goals for every learner, and ensure that goals are met over the one-year grant period (Gabb, 2001). A two-layered accountability system is imposed on local programs, with requirements from both the federal National Reporting System (NRS) and the state's System for Managing Accountability and Results through Technology (SMARTT) (Gabb, 2001; Reyes, 2001). Critics argue that the purpose of the learner goal setting that NRS requires is only a measure of program performance, and does not assist students with their educational plans (Gabb, 2001). In fact, the NRS Implementation Guidelines clearly state that "[it] will assess program performance by comparing students' outcomes to their stated goals" (NRS Implemetation Guidelines, as quoted by Gabb, 2001).

This study combines two thematically related components, in a mixed method research design (Creswell, 2014). The first component, of a descriptive nature, provides a greater understanding of the internal and external determinants that influence ABE learners to setting and meeting goals, while participating in ABE classes. The second component, of an exploratory nature, testifies of the other involved stakeholders' interest in the goal setting process. A summary of the conceptual framework is presented by the end of this chapter, **Table 1: Study Design.**

The descriptive component of this study uses a qualitative research design, following a conceptual framework based on grounded theory. Methods of inquiry for this phase of the study included in depth interviews with ABE adult learners, observations of participants' portfolios and documentary analysis pertaining to program outcome data reporting. Findings from the descriptive component informed the second, exploratory, stage of the study, in which a decision-analytic framework was applied in order to identify ABE learner and teacher preferences and gain insights into stakeholder involvement. Value-focused thinking exercises were used to yield

new insights to ABE stakeholders with conflicting preferences at the goal setting process. This phase of the study involved flexible and facilitated conversations with ABE local instructors situated at a local ABE program and approximations of learners' and teachers' value hierarchies. The data generation method of choice was value-focused thinking (Keeney, 1992). This study generated value-structures from which commonalities and differences of objectives across stakeholder groups might be identified.

The dissertation contributes to both the scholarly literature and ABE practice and policy. On the academic side, it introduces a new perspective on determinants that influence learner goal setting, given the particular experience of Massachusetts' state accountability system supporting the collection of such data. This dissertation also demonstrates that the ABE stakeholder goal setting problem is amenable to decision analysis, and that findings derived from application of specific decision-analytic methods aid in identifying stakeholder preferences and gain insights into stakeholder involvement. Use of specific operations research and decision science methods makes this research the first known applications to ABE in general, and learners' goal setting in particular. Findings generated by this study will be a useful addition to the growing literature of decision modeling in education.

On the policy side, this research influences the ongoing debate about whether and how adult learners' voices and experiences could be incorporated into accountability. Motivated by the desire to help local programs identify useful solutions to problems that concern multiple stakeholders, this study has set itself as a trailblazer to promoting use of decision analysis in solving other problems that involve uncertainty and conflicting goals, values and objectives within ABE programs. This study will also assist policymakers and policy analysts at the ABE state and federal level to debate policies that promote mutual or multiple stakeholders'

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accountability, contributing to the discussion between educators and learners regarding participant self-defined and program goals.

ABE adult learners and other stakeholders

Adult Basic Education serves *adult learners,* age 16 and above, not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary education, who either are in need of basic literacy and numeracy; cannot speak, read and write the English language; or, do not hold a high school equivalency or a secondary school diploma (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013). Approximately 2.5 million students per year are enrolled in the ABE system (National Commission, 2008). Due to limited funding, this enrollment level represents only 6% of the estimated population that are in need of these services (Strawn, 2007, Reddy, 2012).

Massachusetts Adult Basic Education (ABE), through a variety of local providers, serves adults in need of basic literacy, adult basic education, preparatory High School Equivalency Certificate (HiSET), high school credentialing (HiSET and Adult Diploma Program) and English as a Second Language (ESOL) (Massachusetts Coalitions for Adult Education, 2013). According to the Massachusetts Department of Education, during FY2012, 21,391 adults were enrolled in ABE programs offered throughout the state, with more than 60 percent enrolled in ESOL classes (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2013; Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education, 2013). According to a recent report of the Adult and Community Learning Services, as of October of 2015, a total of 17,145 adults are still waiting to enter in one of these classes; 81 percent of these are in need of ESOL services (Adult and Community Learning Services, 2015). The wait to enter one of ESOL classes is estimated to be from 6 months to 3 years, due to the limitations of funding offered (Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education, 2013).

ABE adult learners exhibit a highly diverse demographic profile, with students coming from all age groups, genders, racial, ethnic and national backgrounds. In a study conducted in 2005, Lasater and Elliot estimated that about 52 percent of the ABE adult learner population is female (Lasater and Elliot, 2005). In terms of the educational attainment, 37 percent of the targeted population have had, in average, no more than eight years of education (Lasater and Elliot, 2005). In terms of racial distribution, 65 percent of the target population are White, 15 percent are African-American, 3 percent Asian and 12 percent report to be of some other race (Lasater and Elliot, 2005). Latino learners make for 28 percent of the targeted population.

Adult learners' life stories and educational paths are equally rich and diverse, and have been the basis for many ethnographic and sociological studies (see for example, Drago and Severson, 2004; Demetrion, 1997; Bingman and Ebert, 2000). Characterized by academic literature[2] as primarily 'workers who study' (Kazis at al., 2007, Reddy, 2012), ABE adult learners' educational paths with ABE are far more challenging than those of traditional higher education learners (Reddy, 2012). In a recent study, Reddy (2012) presents a detailed review of structural barriers that ABE adult learners have when accessing higher education. Although her study primarily focuses on ABE learner's conception of identity when transitioning to college, some of the analysis of barriers could be extended to the general ABE adult learner population. Concerns of the situational nature, defined as issues with role conflict and role overload, including lack of time, family issues (need for childcare and lack of support from extended family); work issues, logistical issues (transportation) and financial limitations (Shlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1991; Marshall, 1992; Reddy, 2012) are pertinent to all of the ABE population. Other barriers, such as student identity formation; anxieties and doubts about

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[2] Moore and Stavriano (1995) assert that employed adults are the biggest population participating in ABE (see also, Scanlan, 1986, Diekehoff and Diekenhoff 1984; Darkenwald, 1980; and Johnston and Rivera, 1965).

education; and students' understanding of teaching and learning[3], could also be considered as pertinent to the whole population of ABE learners. This study observes only adult learners that are enrolled in High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) classes, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Family Literacy classes.

Many other stakeholders, involved with the delivery and organization of services in ABE, have a genuine interest in adult basic education, either because of their mission, interests or employment. *Providers* are involved because of their mission to assist with educational and training services, or their long commitment and expertise they have in the field. In Massachusetts, providers range from community colleges, public school adult learning centers, religious institutions, libraries, correctional facilities, community-based organizations, etc. Providers are responsible for insuring *local programs* meet *federal* and *state* accountability standards in order to be awarded in the competitive granting process. ABE providers, as depicted in **Figure 1**, could be located in different settings such as colleges, school districts, community-based organizations, public libraries, workforce development structures, religious organizations, volunteer literacy programs and prison facilities. *Local ABE Programs* in such context receive federal and state funding to carry their mission of educating learners from different *educational tracks*, like preparatory General Educational Diploma (GED)/High School Equivalency Test (HiSET), English as a Second Language (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), Family Literacy, Citizenship and Civic Education and particular skills' training, like English as a Second Language (ESOL) for a certain trade (for example ESOL for the medical field). In order to provide all of these educational services, local ABE programs are equipped with trained and qualified staff, like *faculty, student advisors, local program administrators and program*

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[3] In a study examining why adult learners leave adult literacy programs (Quigley, 1997), findings indicate that program structure and teaching style of the instructor make for the two most important reasons for adult literacy program dropout.

specialists. As depicted in **Figure 1**, *Federal and State agencies* oversee the operations of all local programs, through *program development agencies,* who are responsible of reporting to federal and state authorities of the performance delivered locally. *Policy advocates, Adult Education Advisory Councils* (an example of which is Massachusetts' Coalition for Adult Basic Education/MCAE) *and researchers* are equally important actors advocating for policy changes, insuring sound policy implementation and collecting and disseminating findings from current practices in the field.

In Massachusetts, local programs are required to meet the following performance benchmarks: attendance and participation (average attended hours), pre/post assessment rate, learning gains (measured by significant gain on standardized tests) and goal achievement (entry or retention of employment, entry in post-secondary education, or receipt of a secondary credential, to mention some.) (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2013). In this regard, the job of instructors, counselors, and administrators is not only to provide the educational services, but also to ensure compliance with federal and state accountability standards and systematically report outcome-based data on all of the above (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2013). This study observes only *learners'* and *instructors'* involvement and preferences in the goal setting process.

Figure 1 depicts the relationships between all of the stakeholders[4] involved in Adult Basic Education.

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[4] **Figure 1** presents a pictorial depiction of the relationships of all of the stakeholders that have an interest in ABE. The scope of this study is however to only observe power differentials of actors that operate in the local program environment, i.e. learners', and ABE instructors.
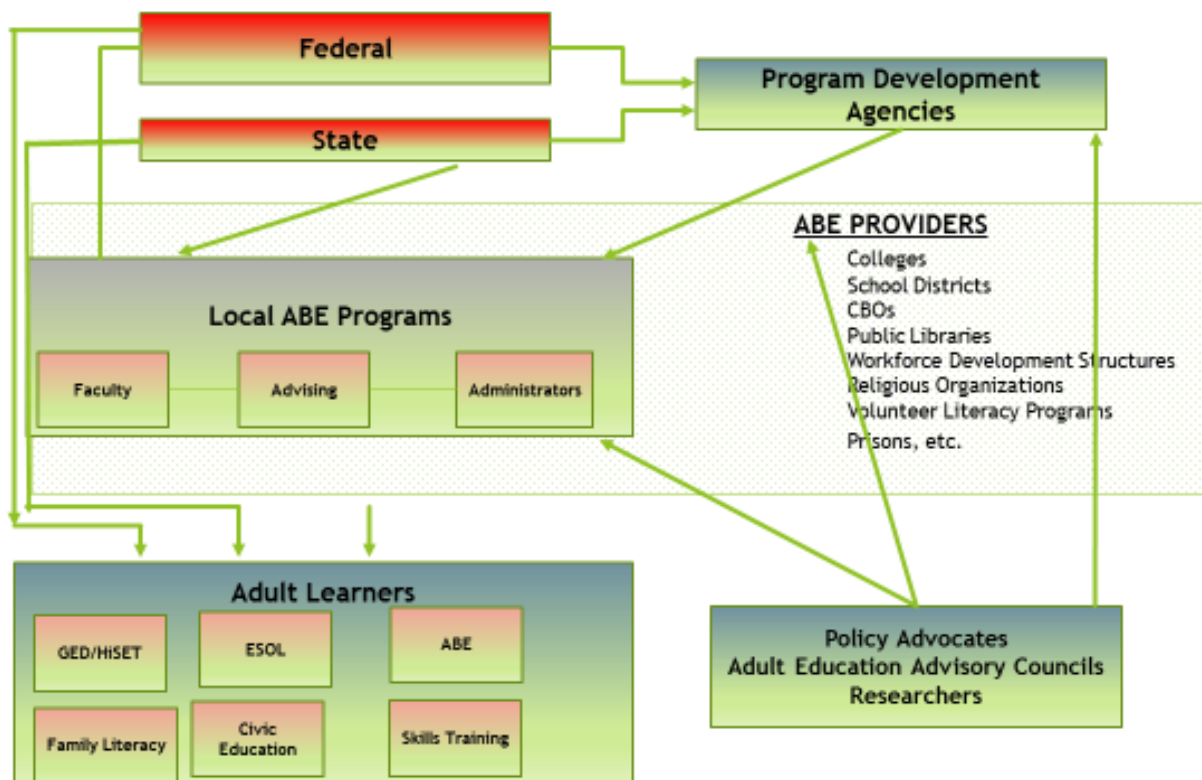
Figure 1: Stakeholders involved in ABE

Why study learners' goal setting?

The question of goal setting remains very closely related to the question of learners' decisions about participation, self-efficacy, learner engagement, and learner persistence with the educational process (Ziegler and Durant, 2001; Belzer and St. Clair, 2003a). The particular goals learners embrace are thought to be related with their engagement with education; guide their behavior; and, ultimately affect their educational achievement (Wolters at al., 2005).

By the time adult learners make the decision about participating in ABE classes, they know the reasons associated with their return. Their reasons, however, are expressed in simple terms; "get through the HiSET exam", or "learn English" (Gabb, 2001). As Gabb argues, although there is clarity in purposes of adult learners to return to ABE education, yet "this clarity […] does not easily translate into 'crafted' goals, outlined as a metered line with identified

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benchmarks, and 'documentation' of achievement towards a stated goal or goals" (Gabb 2001, p. 17).

Massachusetts' experience with goal setting and outcome assesment can be very helpful to understanding learners' perspective with setting and meeting goals. This study sets the stage for revealing and contrasting learners' self-defined goals with systemic 'crafted goals' measured by Massachusetts' Goal Setting Instrument (**seeAppendix B**)**.** In the last two decades, the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) has made learner goal setting and outcome assesment a centerpiece of measuring local program performance and accountability. Local programs are therefore required to set primary and secondary goals for every learner, and ensure that primary goals are met over the one-year grant period. A two-layered accountability system is imposed on local programs, with requirements from both the federal National Reporting System (NRS) and the state's data management system (System for Managing Accountability and Results through Technology, SMARTT) weighing on (Gabb, 2001; Reyes, 2001). Critics argue that the purpose of the learner goal setting NRS requires is but a measure of program performance, not to assist students with their educational plans (Gabb, 2001). The duality of the impositions and the struggle to manage and report in two separate data systems, is reflected on the words of the Massachusetts Commissioner for Adult Basic Education, Robert Bickerton:

> "I and others in our state strongly objected to this requirement arguing that it would pervert having student-articulated goals… and could foster 'creaming'. For a while it appeared as if this would become a sticking point in our negotiations with the USDOE and we were prepared for a battle. Instead we found a way to tweak the existing policy. We [emphasis in the original text] still honor the goals articulated by each student regardless of how long it may take to achieve them. We now also ask programs to discuss

with each student what goals (or benchmarks) he or she would like to achieve in the program year." (Gabb, 2001:22)

Practitioners and researchers have long argued for an assesment system that is based on authentic goal setting and learner-identified purposes; not measured with time limits and tests; carried as a self-evaluatory process in a continuous dialogue with the practitioner; and that credits goals that are as mutable as life (Auerbach, 1991; Gabb, 2001; Reyes, 2001; Kelly, 2001). However, currently what drives learners' goal setting in the field, is a lengthy list used by programs as a pre-post measure, with a rubric of elicited goals and the requirement that goals that are set need to be attained, measured, and verified (Gabb, 2001, p. 18). Goals need to be of a certain format and Massachusetts ABE is required by the state and federal government to collect only goals that satisfy the SMART metric (S-Specific; M- Measurable; A-Attainable; R-Result-driven; and, T: Time-bounded). Additionally, learner goals in the list are weighed, with the NRS goals (defined as primary goals, pertaining to Part A of the Massachusetts Student Goal Sheet) weighing more than goals recorded in the other columns. Column A goals are those goals that measure, among all, outcomes of employment, specifically learners' entry in the job market; learners' entry in occupational training; job retention and increase of earnings. These goals are weighted (see **Appendix C** for a detailed view of how goals are weighted) with the highest number of points in the yearly competitive evaluation process, when goals set and met are calculated by the state agencies and a score is assigned to each and every local program operating with state and federal government funding. Thus, Column A goals indicate that the goal-setting process is rather a tool in the competitive granting process, to identify underperforming, underachieving local programs, who are to be accounted for not being able to attain as many learner goals as required. In the words of one practitioner,

"In a perfect world, goal setting, curriculum and assesment are all linked together. In this world, we keep working to make those pieces connect. (…) So far we have not found a satisfactory way to avoid the duplication of efforts and duality. One set of goals lists and assessment measurements is the "real" one in terms of what learners and teachers use to understand progress and the other is the "real" one in terms of what must be reported to funders." (Kelly, 2001, 22).

As intrinsic to the scope and rationale of this study, is the narrowing focus that such instrument has imposed on the adult learners to express and carry their authentic goals. As Gabb (2001) argues, the nature of the instrument contradicts the purpose of learner goal setting, which needs to encourage expression of goals over time, and enable the learner to experience growth and progress over goals that change (Gabb, 2001). For many of ABE learners, expression of these goals would require a certain vocabulary and thinking process that needs to be construed over time and in constant dialogue with the practitioner. For some participants, like ESOL low level learners, this process would often entail use of first language and multiculturality considerations.

Research questions

Massachusetts' experience with goal setting and outcome assesment can be very helpful to understanding learners' perspective with setting and meeting goals. This study sets the stage for revealing and contrasting learners' self-defined goals with systemic 'crafted goals' measured by Massachusetts' Goal Setting Instrument The following research question guides this study:

Which goals do learners in ABE programs see as fundamental, and how congruent are ABE stakeholders' perspectives on learner goal setting?

The following three sub-questions contribute in answering the over-arching research question, by unpacking and shedding light into important parts of the scientific inquiry, respectively:

1. What are the goals that ABE adult learners set while participating in ABE local programs and are these goals met one year after participation?

2. Which goal-related objectives do ABE learners and instructors see as means to an end and what do value-structures look like?

3. How congruent are ABE stakeholders' perspectives on learner goal setting?

Organization of the study

This dissertation is organized in six chapters. The current chapter is composed of the introduction and the scope and rationale of determining why goal setting is a relevant topic for academic study. It also includes a description of the actors involved in Adult Basic Education, including learners, and other stakeholders with an interest in it. Finally the chapter presents the reader with the research questions that guide this study as well as a summary of the research design. Chapter 2 discusses the existing academic scholarship on adult education policy and practice with special emphasis on new approaches to analyzing stakeholder interests in the goal setting decision problem. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the two thematically linked stages, indicating data collection strategies; data analysis and validity considerations.

Chapter 4 presents an in depth analysis of the findings that emerge from the descriptive phase. Chapter 5 delivers learners' and teachers' means-ends and fundamental hierarchies. A discussion of the findings, together with the conclusions, recommendations, anticipated academic contributions and any further area of potential research is presented in Chapter 6.

A summary of the conceptual framework is presented below **Table 1: Study Design.** The summary sheds light into the organization of the two thematically related components. The consequent chapter will address the existing academic scholarship on adult education policy and practice.

	Application/Relevance to *Descriptive* Research	Application/Relevance to *Exploratory* Research
Study Population	Purposeful sample of 12 ABE learners, participating in HiSET, ESOL and Family Literacy Classes	9 ABE Instructors involved in teaching in a local ABE Program in Massachusetts Purposeful sample of 12 ABE learners, participating in HiSET, ESOL and Family Literacy Classes
Purpose	Identify and describe goals set and met by ABE adult learners	Gain insights in stakeholder involvement in goal setting process and reveal stakeholder preferences.
Research Questions	Are learners' goals met one year after participation in ABE local programs?	Which goal-related objectives do learners and instructors in ABE see as means to an end and what do value-structures look like? How congruent are ABE stakeholders' perspectives on learners' goal setting?
Conceptual Framework	Goal theory: Suggests that goals of learning are an intrinsic factor influencing students' motivation	Decision Analysis: Suggests that the goal setting could be envisioned as a decision problem between stakeholders whose conflicting interests could be articulated.
Empirical Framework	Learners' narratives as a way to identify learners goals	Contextualization of stakeholders' objectives
Methods	1. Live history methodology: puts participants' practices and experiences in the context of their everyday life. 2. Documentary analysis: enables the emergence of the complete picture of goal setting from the programmatic side	1. Value Focused Thinking: Structuring of learners and teachers' objectives into means-end networks and fundamental values hierarchies
Data sources	1. Cycle of open ended interviews with selected adult learners in one ABE local program. 2. Observations of adult learners' portfolio and program documents pertaining to learners' goal setting.	1. Expert-led VFT session with ABE local stakeholders who have a stake at the goal setting process; 2. Maps of fundamental objectives and means-ends networks that link local program decisions with the desired outcomes of the goal setting process.

Table 1: Study Design

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Current ABE policy is mostly concerned with outcomes rather than learners' goals. The chapter surveys the research landscape, evaluates critically the existing research and makes the case that there is a gap in literature with regard to goal setting which this study seeks to fill.

This chapter begins by identifying the complexities that surround learners' goal setting. The chapter reveals relevant literature that highlights the three major areas proposed to be studied: learners' centrality (or lack thereof) to the goal setting process, ABE program involvement with learners' goals, and newly proposed analytical methods to studying goal setting. Three major areas of literature are reviewed: learners' goals and outcomes, education planning theories, and decision analysis. I particular, I argue that the application of decision analysis to the goal setting decision problem proposed here is new and may provide unique policy insights.

Review of literature on learners' goals

We start by presenting and evaluating the assumptions by which learners' goals are central to program evaluation purposes. We find substantial support for a critique of the widely held notion that goals reflect programs' expectations and society's preference and understanding of learners' needs (Horsman, 1990; Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998; Stein, 1999; Valentine,

1990). Finally, the literature reviewed in the section raises important questions on whether ABE local programs attempt to merely respond to adult learners goals or actively participate in shaping them (Lyttle and Wolfe, 1989).

The decisions that bring adults to ABE programs are complex and nonetheless relate to many areas of research (see for example, motivational studies of Ames, 1992; Blumenfeld, 1992, Meece, 1994; Locke and Latham, 2002; Bandura 1997; Wigfield and Eccles, 2000). Central to these debates are issues of need; individual characteristics; motives and intentions; concepts of how adults learn; and perceptions of growth (Lyttle, and Wolfe, 1989; Demetrion, 1997). Contrary to traditional images portrayed in the media, adults that come to ABE programs do not necessarily fit the stereotypes of incapacity to help self, weakness, or dependency and failure (Fingeret 1983; Lytle and Wolfe, 1989; Bingham and Ebert, 2000; Quigley, 1997). In fact, this literature recognizes the ability of ABE learners to navigate complex social networks; to exchange individual skills for skills they do not possess; to be resilient and self-reliant; to value and pursue their education and their children's education; and to have personal goals for betterment of quality of life (Charnley and Jones, 1979; Fingeret, 1985; Lytle and Wolfe, 1989, Bingham and Ebert, 2000).

Recent research on adult literacy programs, has revealed an array of important sources of motivation for literacy students. Beder and Valentine's (1990) review of literacy student motivators points to the following sources: "(a) self-improvement; (b) family responsibility; (c) diversion; (d) literacy development; (e) community/church involvement; (f) job advancement; (g) launching; (h) economic need; (i) educational advancement; (j) urging of others" (Beder and Valentine, 1990, p. 78). Demetrion and Gruners' study of a Literacy Volunteers' Program in Connecticut (1995) reveals a similar set of motivators that point to learners' aspiration for

"dignity, self-esteem, growth, spiritual development, competency, the improvement of family life, the enhancement of general knowledge and the stimulation of hope" (Demetrion and Gruner, 1995, p. vii; Demetrion, 1997). Fingeret and Danin's ethnographic study (1991) of Literacy Volunteers in New York City provides us with some of the examples of literacy students' goals, such as "the desire to overcome shame (p. 114)…desire to read the Bible, the general ability to access print,… reading train and bus schedules, becoming increasingly independent, reading bills, checks and letters, functioning more effectively in the world of work, and obtaining a GED" (Fingeret and Danin, 1991, p. 114 – 145; Demetrion 1997).

In reviewing existing literature about economic motivators among ABE participants, Moore and Stavriano (1995) report that across the literature reviewed, economic motives are less cited as reasons for enrolling. Studies cited in their report account for only 15-20 percent of ABE participants giving economic reasons on enrollment (Development Associates, 1994; Fingeret, 1985; Mezirow, Darkewald and Knox, 1975). In another referred study, only 3 out of 35 percent of participants who had a primary motive for participation, reported employability as a motive (Development Associates, 1994, as cited in Moore and Stavriano, 1995). Only one longitudinal study of ABE participants in Tennessee reported employment-related goals as a top motivator for participation (Merrifield at al., 1993). According to Chan at al. (1993) and Bova (1985), the groups with the highest tendency to report employability and economic motivators are employed adults aged 30-50 and participants that have more years of education (Chan, Kopka and Peng, 1993; Bova, 1985).

Demetrion's work on defining such complex and multidimensional motivators under the term "growth" has been particularly promising to the field, with growth defined as 'the elicitation and exercise of critical intelligence' (original term borrowed from Dewey, 1916, 1938,

used by Demetrion in his voluminous work of 1995{a, b}, 1996, 1997, 1998 {a, b}, 2000, 2001 and 2005). Demetrion explains that "growth" could be experienced equally in the attainment of "public" or "private" goals, pointing to deeper aspirations of learners to build their personal or social identities.

The review of motives for participation in ABE programs is instrumental to this study, since it provides a baseline for observing the range of goals study participants report during participation and enrollment in local programs. The following paragraph reviews sources of literature on outcomes of participation in Adult Basic Education.

Outcomes of participation in ABE

In states like Massachusetts, learners' assessment has become one of the key features of program evaluation for accountability reporting. In this spirit, learners' goals are annually translated into countable outcomes of program effectiveness (or lack thereof) and return-on-investment indicators. The outcomes, researchers argue, are rather a reflection of benefits attributed to participation in ABE, with goal setting being just a means by which these benefits may be achieved.

Research regarding ABE outcomes emphasize methodological limitations. For example, the majority of studies on ABE outcomes focus only on ABE participants, with no corresponding control group (Moore and Stavriano, 1995). Therefore validity of these studies is highly compromised, since one does not know whether the observed set of outcomes are a consequence of program participation, or if similar outcomes would have been possible even in program's absence (Moore and Stavriano, 1995).

Human capital outcomes

Studies on human capital effects of ABE participation show mixed results. More and Stavriano (1995) conclude that program participation results in literacy gains which are associated with increases in earnings, employment and reduction of public assistance. Another study from Development and Associates (1994) attributed higher employment rates to participation, with ESL participants reporting new employment or improvements in their employment status. However, the increases in employment were observed six months after participants graduated from the program (Development Associates, 1994). One experimental study from the Even Start Evaluation, however reported that program participation had no effect in employability or financial outcomes for the duration of study (St. Pierre at al, 1994). The time-frame over which one can reasonably expect labor market outcomes to emerge is not clear, and some researchers note that educational gains accumulation is estimated to be years before positive effects of higher earnings and employment are observed (Martinson, 1994).

Researchers also disagree on the impact of HiSET exam attainment on human capital outcomes (see for example Larin, 1995). As with the previous findings, non-experimental studies have identified positive correlations between GED attainment (recently replaced with the HiSET exam) and employment outcomes (see for example Beder 1992, Darkenwald and Valentine 1984), while experimental studies report findings that are not as promising. Cameron and Heckman (1991) assert that high school equivalency certificate holders are statistically indistinguishable from high school dropouts when it comes to income (salaries, benefits and earnings) and job tenure (employment, unemployment, and workday). They conclude that programs that focus on high school equivalency per se are misguided. (Cameron and Heckman, 1991).

Literacy outcomes

It is estimated that almost 80% of participants who enroll in ABE seek to increase their literacy or basic skills (Development Associates, 1994). Evidence of goal achievement includes reporting gains on standardized tests, attainment of high school equivalency certificate, or rates of pursuing college or higher education (Development Associates, 1994).

Researchers disagree about the association between instruction and literacy gains (Venezky at al. 1993). Mikulecky and Lloyd's (1993) estimate of about 100 or more hours of literacy resulting in one level of gain[5] in reading, is usually taken as the baseline in the field (Moore and Stavriano, 1995). Based on this estimate, the literacy gain of the typical ABE participant in a given year would be modest, considering that the median of instruction length is estimated to be at 58 hours (Moore and Stavriano, 1995). Researchers consider estimates of .2 unit effect to be small and .4 unit to be moderate gains in literacy {where gain is converted in standard deviation units} (Moore and Stavriano, 1995). Most research studies reviewed by this literature find literacy gain produced by local programs to vary between .2 and .3 standard deviation units (St. Pierre at al. 1994; CASAS 1992; Moore and Stavriano, 1995).

Degree attainment: HiSET

A review of the literature on high school equivalency certificate attainment, reveals a number of studies reporting that ABE enrollees attribute the attainment to participation in ABE classes (Beder, 1992). As with other outcomes, researchers warn for limitation of studies where the control or comparison group is absent, or where methods rely on self-reports of high school equivalency certificate holders (Moore and Stavriano, 1995). Some studies have found

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[5] Authors refer to National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading levels, ranging from basic, proficient and advanced.

participation to lead to increases of over 20 percent in high school equivalency certificate

attainment compared to control groups (Even Start Evaluation, St. Pierre at al. 1994). In terms of

demographical composition, younger adults are said to have higher rates of attainment than older

adults (Even Start Evaluation, as cited at St. Pierre at al. 1994). Around 10 percent of ABE

participants' age 16- 25 participating in the Even Start Evaluation Study were reported to have

attained the diploma, with the percentage dropping between 5 percent and 7 percent for ABE

participants age 26-40 (St. Pierre at al. 1994). However, other researchers do not attribute high

school equivalency certificate attainment to the instructional hours associated with passing the

HiSET exam, but to the internal motivational factors of the test takers (see for example Kaplan

and Venezky, 1993; Baldwin 1990; Malizio & Whitney 1981).

The value of the high school equivalency certificate for outcome measures such as

attendance, persistence in post-secondary education and better employment seem to be modest.

In terms of transition and completion of college, studies reveal a very low rate for ABE program

graduates (Jacobs & Tolber-Bynum, 2008). The National Reporting System (NRS) estimates that

around 45,000 ABE program graduates enroll in postsecondary education or training each year

(National Reporting System; Reddy, 2012). Another report of the US Department of Education

estimates that only 2% of all the ABE participants enroll to postsecondary education within six

months of graduating from the program (Department of Education, 2011; Reddy, 2012).

Personal and societal outcomes

Improved self-concept is the most often reported benefit of ABE participation

(Development Associates 1980, 1994; Beder 1992; Drago-Severson, 2004). Some of the

reviewed studies (Development Associates 1980, 1994, Beder, 1992; More and Stavriano, 1995)

assert that over 80 percent of ABE enrollees attribute improvement in their self-concept to participation in ABE programs. One study of literacy participants in Tennessee (Merrifield at al., 1993) asserts that moderate to substantial participation increases adult learners' self-esteem, while minimal participation (fewer than 20 hrs.) decreases it. Another study of Ohio programs revealed increasing self-confidence of enrollees compared to a comparison group (Boggs, Buss and Yarnell, 1979). A third study of Iowa high school equivalency certificate graduates (Beder, 1992) reported that 75 percent of participants' lives were reported to have generally improved because of high school equivalency certificate attainment; 77 percent of high school equivalency certificate graduates interviewed self-reported to have encouraged someone to enroll in ABE programs; and, that respondents' children high school graduation rates had improved comparably to the Iowa state high school graduation rate (Beder, 1992).

Out of the societal outcomes, effect of ABE participation in children education, voting and receipt of U.S. citizenship are the three most reviewed ABE outcomes in literature (Kirsch at al., 1993; Reder, 1985; Moore and Stavriano, 1995).

Theoretical underpinning of ABE practice and policy

The outcomes of ABE depend on the perspectives and positions of stakeholders and interested actors involved (Merrifield, 1998). ABE learners may want a program that support *outcomes that reflect their own values and preferences*, and enable them to feel successful with career or educational advancement, parenthood or citizenship. They may want a program that supports their individual aspirations, and assists them with meeting their short and long term goals. Policy-makers may be concerned with *program performance outcomes* in order to show the taxpayers and the funders the impact they are making with the educational intervention and

the 'return' for their investment. Their perspective may in part be fueled by the internal growing requirements of accountability and performance measurement and in part by the pressure of the global competitive markets for a better skilled workforce.

It is this later agenda that in fact has driven ABE for nearly two decades. Since the enactment of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 1998, ABE has transformed from a purely educational program to being part of the workforce development continuum (Belzer, 2007). With WIOAs (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) re-authorization in 2014 Adult Basic Education further subsumed under the Workforce Development System. The implications of the provision of educational funding within a workforce development law have culminated with the creation of the new accountability system, which not only requires local programs to report data to state agencies, but also charges states to report uniform data to the federal government. Within the WIA context, Merrifield (1989) argues, accountability becomes intrinsically linked with return-on-investment strategies, of what the government can in turn obtain for its investment in ABE (Merrifield, 1989, p. 6). Critics like Merrifield have demonstrated that the new accountability system among other others things, undermines self-defined learners' goals (Demetrion, 1997; Belzer and St. Clair, 2007; Belzer, 2003b; Merrifield, 1989). For Merrifield, an ardent critic of the new requirements,

> "A focus on educational improvement challenges a powerful, but outmoded metaphor for
> performance accountability borrowed from industry: the production line. The dominant
> metaphor in measuring results portrays adult education as a production process, with
> adult learners rolling off the end of the line, equipped with certain skills and knowledge
> which can be tested and reported in the same way that businesses make sure that widgets
> coming off the production line meet specifications." (Merrifield, 1998:22)

For Merrifield, ABE public policy-makers' immediate goal is to reach an agreement on performance. She argues that the ABE field is a contested ground whereby agreement about what "good performance" is and how to measure, is missing. At the core of this 'contestation' is agreement about the purposes of literacy education. If learners come to ABE programs to increase their self-confidence, but policy-makers want local programs to find them a job, we have a mismatch of goals and a recipe for failure, Merrifield argues (Merrifield, 1998).

In fact the concept of literacy in ABE education has been highly contested throughout the years: If three decades ago, students were expected to show formal correctness in class assignments, today the situation is very different. Embedded in the *functional or competency based approach* (Savage, 1993; Auerbach, 1999) the focus today is in getting students to learn survival skills. According to the US office of Education literate persons are defined as,

> "persons who have acquired the essential knowledge and skills in reading, writing, and computation, required for effective *functioning* in society, and whose attainment in such skills makes it possible for [them] to develop new attitudes and to participate actively in the life of [their] time" (Lankshear, 1993:91).

This definition, in its core context, is *functional* and *utilitarian* in nature. It reduces literacy to very narrow, functional term, and considers individuals in search of literacy as means to an end. In fact, as Levine (1986) argues, such arguments have in their core a utilitarian point of view, customizing and tailoring 'a broad based, socially "relevant" literacy' (Levine 1986:25; Lankshear 1993:90).

Such arguments can be seen as promoting a neoliberal agenda in themselves: the ultimate goal of such agenda is the 'incorporation of adults into established economic and social values and practices'. (Lankshear, 1993). Considering adults in search of literacy as means to an end,

this kind of literacy is strictly linked with employability, 'politically justified' social integration and assimilation (Levine 1986:25-6; Lankshear, 1993:93).

Critics of functional literacy condemn the minimalist philosophy that functional literacy entails. Jonathan Kozol (1985) for instance, calls it a "mean-spirited strategy". "Machines function, people either perish or prevail", Kozol argues. For ESOL learners, this kind of literacy limits their abilities to expand personally and collectively as human beings, preparing them to cope primarily with work and civic duty.

In a similar spirit, Levine's critique on functional literacy raises questions and concerns regarding the political and social interests of such agenda. By answering the question of interests, Levine argues that the promotion of the functional enterprise would clearly benefit the employers by promoting subordination and authority. Levine believes that the functional literacy enterprise would more likely add to the domestication and subordination of learners by confining their autonomy and social standing. (Levine, 1986:41).

One of the most ardent critics of functional literacy, Auerbach (1999) compares the competency- based approach to the English for special purposes approach used in higher education ESOL classes. Her message is clear in that this kind of approach often does not empower students to look beyond the word, to explore critically the world around them, and use language as a mean of power of understanding social issues and taking action to improve one's or one's group conditions of life. She cautions teachers into the implications of the pedagogical practice they choose to bring to the classroom (Auerbach, 1999).

Contrary to the functionalist school of thought, are the new progressive views of *participatory and critical literacy* that take in consideration literacies as practices, embedded in the social and historical determinants of different cultures. These views of literacy, presented

often under the school of thought of *New Literacy Studies*, respect the pluralistic cultures learners bring to ABE classes but also recognize the different social contexts where literacy is used (Heath, 1983; Philips 1972; Reder and Green, 1985; Taylor Dorsey-Gaines, 1998; Mikulecky, 1990; Lyttle and Wolfe, 1989). The *literacy as practices* model posits itself against the deficit model that highlights the limited background adults bring to the ABE classroom, by asserting that in fact learners and their families use literacy for a wide array of purposes, for many audiences and in diverse situations (Heath, 1983; Reder and Green, 1985; Lyttle and Wolfe, 1989). Another proponent of the literacy as practices model warns educators to avoid associating literacy with the individual agency only, but rather to conceive it at the level of the social, institutional and cultural enterprise (Gee 1996, as cited at Merrifield, 1998).

Closely related is the view of *literacy as a critical reflection*, inspired by the works of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Centered on themes of critical understanding of the world and conscientization of learners to reflect and change the conditions of their existence, this type of literacy makes a call for the ABE system to get away from the training mode (Brookfield, 1985) into the educational mode. Embedded in the Frerian praxis, a critical dialogue is a fundamental element of ABE programs, and need to happen among learners but mostly between learners and teachers (Brookfield 1985; Auerbach, 1989; Macedo, 1994). Brookfield emphasizes that an awareness of beliefs, values and behaviors as culturally constructed leads to the possibility of individual change and collective action.

Although the theories of New Literacy Studies are finding more and more supporters among teachers, researchers and advocates, they have had less power to permeate the education foundation and the policy arena (Merrifield, 1998). As this section elucidated, the field has first

to agree on what it means to be literate and what the desired outcomes of ABE are, from all the stakeholders' viewpoints.

Perspectives informing ABE program planning

In her review of ABE planning models, Uhland (1994) notes that there are different models that represent social policy and adult education practice. The concerns of program planners, she argues, need to be around the two following questions: "Whose interests are being served? How can learners become enfranchised to attain social justice and emancipation?" (Uhland, 1994, p.69). The answers to these two important questions help us understand the program planning models that have permeated Adult Education during the last century.

The social policies of the *market model*, as suggested by Quigley (1993), have their roots on the transformation of the US economy from a goods and services-based economy to a technocracy, an information based economy. The transformation has accordingly changed the philosophical foundations of the American education, linking it sociologically with behaviorism and vocational training. As a consequence, today's American education is regulated by structural functionalism, or consensus viewpoint, underlying that "the existing dominant culture is good, and those in power focus on the public good" (Schon, 1983). Core to the structural functionalism theory is the positivistic belief that knowledge and understanding are measurable commodities (Uhland, 1994, p. 63).

In contrast, *the consensus model*, represented by Tyler (1974), supports the design and implementation of programs to achieve specific outcomes. Based in Gagne's (1965) neo-behaviourist theory, Tyler introduced a new program planning based on four key characteristics: (a) purposes of the educational system (b) types of educational experiences that could be offered

to meet the purposes of the educational system; (c) systematic organization of the educational experiences, and (d) determination if these purposes have been already attained. Both Tyler (1974) and Gagne (1965) promoted a program planning geared toward the production of individual observable change, not toward learning as the process of emancipation or growth (Uhland, 1994).

Second to the consensus model is the *liberal-progressive welfare model* represented by Boyle (1981). Purported as the model based on humanistic adult education policies, the liberal-progressive model claims to deliver an educative program whereby learners and faculty alike are involved in a deliberate series of actions for the betterment of the community of learners in particular (Boyle, 1981, p.5; Uhland, 1994, p.64). Critics argue that even Boyle's model falls short on the promise to truly demonstrate characteristics of the liberal-progressive model, since like its predecessor, relies on accountability and required outcomes. Critics argue that particularly the accountability component of Boyle's model "emphasizes meritocracy rather than equality, which can lead program planners to be insensitive to real problems and issues" (Goodwin, 1982; Uhland, 1994, p.65).

Programing activities within ABE planning can be viewed through LaBarbera (1992) perspective of "politically correct" educational activities. For example, each year, ABE local programs engage in allocating resources and promoting certain massive educational activities tied to the job market accessibility, like mock interviews, "dress for success" fashion shows, resume building, or hosting job fairs. Such activities suggest that a particular body of knowledge that is considered "politically correct" is promoted. In close terms, it also suggests that ABE program planning is tied to outcomes (i.e. meeting program outcomes not individually and as part of learning, but massively, as part of a certain ideological orientation) rather than learners'

goals. Using Giroux's (1983) analysis of the three aspects of *reproduction* in an educational setting, this type of programs can be described as (a) providing a specific class and social group with knowledge and skills to occupy a predetermined place in society; (b) functioning for the purpose of distributing and legitimizing forms of knowledge, values and language; and (c) producing and legitimizing certain economic imperatives (Giroux, 1983).

Uhland (1994) warns that if ABE programs continue in the path of Tyler (1974) and Boyle (1991), inequality will prevail, "promoting the organizational or programmer's philosophy through the way knowledge is classified, transmitted, and evaluated, and thereby, reproducing existing viewpoints" (p.66). The concern here is not only with critiquing the existing status quo, but with the promotion of alternative models that could contribute to a more equitable program planning for ABE local programs. This literature review confirms the gap that exists in research that little to no theory is offered on alternative planning models that could generate democracy and social justice among all of the constituents in ABE programs (Uhland, 1994).

As the scope of this research is not elucidation of theory, but rather of practice, this literature review prepares the landscape for proposed prospective models that could be tied to qualities like promotion of a dialogical relationship between the provider (institution and educator) and the learners; inclusion of an emancipating role "guided by the values of "equity, sharing, personal dignity, security, freedom and caring" (Beyer and Apple, 1998); design of a collaborative process of both the planner and participants (Uhland, 1994); and finally, expanding the mandate of the planner to "openly take sides in the interest of struggling for a better world" (Giroux, 1983, p.19).

A new approach to analyzing stakeholder interest in the goal setting decision problem

As traditional methods have failed to address the question of conflicting agendas and multiple accountability in ABE, we now consider non-traditional, novel methods, which aid with decision-modeling of stakeholders whose interests are not necessarily the same. We have shown that the ABE stakeholders with an interest in goal setting exhibit influence and power differentials. Some of the stakeholders, like program administrators or specialists, for example, focus more on the overall process and structure rather than facilitation of decision-making among the involved stakeholders. Other stakeholders, like ABE faculty, are faced with decisions about setting and meeting students' goals while at the same time partake on meeting accountability requirements and meeting the outcome reporting quotas. Like teachers, counselors face mutual accountability concerns, while dealing with fulfillment of learner and programmatic goals.

These conflicting goals make it difficult to develop coherent ABE policies. In response, the need for policies that address multiple stakeholders' (instructors and learners) preferences with regards to goal setting is imperative. In the basis of such policies is the need to first and foremost understand and reveal multiple stakeholders' preferences in the goal setting process. Questions of who different stakeholders are accountable to, needs to also be addressed. However, there is lack of scholarly literature on the means by which ABE local programs' stakeholders identify objectives and in what ways can stakeholders disentangle the conflicting preferences fueled by outcome-based accountability requirements.

This study considers the gap in ABE local decision modeling an opportunity for proposing an innovative, prescriptive model by which ABE stakeholders could identify, structure

and develop decisions around the goal setting decision problem. We introduce methods drawn from operation research and management to deepen the study's conceptual framework.

The body of literature reviewed in this section introduces *value-focused thinking* (VFT) as the methodology of choice, to aid with identification of objective hierarchies of different ABE stakeholders that have an interest in the goal setting process. VFT is part of a larger class of methods belonging to the field of *operation research and management science*. Johnson (2011) defines operations research and management science as "the discipline involved with the analysis of individual and organizational decision-making and problem-solving" (Johnson 2011, p. 3). Although at the core of operation research and management science lies quantitative analysis and mathematical models, the field has recently adopted several classes of qualitative methods that are concerned with structuring of problems that pose some degree of uncertainty. Labeled as problem structuring methods or 'soft OR', these methods usually aid in optimization of certain objectives that are of interest to stakeholders or organizations (Winston and Albright, 2010, as cited in Johnson, 2011). The following section will review literature on decision modeling applications to education; discuss why goal setting can be considered a decision problem; and argue that a qualitative method known as *value-focused thinking* could aid with decision-making of ABE stakeholders involved with the goal setting process.

The literature reviewed for this section reveals emerging research on decision modeling applications to public education, encompassing both mathematical programming and decision-analytic approaches. Molinero (1988) used decision modeling for improving a public school system design. Bowerman (1995) used a multi-objective model for urban public school bus routing. Mathematical models were also used by Taylor, Vasu and Causby (1999) in forecasting models for public school location and attendance; public libraries and literacy (Mandell 1991;

Francis et al., 2006; and, Min, 1989); and school competition and public high school performance (Harrison and Rouse, 2014). Decision Envelopment Analysis (DEAs) were to some extent used for purposes of assessment of secondary school performance (Thanassoulis and Dunstan, 1994; Blackburn, Brenan and Ruggiero, 2014) and faculty academic performance evaluations (Oral at al., 2014). While recent research on decision modeling applications to public and higher education is focusing on many social objectives of public schools, there has been no literature published on use of decision modeling in Adult Basic Education. In this light, the proposed study to use decision modeling to aid with the goal setting decision problem, is an innovative way that constitutes the first contribution in Adult Basic Education.

This study considers goal setting a *decision problem* based on the following criteria, originally established by Mingers (2009):

- The goal setting problem involves *multiple stakeholders* that are said to have an interest in learners setting and meeting goals. Stakeholders' interests, i.e. administrators, counselors and faculty, linger between learners' goals and programmatic goals;
- ABE local stakeholders involved with the goal setting decision problem have *interests that are often competing*. Mutual or multiple accountability concerns exist;
- The goal setting decision problem is *vaguely defined* and is surrounded by uncertainty. Stakeholders, including learners, have little to no ability to negotiate their preferences among themselves or with the state or federal policy makers;
- The *data* on the goal setting decision problem are *fuzzy and difficult to measure*.

I turn therefore my attention to soft OR for its ability to not only define the problem, but also to clarify which objectives are to be achieved (Mehrotra, 2009; Mingers, 2009; Johnson, 2011).

Among the characteristics that make Soft OR suitable for this study, researchers emphasize the method's ability to engage stakeholders and OR experts into facilitated conversations, which enable not only with the articulation of the decision problem but also with modeling and ultimately action (see for example Woolley and Pidd, 1981; Rosenhead, 2006; White 2006; Mingers and Rosenhead, 2004; Johnson at al. 2012; 2014). Literature recognizes a few effective methodologies belonging to soft OR. *Value focused thinking* (VFT), originally developed by Keeney (1992) defines essentially what the decision maker cares about. *Values* or *alternatives* are what is in question here: does the decision maker models his decision-making driven by values or alternatives? Kenney (1988; 1992; 1996) argues that on most decision problems that are either forced upon us from mutual or multiple stakeholders or unforeseen circumstances, what first drives the decision maker, are the alternatives, rather than the objectives or criteria to evaluate the alternatives. Such problem-solving approach, coined by Keeney (1996) as the *alternative-focused thinking,* narrows the focus of the decision makers; forces upon stakeholders' reactive solutions rather than proactive ones; and, more importantly throws the thinking mode into a backward cycle, of putting alternatives before values.

Instead, values need to drive our decision-making: by first focusing on values, and the consequences that those values bring to a decision problem, it contributes to making a sounder, reasonable judgment about the alternatives in question. Keeney (1998) suggests to understand alternatives as means to achieve our values, by considering values as the fundamental core of a decision problem. He is also adamant about recognizing the importance of the decision context, the object, and the direction of the preference (Keeney, 1992). If values we construe are ends, desires, "what is important", "what matters" (Leon 1999) than by knowing and revealing them the decision-maker, or the group of decision-makers' context of the decision will be enlarged.

Keeney's positivist vision, Leon (1999) argues, is important to the field of decision analysis and decision theory, since it has drastically changed the way about how we all look at decisions, not anymore as "problem" per se, but rather as opportunities to decide. Additionally the method is also praised for its ability to aid with structuring of decision problems (Clemen, 1996). Without the structuring step, Clemen (1996) argues, it is virtually impossible to really understand the complexity of the objectives and aim at improving the decision opportunities (see also Pierce and Robinson, 1985).

As elucidated by Keeney, decisions are made of multiple objectives. Objectives could be understood as statements of something desirable to be achieved in a given decision context (Keeney, 1992). Objectives are of two sorts: 'fundamental objectives' and 'means objectives'. Fundamental objectives are characterized as the endpoints that the decision-maker would like to achieve in a decision context; means objectives, in turn, are vehicles to achieve the desirable ends. In this regard, value-focused thinking could be envisioned as an engaged discussion about what is important. Through questions about what do we want to achieve and why is that important, the researcher engages with the community to collectively define the decision problem and articulate the values that are associated with it.

Value Focused Thinking Methodology: What steps are involved in revealing stakeholders objectives

Inquire about what objectives do stakeholders attribute to the goal setting process	→	Structure objectives – distinguish between fundamental and means objectives	→	Reveal presumed/ uncertain relationships between objectives; Build an objective hierarchy
Question: What do you expect the goal setting policy to achieve?		**Question:** Why is this goal important?		**Question:** In what ways can we achieve this goal?

Figure 2: Map of steps involved in VFT methodology *(adapted from Sheng at al., 2010)*

Additionally, value-focused thinking raises important considerations about the articulation of opportunities for decision-makers who do not have direct control over a decision that they care about (Keeney, 1994; 1996). By raising the ethical bar of including all stakeholders' perspectives in a decision context, and with use of *empathic negotiation*, all stakeholders, even the ones that have less voice in a decision context, could negotiate their alternatives (Keeney 1996).

The literature reviewed for this section reveals an extensive amount of research using the value-focused thinking methodology. Keeney and McDaniels (1992) used the value-focused thinking approach to study the strategic decision process at British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority; Keeney (1994) used VFT to study decision making at Conflict Management, Inc, and to identify Seagate's vision and mission statement (Keeney, 1999); Shoviak (2000) used VFT to evaluate municipal solid waste management alternatives (Jurk, 2002); Jurk (2002) also used VFT as a methodology to select force protection initiatives for evaluation (Jurk 2002); Dhillon &

Torkzadeh (2001) used the value-focused assessment methodology to evaluate the information system security in organizations (Sheng, at al, 2012); Sheng at al. also used value-focused thinking to assess the strategic implications of mobile technology (2005), and understand the value of technology in education (2012); finally, Keisler, Turcotte, Drew and Johnson (2014) and Johnson at al. (2015) used value-focused thinking to aid with strategy design for housing and community development and to assess objectives and acceptance of the method among community development corporations (CDCs) involved with redevelopment of foreclosed housing.

This section of the literature review makes the case for the application of the value-focused thinking in Adult Basic Education, in particular with the learner goal setting decision problem. It concludes here by asserting the novelty of use of value-focused thinking in Adult Basic Education, in a way that is never been proposed or carried before.

A synthesis of the literature reviewed is presented below **Table 2: Synthesis of Literature Review.** The summary sheds light into sources reviewed during this chapter and the relevance to the descriptive and exploratory phase of the study. The consequent chapter will address in detail the methodology of the two thematically linked stages, indicating data collection strategies, data analysis and validity considerations.

Topic	Application/Relevance to:	Reviewed Literature
Motivators of learners' goals	Descriptive Research	Lyttle & Wolfe (1989), Demetrion (1995, 1996, 1997), Fingeret (1983); Bingham&Ebert (2000), Demetrion and Grunner (1995), Beder and Valentine (1990), Fingeret and Danin (1991), Moore and Stavriano (1995)
Human Capital Outcomes	Descriptive/Exploratory Research	Moore and Stavriano (1995), Development Associates (1994), Beder (1992), Darkenwald and Valentine (1984), Cameroon and Heckman (1991)
Literacy Outcomes	Descriptive/Exploratory Research	Development Associates (1994), Venezky at al. (1993), Moore and Stavriano (1995), St. Pierre at al. 1994, CASAS (1992), CBAE (1987)
High School Equivalency Certificare (HiSET)	Descriptive/Exploratory Research	Beder (1992), Moore and Stavriano (1995), Kaplan and Venezky (1993), Baldwin (1990), Malizio&Whitney (1981), St. Pierre at al. (1994) Jacobs&Tolber-Bynim (2008), Reddy (2012)
Personal and Societal Outcomes	Descriptive/Exploratory Research	Development Associates (1980, 1994), Beder (1992), Drago-Severson (2004), Bogs, Buss and Yarnell (1979), Kirch at al. (1993) Reder (1994), Moore and Stavriano (1995)
Theoritical underpining of ABE Practice and Policy	Descriptive/Exploratory Research	Merrifield (1988), Belzer (2003, 2007), Demetrion (1997), Belzer and St. Clair (2007), Savage (1993), Auerbach (1999), Lankshear (1993), Levine (1986), Kozol (1985), Macedo (1994)
Perspectives informing ABE program planning	Exploratory Research	Uhland (1994), Tyler (1973, 1974), Gagne (1965), Boyle (1981), LaBarbera (1992), Beyder and Apple (1998), Giroux (1983)
Value Focused Thinking	Exploratory Research	Keeney (1988, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1999), Keeney and Mc. Daniels (1992), Johnson at al. (2011, 2012, 2015), Keisler, Turcote, Drew and Johnson (2014), Shoviak (2000), Leon (1999) Clemen (1996), Sheng at al. (2005, 2012), Mingers (2009)

Table 2: Synthesis of Literature Review

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the approach I employed in the proposed study. It explains why a

multidisciplinary, mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2014) is best suited for answering the

questions that this study addressed. It starts by introducing the research questions and defining

the relevance of proposed methods to the area of research. The remainder of the section is

designed to address the two thematically related components of the study, by narrating the

criteria and procedures for selection of participants, methods for collecting and analyzing data,

analysis steps, ethical considerations, and potential limitations.

Research questions

The previous literature review chapter revealed the gap that exists in the study of ABE

learners' goal setting, by pointing to two possible, yet interrelated, areas of further academic

study. First, this study has identified a considerable gap in the literature related to goals ABE

adult learners set while in ABE programs and determinants that influence the goal setting

process. Second, literature has given no consideration to other stakeholders' values in setting and

meeting learners' goals, and therefore has provided no descriptive or exploratory model that

might reveal and critically negotiate these interests.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill these gaps in the literature by answering the following

questions:

Which goals do participants in ABE programs see as fundamental, and how congruent

are ABE stakeholders' perspectives on learner goal setting?

The following three sub-questions arise:

1. What are the goals that ABE adult learners set while participating in ABE local programs and are these goals met one year after participation?

2. Which goal-related objectives do ABE learners and instructors see as means to an end and what do value-structures look like?

3. How congruent are ABE stakeholders' perspectives on learner goal setting?

Analytical component #1: ABE learners' goals

The first component of the study focused on the identification of ABE learners' goals. This part of the analysis answered the first research question and focused on perspectives of adult learners as they set their goals while participating in ABE classes. The study also observed if the programmatic and self-defined goals were attained one year after participation.

The analysis for the inductive part of my study was rooted in grounded theory and life history methodology. Grounded theory, developed by Glasser and Straus (1967), was imperative for my study because it allowed me to build from data to concepts. Additionally, with use of grounded theory, data analysis was carried on from the beginning, not as a separate and distinct phase from data collection (Straus and Corbin, 1990). The motivation for use of these theories was borne out of ABE researchers' calls for in-depth focus on learners' own perspectives rather than examination of learners' needs from programs' or society's expectations (Horsman, 1990; Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998; Stein 1999; Valentine 1990; Drago-Stevenson, 2004). In

addition, use of grounded theory approach provided a full picture of learners' experiences prior to coming to ABE programs, and how these experiences created a fertile ground where self-defined goals were crafted (Cuban, 2003).

Life history methodology illuminated the study's scope of inquiry, with particular emphasis to the role the methodology played into revealing determinants that influence learners' goals. Considered as the most frequently used method for qualitatively collecting and analyzing ABE participants' data (Bingman and Ebert, 2000), the theory assisted particularly with the analysis of learners' narratives, highlighting pathways of paradigmatic typologies and categories (Polkinghorne, 1995) emerging from the stories themselves. The richness of life histories (Bloom and Munro, 1995) made ground for attentive interpretation of both the individual predictors of learners' goals and of the effects of system-level constraints these goals aimed to dismantle. The merit of this approach to blend virtues of focused interviewing with life history narratives gave the researcher the ability to see beyond a person's life or a narrowly specified particular situation. Thus, the researchers' attention (Mishler, 1986) became centered not on what was particular about individual participants, but rather on what general situation or circumstance these learners might have had in common.

The analysis of narratives of ABE participants enabled me to put their goal setting practices and experiences in the context of their everyday lives and allowed me to hear their true voice and explore into their world of feelings and values. For the purpose of this study, participants' experiences before, during and after enrollment in ABE program were explored. Use of life history methodology presented the complete picture of images, perspectives and realities construed by my study's participants.

Self as researcher

In the qualitative research paradigm, the researcher occupies the dichotomous position of acting as the data collection instrument and the analytical tool (Patton, 2002). As such, data quality depends greatly on the ability of the researcher to conduct the study with poised skills and sharp rigor. Eisner (1998) additionally notes that the quality of a research study also relies on the expertise of the researcher. As such, it is the researchers' job to conduct data collection and interpretation with as much impartiality and transparency as possible. In favor of transparency and impartiality, researchers are bound to state their expertise in the field, along with any personal and professional factors that might influence how the study is carried.

I have been involved with ABE for eight years, as a teacher and a curriculum coordinator and have taught students from all levels in ESOL, Family Literacy and GED classes. I entered ABE by the 'back door'[6] (Lin, 2010) but embraced the field passionately and dedicated myself entirely to the advancement and progress of my students. I identify with adult learners in ABE programs, and more specifically with ESOL learners, since I am one of them. After I completed my graduate studies in my country of origin, Albania, I decided to travel the world, in a quest for better education. It is in our common struggle and determination to succeed, that I find my inspiration and my commitment to serving adult learners' cause. I use my own voice, my current knowledge and my dedication to bring forth the voices of the disadvantaged learners

My studies in the Public Policy PhD Program, at the University of Massachusetts Boston, have equipped me with the necessary knowledge and expertise to exercise the descriptive and exploratory inquiry of the problem at hand. I believe that as the prime instrument of my study (Merriam, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994) I was be able to ethically and with the outmost

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[6] Lin (2010) dedicates her dissertation to understanding Adult ESOL teaching profession and practice. She uses the metaphor to characterize the majority of ABE teachers who, like me, enter the field serendipitously.

concern and dedication transcend only the research participants' consideration and opinions. Yet, I recognize that my values have influenced my selection of the research problem and the methods I chose were bound by my commitment to solving decision problems (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Johnson at al., 2012).

Data sources and data collection

The criteria for the selection of programs were as follows: 1) ABE local programs, based in Massachusetts' communities with a large pool of ABE learners; 2) largely funded with Federal WIA funding; and, 3) providing ESOL, GED and Family Literacy Services.

This study was situated in Worcester, Massachusetts and participants were selected from one of the many community and adult learning centers located in the city. Prior to getting consent for the study, I approached two potential Adult and Community Learning Centers operating in Worcester, Massachusetts in September of 2014. One of these learning centers agreed to let me conduct the study at their site. This center proved to be particularly well suited for the purpose of the study; it provided services to more than 600 adult learners per academic year and its breadth of programs was well received and highly respected by the communities of interest. The center had a particular affiliation with Worcester Public Schools (WPS), providing a myriad of ABE classes, like HiSET and pre-HiSET preparation, ESOL, Family Literacy, Workplace ESOL and Pre-College Math. For the purpose of these study only GED, ESOL and Family Literacy students were approached for recruitment.

Once interest was expressed to the centers' program administrators, I presented verbally and through email the purpose of the research, together with measures to protect and ensure participants' confidentiality. A study agreement was signed by the Adult Learning Center

Director and myself, to allow for the recruitment of participants and start of data collection at the approved study site **(Appendix L)**.

Participants were selected using maximum variation sampling (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This qualitative sampling method was important in allowing for a selection of cases that were as different from each other but also that would best represent the depth of the learner goal setting phenomenon (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This would allow me to collect nuanced data about goals adult learners set while enrolled in ABE programs. For the first phase of my study I recruited 12 adult learners, aged 18 and above, enrolled at the approved study site, attending either HiSET, Family Literacy or ESOL classes. The recruitment plan controlled for a balanced distribution of study enrollees across ABE educational tracks, to allow for all the voices of adult learners attending different tracks transpire evenly through the data collection phase. As a result 4 participants were recruited from three ABE educational tracks, HiSET, Family Literacy and ESOL classes. To ensure diversity among study participants, I selected to recruit from different age groups, gender, nationality, country of origin, and variation in educational attainment. **Table 8** depicts the demographic characteristics of the study's population.

Additionally, I controlled for substantial participation level of enrollees. The decision to recruit participants that had at least attended 80 hours of instruction was based on ABE related literature that defines it as a "substantial participation rate" (Sticht and Armstrong, 1994; Young at al., 1955; Bingman and Ebert, 2000). At this level of participation, it is believed that ABE learners are well situated with programmatic requirements and possibly on the way of meeting their initial, pre-set, program-defined goals.

A direct method of recruitment was used, whereby I met and invited the study participants to sign for the study. Several visitations took place at the adult learning center,

during which I presented the research purpose and methods to ABE learners in their classroom environment. I also provided potential participants with a short description of the research, including procedures, protection of confidentiality and ability to withdraw from the study at any point in time. I asked potential participants to express their interest for the study either through email or verbally, and I received a considerate amount of respondents that showed interest in participating. In all, I interviewed 12 participants, four from each instructional track. Additionally I followed up with study participants by phone, to discuss progress with their goals and ask for clarifications and additional thoughts regarding the topic of the study.

The interviews took place in private, in one of the classrooms of the adult learning center. At the beginning of each interview, I would ask the participant to tell me something about themselves and about their lives prior to getting to the program. All participants were reminded prior to signing the consent that they had unlimited amount of time to ask questions of interest. Only after the participant agreed to be interviewed, was the consent signed and a copy given to the participant, for their individual records. All of the adult learners, who consented to be in the study, also agreed of the digital recording of their interviews. A copy of the interview consent is exhibited in **Appendix F**.

Prior to starting the interviews with participants, I met with a small group of ABE graduates, to consult about the validity of my interview instrument. This particular meeting was important for advice on how to approach the interviewees, but also to gather insights from ABE graduates about their individual experience with the goal setting process. After I solicited their advice and reviewed interview protocols, I piloted my initial interview with two ABE students.

The primary source of data for this study was a series of semi-structured interviews with 12 ABE participants. The learners' interview protocol is exhibited in **Appendix D**. I also got

IRB approval to call the study's participants, to follow up on some of the themes that occurred during the interview, without undermining to probe for change on initial goals or new goals that the participants had identified in the course of their studies. The learners' follow-up call protocol is exhibited in **Appendix G**. The length of each interview was 1-1½ hours each, with questions being a guide for the researcher. The primary purpose of these interviews was to make the participants talk about their lives and how the goals they were setting were a part of their life. In developing a protocol for these interviews, I extensively reviewed similar research protocols from other ABE research studies such as Rivera (2008); Reddy (2012); (Drago-Severson (2004); Bingman and Ebert (2000) and Mischler (1986).

Secondary data, such as additional program documents regarding goals program set with students ("program-defined goals"), intake forms, and student portfolios were reviewed. I conducted a documentary analysis of outcome data reporting, to observe when and how the outcome indicators were reported to federal and state data collection sites (Smartt System and Cognos) for the study participants. Observations of secondary data such as goal instruments, adult learners' portfolios, including intake forms completed at program entry, enabled the emergence of the complete picture of perspectives and images of goal setting from the programmatic side.

Data analysis

Data analysis was carried on from the beginning and did not constitute a separate phase from data collection (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Straus and Corbin, 1990). The first research question, centered on the goals that ABE adult learners set while participating in ABE classes, guided this phase of data analysis. The question helped to shed light primarily on the

determinants that influenced ABE learners' goals and how these determinants shaped the process of setting and meeting their goals. Themes that emerged from participants' interviews helped to construe a picture of learners' dreams and aspirations invested in the ABE educational journey.

I approached the data using several layers of analysis. The first layer of analysis looked at the ABE participants' goals and determinants affecting the goal setting process. Parallel with the process of collecting interviews, I created biographical sketches of my study's participants, highlighting individual characteristics like the participants' demographic characteristics, educational background, economic status, family composite, and existence of social networks. Initial comparative memos were reviewed periodically and complemented with additional side notes, highlighting similar categories and themes that emerged from other interviewees.

Participants' interviews were recorded and transcribed immediately after completing them. The notes made following each interview were also reviewed as part of the analysis process. The transcriptions, the biographical sketches, the comparative memos and the notes constituted the raw material infusing the data analysis. Data was compared horizontally (across interviews) and vertically (across study participants), making the analysis an iterative process.

Each interview was transcribed and coded using the open coding system. Codes reflected several categories. Concepts emerging from the literature review or the conceptual framework constituted the base for the emergence of the interview codes. Participants' descriptions of the goals, in their own terms, were also important in construing the initial round of coding. Finally, new categories that emerged naturally from initial memos or during data analysis were included in the mix.

Another important part of the analysis was use of excerpts from participants' interviews, to illustrate the nuanced themes that emerged with coding. **Table 3** provides an illustration of a

first round data analysis, whereby a cumulative table depicts program-defined goals side by side excerpts from participants' interviews (a full version of this table is exhibited in **Appendix J**).

Pseudonym	Goals Set by Program	Met? Y/N	Interview Excerpts	Level of Instruction
Nok	1) Pas HiSET 2) Create a resume	N Y	*'So if I get the HiSET, I can go to the hospital and become a medical interpreter. I used to go to translate, you know, to the place for the abortions. They continue to call me, but I don't like to do that.'*	HiSET
Tung	1) Enter employment 2) Pass HiSET 3) Learn about or use community organizations or resources	Y N	*'I just want to do something more [pauses for some time to think about the choice of words] intelligent actually, using less of my physical strength'.* *I will take another class, [w]riting appraisals for insurance companies. That would give me time to be with my nine years old, to take care of his educational needs.*	HiSET
Dottie	1)Pass HiSET 2)Volunteer in a program, community school, daycare 3)Participate in community activities	N Y Y	*'And we moved from a little town to a bigger city, Worcester, and the challenges were greater, and I started using drugs and I dropped out of school'.* *'I dropped out in the 9th grade. And 30 years later I am back'.* *'[My son] is a freshman, so I like to finish my high school before my youngest one finishes his'.*	HiSET

Table 3: Program-defined Learners' Goals with Interview Excerpts

The second layer of analysis observed program-defined goals ABE local programs set for learners. Data collected through documentary analysis and interviews with administrators and counselors were analyzed in terms of 1) the initial goals programs set with the study participants, and why some of these program-defined goals were different from the ones collected during the study; 2) other goals that faculty/program staff set throughout the course of program

participation and the initiation process that guides this phase of goal setting; and, 3) program goal attainment for study participants and reporting of these goals (outcomes) by faculty and program staff.

A description of findings and detailed interpretation of the data is presented on Chapter 4 and 6.

Exploratory component #2: Value focused thinking

The second component of the study focused onto the local ABE stakeholders by revealing their most fundamental objectives that influence the goal setting process. This part of the analysis sought to answer the last two research questions that focused on understanding and structuring of stakeholders' objectives into value hierarchies and means-ends networks. The aim of this part of the analysis was to create a map of local stakeholders' objectives in the goal setting process and highlight differences and similarities among values and objectives expressed by ABE teachers and learners.

Literature in ABE has for a long time been calling for studies whose focus need to be around local stakeholders' examination of goals (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Koen 1985; Lerche, 1985a and 1985b, Fingeret, 1985; Lyttle and Wolfe, 1989). For the purpose of this study, I borrowed the definition of Guba and Lincoln (1981) that defines stakeholders as the local audiences that "have a stake and interest in the performance or outcomes of a program". I also define the space of stakeholders I am interested to study, as the space of actors involved at the local level with the administration, delivery and recipience of program outcomes. My particular interest and locus of inquiry for the exploratory phase of the study rested with learners' and ABE teachers' value hierarchies.

The literature reviewed for the exploratory phase of the study argues that ABE programs' goals are driven by state and federal funding legislation (Lyttle and Wolfe, 1989). ABE local programs may feel little flexibility in determining their own goals, given the constraints of federal and state legislations. Yet, there are continuous calls by researchers for studies that explore the divergence among particular stakeholders' viewpoints and the implication these divergences bring for decision-making. (Lyttle and Wolfe, 1989).

The analysis for the prescriptive part of the study was rooted value focused thinking theory. I believe both parts of the framework, the descriptive and exploratory/prescriptive, together and as one piece, contributed to painting a complete image of local stakeholders' preferences with the goal setting process, not only by telling the complete story on particular stakeholders own motives and goals, but also on exploring and revealing a decision space whereby some of the stakeholders' interests could be mutually negotiated and agreed upon.

As explained during the literature review section, value focused thinking is instrumental in assisting stakeholders to collectively think of values that permeate a particular decision problem. Keneey's work has been crucial in building a method that not only assists with making these values explicit but at the same time allows all of the stakeholders appraise the implications of convergent or different value judgements (Keeney, 1996).

Keeney argues that although values are subjective, they constitute the heart of the decision problem. In this regard, all attempts to model values illuminate the decision context, by bringing implicit values upfront, and helping the decision process to become more consistent and logical. It is through this 'hard thinking' about what values permeate, that stakeholders are challenged to channel a critical resource that hopefully could lead to better decisions (Keeney, 1988).

The method is praised for its ability to be inclusive and respectful of all the voices that have an interest with the decision problem at hand. It particularly helped this research study in several dimensions; first and foremost it revealed answers to the question of whose values were being used in the ABE goals setting process (Keeney, 1988). Additionally, it helped with the 'thinking through' and articulation of the values and alternatives that surround the goals setting decision problem, by revealing the part of the story which was implicit. Finally, it illuminated a pathway of learning from the story, by distilling what was really important for ABE learners and teachers.

The method primarily assisted this study to model both fundamental objectives and means-ends networks for ABE learners and instructors. As explained at the literature review section, questions of different natures drive the 'thinking through' and the articulation of values in modeling these hierarchies.

Figure 3: Modeling Means-Ends and Fundamental Value Hierarchies, ABE Learners
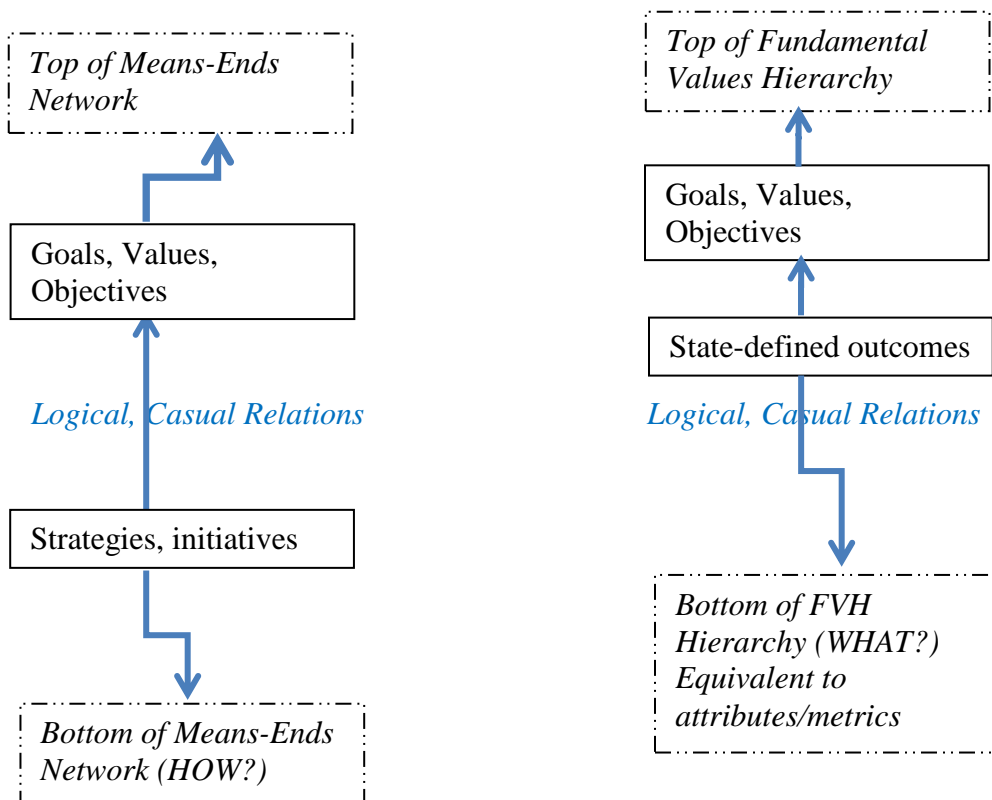
As **Figure 3** illustrates, to build means-ends networks the researcher starts asking the question of "how can these objective be achieved". The researcher then could start at the bottom, with lower level objectives, or at the top, with higher level objectives. For the fundamental values hierarchy, for any objective considered, the research would ask "this objective is a specific example of what?" or "this objective could be understood along which dimensions, or for which groups?" As for any value structure, the researcher might start investigating from the top or the bottom. In this fashion, the researcher systematically investigates about all potential possibilities and aspects of the decision problem at hand.

Data sources and data collection

Like the first component, the second phase of this study was situated in Worcester, Massachusetts. For this phase, the researcher chose to model means-ends and fundamental value hierarchies for ABE learners and instructors. The rationale for choosing to compare ABE teachers value hierarchies with learners stem from the fact that out of all the local stakeholders involved in the goal setting process, teachers are not only closely related with setting and meeting learners' goals, but they also constitute the major group of ABE stakeholders that receives training and updates on how to administer and implement the goal setting policy. Additionally, state and federal performance measures, of what goal setting policy is part of, could be also considered standards that test ABE teachers' performance. As such teachers are not only trusted but also pressured to meet as many program-defined goals, so they can ensure respective local programs get rewarded in the annual competitive grant evaluation process. For all these reasons, teachers are believed to be the best data source available to investigate in terms

of shedding light on the nature of the dichotomous, yet conflicting relationship between ABE program-defined and learners' self-defined goals.

Data collection for value-focused thinking mainly consisted of a two hour workshop, accommodated during the staff and faculty monthly meeting, with a break of one hour for the researcher to organize the goals and objectives and draw relationships between them. The data analysis relied on in-person discussions with 9 ABE teachers, research-only analysis sessions, and multiple rounds of discussion of drafts of objectives hierarchies. A direct method of recruitment was used, whereby I met and invited the study participants to sign for the study. Several visitations took place at the adult learning center whereby I presented the research purpose and methods to ABE teachers in their classroom environment. I also provided potential participants with a short description of the research, including procedures, protection of confidentiality and ability to withdraw from the study at any point in time. I asked potential participants to express their interest for the study either through email or verbally, and I received a considerate amount of respondents that showed interest in participating. In all, I extended the workshop to 9 teachers, 3 from each instructional track. Below is a table that provides demographic characteristics of the study sample.

Characteristics of the Study Sample: ABE Teachers

Variable	N	Percentage (%)
Total	9	
ABE Educational Track		
HiSET	3	33%
ESOL	3	33%
Family Literacy	3	33%
Gender		
Females	9	100%
Males	0	0%
Race/ethnicity		
Caucasians	9	100%
Hispanic	0	0%
Asian	0	0%
African	0	0%
US-Born	9	100%
Foreign-Born	0	0%
Number of years teaching in ABE		
0-2	0	0%
3-4	1	11%
5-10	7	77%
10-15	1	11%
Dual Employment		
Worcester Public Schools	5	55%
Other Employment	1	11%
Only working in ABE	3	44%

Table 4: Characteristics of the Study Sample, ABE Teachers

All participants were reminded prior to signing the consent that they had unlimited amount of time to ask questions of interest. Only after participants agreed to be interviewed, was the consent signed and a copy given to the study participants, for their individual records. A copy of the workshop consent is exhibited in **Appendix F**. All of the instructors who consented to be in the study, also agreed of the digital recording of their workshop.

Probing questions such as the following, drove the initial discussions at the instructors' workshop: How long have you been using the goal setting instrument in your practice? What can

ABE accomplish with the current goal setting process? What technical and personnel resources do you have to apply for to the goal setting? What advantages and disadvantages do you see with the current goals setting process? In your opinion, what does the future looks like for learner goal setting in ABE? Additionally, I shared with participants the objective hierarchies derived from a simulation exercise of a workshop session with ABE faculty (see **Appendix I**) approximated during the study's proposal phase, and some samples of value-hierarchies retrieved from the reviewed literature, to help them visualize the end product of the workshops and focus their attention to the scope and rationale of the chosen methodology. The purpose of the probing questions and the visualization techniques was to set the stage for the value-focused thinking session. The workshop was very interactive, involving thinking hard about fundamental questions regarding the goal setting process, and what it would like to do, rather than justifying a particular strategy. A copy of the workshop protocol is exhibited in **Appendix E**; an illustration of the workshop agenda is exhibited in **Appendix H**.

Data analysis

This phase of data analysis consisted mainly on the identification of stakeholders' values; rounds of structuring of stakeholders' objectives into value hierarchies and means-ends networks; extraction of values from the descriptive phase interviews; and, a comparative analysis on the similarities and differences between ABE learners and instructors' value structures.

As with the descriptive phase, data analysis started with data collection, in order to take advantage of the nuances that perspired during the teachers' workshop or throughout learners' interviews. Questions that guided my data analysis first tried to answer the question of whether student goals and values were different from other stakeholders, in particular ABE teachers.

Additionally I asked of whether students' goals and values were generally consistent or quite distinct from those that were inferred from state-defined outcomes. Last but not least, I also asked of whether students' goals and values varied in systematic, predictable ways according to class taken, personality treats or other dimensions.

Particularly for students I tried to form preliminary suppositions that were later tested through the iterative process of identification and modeling of value hierarchies. I presupposed that each student in different ABE tracks (ESOL, Family Literacy and HiSET) enrolls in local programs with unique goals and fundamental objectives. I then tried to investigate of whether students of similar tracks, or stages of life, were expressing goals that showed more similarity across groups then within ABE educational tracks.

I approached the modeling of learners' value hierarchies from a non-traditional VFT angle. The traditional VFT model that calls for different representatives of ABE learners to engage collectively in the same room was not feasible for this particular study, because of the diverse educational tracks or stages of life these learners are at. Additionally these students exhibit various literacy levels in English language, increasing their inability to freely converse or hold a debate in a group. For this phase of the study, I extracted values from the descriptive phase interviews.

To ensure validity of my data and for the purpose of data triangulation, I first created profiles of all the students' goals. These profiles were narratives containing themes that resonated with each and every learners' interview. **Figure 5** illustrates themes that emerged from Kimberly's profile of goals.

Based on similarities of treats among these student goals' profiles, sample group hierarchies were created. I set myself the goal of creating value hierarchies for some groups of

students. I decomposed the problem by choosing a couple of student groups that I thought

together were a good representative of the population of ABE learners. Using a consistent

language, I tried to illuminate some way of learning from these value hierarchies and distilling

what was really important. My assumption in this process was that evaluating in a rigorous way

these values structures would help me aggregate what I learned from different learners' group. In

the spirit of the scientific inquiry, I also inferred that if I was learning similar things from these

group value hierarchies, I would build a value structure as reliable as through traditional VFT

methodology. My other assumption rested with the fact that there were possible combination of

these values, in that they were complementary. A separate section on learners' data cleaning and

data treatment will ensue in Chapter 5.

As for modeling of teachers' value hierarchies I used the traditional VFT model. After

the initial workshop with teachers, I reviewed my in-person notes, transcribed the audio files,

and created the first of multiple drafts of objective hierarchies. An illustration of a preliminary

iteration is made below (**Table 6**). The preliminary iteration of themes was shared with the group

of teachers, for additional feedback and clarifications. Particularly, at this early stage, I focused

primarily on coding the data to produce a list of objectives. I then connected short statements

with field data, as shown in **Table 6**. **Table 7** grouped the mean-ends objectives in several

different areas, in an effort to structure and simplify the modeling of the fundamental values

hierarchy (the full table with means objectives for teachers' value structures is exhibited in

Appendix K).

Means Objectives	Evidence from Interviews
Improve communication between parents and children	[Learner] came to me and said "My kids are getting in trouble at school because they are always late". And so I helped her to make a chore chart and what they would do at night and they [her kids] would check it off, you know, what they would get ready for the next morning. We had it color coded per child and ready to put on her refrigerator.
Increase awareness of community organizations	Like the goal in the SMARTT rubric about being aware of community organizations and things like that. We set up classes to go to trips to the State House and other places. An entire class meets a goal like that, and we make sure that it happens.
Maximize alignment of curriculum with goals	And other things that we try to align with our curriculum, goals and the teaching process like the mock interviews, the dress for success fashion show and the job fair.
Allow communication to be part of the learners' experience	I think if your classroom is set up in such a way that you allow communication to be part of your learning experience, and you build goals into your own curriculum, with your conversations, with your morning messages, with your summing up or with the answering of the questions, than you are making time for your class to feel like a community. However you want to set it up – there is when a goal comes up: Hey, I am trying to look for a new apartment. You are? You are about to also set up a new goal.
Instill sense of accomplishment with low level learners	And what we did in the classroom, since I have the low level readers, and the non-English readers, I tried to be focused on each one of them personally, where they were and what they needed to do. If someone was learning the vowel sounds, maybe the goal for the next week or two would be to learn the vowel sounds. I had a paper that read "steps to goals" and we would have the date the student set the goal and if she met the goal will be that date.

Table 5: Means Objectives, Teachers' Value Structures

Table 6: Teacher's Means Objectives (Iteration)

Maximize Learner Fluency
- Competency in Reading and Writing

- Comfortability with Understanding and Speaking

Maximize Incremental Growth
- Set pathways for learners to achieve long term goals

- Create the sense of prospective goals

- Maximize sense of growth by setting small steps goals

Maximize Learner Accomplishment
- Instill sense of accomplishment with low level learners

Maximize Employability
- Focus on employability as a long term goal

Maximize Functionality
- Contextualize curriculum along job-readiness lines

- Maximize alignment of curriculum with cohort-based goals

- Increase meeting of cohort-based goals

Maximize Return-on-Investment
- Maximize sense of Return-on-Investment

- Maximize interception of outcomes through daily communication

- Maximize the number of SMART Goals Set and Met

Maximize Funding Stability
- Ensure compliance with funders' accountability

- Convince funders that goals setting process matters

Maximize Program Continuity
- Maximize Responsibility to Learners

- Respect hard work that learners put to meeting goals

- Maximize teacher availability

- Maximize the human aspect of goal setting

Maximize community investment
- Increase learning opportunities for older adult students

Maximize Economic Well-Being
- Increase opportunities for highly educated learners

-

Table 6: Teacher's Means Objectives (Iteration), continued

Maximize Learner Responsibility
- Maximize sense of learner accountability

- Maximize seriousness of the learning process

Maximize Educational Achievement
- Maximize sense of educational achievement

- Define purpose of participation in ABE

- Minimize dismissal of learner goal or need

Maximize Family Literacy
- Increase communication between parents and children

Maximize Intergenerational Literacy
- Maximize sense of investment in children education

Maximize Socio-Economic Diversity
- Honor uniqueness and recognize diversity

Maximize Accessible Opportunities'
- Maximize opportunities to access community resources

- Acknowledge the 'common ground' rule

- Maximize opportunities to communicate

Trustworthiness

Throughout the study I tried to maintain methodological consistency either through testing rival and alternative hypothesis; ensuring for data saturation; rigorously presenting the richness of data; and maintaining consistency between the data and the analysis (Charmaz 2006; Patton, 2002). Additionally I insisted in ensuring the study's confirmability either through asking participants to elaborate on their answers or through using additional cross-examination instruments like participants' goal's profiles or notes. For confirmability of my instruments, prior to starting the interviews with participants, I did meet with a small group of ABE graduates. This particular meeting was important for advice on how to approach the interviewees, but also to gather insights from ABE graduates about their individual experience with the goal setting

process. After their advice was solicited and interview protocols were reviewed, I piloted my initial interview with two ABE students.

I shared preliminary thoughts and drafts of my writing with my dissertation committee chair and a few former ABE colleagues, to solicit their feedback on the reliability and credibility of the study results.

Ethics and confidentiality

Before I undertook this study, I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Massachusetts, Boston. A copy of the IRB Approval is exhibited in **Appendix M.** Each participants that agreed to be interviewed or included in this study was presented with an IRB approved consent form, explaining the study's purpose, procedures, discomforts, risks and benefits, and study contacts. The interviews and workshop took place in private, in one of the classrooms of the adult learning center. All participants were reminded prior to signing the consent that they had unlimited amount of time to ask questions of interest. Only after the participant agreed to be interviewed, was the consent signed and a copy given to the participant, for their individual records. All of the adult learners, who consented to be in the study, also agreed of the digital recording of their interviews. A copy of the interview consent is exhibited in **Appendix F**.

In order to protect participants' confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms. Documents and electronic files pertaining to the data collection and analysis phase were also secured for confidentiality purposes. Data will be archived according to guidelines of the IRB Office of University of Massachusetts Boston.

Delimitations and limitation of the study

The delimitation that I set for this study had to do with the scope and the rationale of carrying this type of research, the location of the study population, the questions I was bound to ask and the methodology I employed. I choose to study Adult Basic Education (ABE) Goal Setting Policy in Massachusetts because it had linked adult learners' self-defined goals to educational outcomes, performance systems and accountability requirements. I chose to study ABE learners that participate in local ABE programs in Worcester, Massachusetts, and investigate determinants that influence their self-defined goals. I also chose to extend my analysis and study to investigate and reveal values that influence ABE learners and instructors' programmatic goals, in an attempt to reveal and disentangle the conflicting preferences fueled by outcome-based accountability requirements. Finally, I chose to use a mixed-method research paradigm, in order to reveal the complete story surrounding Massachusetts' goal setting policy.

Such delimitations brought forward a few limitations as well. One of the most important challenges was in recruiting and maintaining a considerable sample of study's participants, given the researchers' lack of proximity from the research site. Geographical and time constraints did play a considerable role and posed limitations in regards to the researchers' ability to be close to study's participants throughout the entire course of the study.

Another limitation that needs to be taken in consideration is the ability of the study to generalize its findings. As explained in the methodology section, I was drawing samples from only one city in Massachusetts. As such, this study's generalizability need not go beyond the learners' goal setting policy in Massachusetts, with particular emphasis to its application in local ABE programs in the Greater Worcester County.

Additionally this study was not longitudinal, and it did not observe participants after they completed their particular studies in ABE local programs. However, the generalizability concerns did not distort the validity of the study in revealing adult learners' goals while participating in ABE programs or the exploratory stage of mapping and negotiating stakeholders' objectives.

As argued elsewhere, the researcher's biases need to be taken in consideration, as they can unduly affect the study's findings. As fully disclaimed in prior sections, the inclination to carry this study was borne from my proximity with the ABE adult learners in my role as a former ABE teacher. Nevertheless, I was able to represent ABE learners' and faculty voices with maximal reliability, consistency and scientific rigor, fully equipped with the best principles of scientific inquiry and bound by the researcher role I fully embraced.

A summary of the research design and methodology is presented below **Table 7: Summary of the Research Design and Methodology.** The summary sheds light into the research design and methodology of the two thematically related components. The consequent chapter will presents in depth analysis of the findings that emerged from the descriptive phase.

Summary of the Research Design and Methodology

	Application/Relevance to *Descriptive* Research	Application/Relevance to *Exploratory* Research
Study Population	Purposeful sample of 12 ABE learners, participating in HiSET, ESOL and Family Literacy Classes	9 ABE Instructors involved in teaching in a local ABE Program in Massachusetts 12 ABE learners, participating in ABE classes
Purpose	Identify and describe goals set and met by adult learners while participating in ABE local programs.	Gain insights in stakeholder involvement in goal setting process and reveal stakeholder preferences.
Research Questions	Are learners' goals met one year after participation in ABE local programs?	Which goal-related objectives do learners and instructors in ABE see as means to an end and what do value-structures look like? How congruent are ABE stakeholders' perspectives on learners' goal setting?
Conceptual Framework	Goal theory: Suggests that goals of learning are an intrinsic factor influencing students' motivation	Decision Analysis: Suggests that goal setting could be envisioned as a decision problem between stakeholders whose conflicting interests could be articulated.
Empirical Framework	Learners' narratives as a way to identify learners goals	Contextualization of stakeholders' objectives
Methods	1. Live history methodology: put participants' practices and experiences in the context of their everyday life. 2. Documentary analysis: enables the emergence of the complete picture of goal setting from the programmatic side	1. Value Focused Thinking: Structuring of ABE learners and teachers' objectives into means-end networks and fundamental values' hierarchies
Data sources	1. Open ended interviews with selected adult learners in one ABE local program. 2. Observations of adult learners' portfolio and program documents pertaining to learners' goal setting.	1. Expert-led VFT exercise session with ABE local stakeholders who have a stake at the goal setting process; 2. Maps of fundamental objectives and means-ends networks that link local program decisions with the desired outcomes of the goal setting process.

Table 7: Summary of the Research Design and Methodology

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS: DESCRIPTIVE PHASE

This chapter starts by discussing the findings of the descriptive phase, exploring the perspectives

of different groups of adult learners within ABE with regard to goal setting. In particular, the

first part of the chapter reveals the themes that emerged from the data with regard to

determinants that influence ABE adult learners' goals. The second part of the chapter contrasts

learners' self-defined goals with goals set by programs and answers the first sub-question of this

study regarding the goals that ABE learners set while participating in ABE local program and of

whether this goals were met one year after participation. Findings from this phase inform the

exploratory phase of the study, in which I applied a decision-analytic framework to identify ABE

local stakeholders' perspectives with the goal setting process.

Description of participants: ABE adult learners

For the first phase of the study, twelve participants were recruited. Participants were all

ABE adult learners from one Adult Learning Center located in Worcester, Massachusetts,

currently enrolled in the 2014-2015 academic year. As shown in **Table 8** the study population

exhibited variation in terms of gender, age, nationality, educational background, employment

status and other demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

Characteristics of the Study Sample: ABE Learners

Variable	N	Percentage (%)
Total	12	
Females	8	66%
Males	4	34%
Race/ethnicity		
Caucasian	6	50%
Hispanic	2	17%
Asian	2	17%
African	2	16%
Country of Birth		
Foreign-born	10	83%
US-Born	2	17%
Immigration status		
Refugees, Asylees	2	20%*
Legal Permanent Residents (LPR)	8	80%*[7]
Median length of living in US	12.8*	
Languages		
Languages other than English spoken at home	10*	100%
(Arabic, Albanian, French, Farsi, Lao, Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese)		
Age range		
18-20 years of age	2	17%
21-40 years of age	4	34%
41> years of age	6	50%
Median Age	38	
Educational Attainment (Range)		
Some Middle School	1	8%
High School Dropout	5	42%
Completed High School	2	17%
Some college	1	8%
Completed college	2	17%
Completed Master's	1	8%

Table 8: Characteristics of the Study Sample, ABE Adult Learners

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[7] Statistics regarding the immigration status, median length of living in US and languages pertain only to the foreign-born study population.

Variable	N	Percentage (%)
Employment Status		
Unemployed	5	42%
Volunteering	2	16%
Employed	5	42%
Full-Time	2	40% *[8]
Two Part-Time Jobs	1	20% *
Seasonal	1	20% *
Self-Employed	1	20% *
Family Status		
With Children	10	83%
With Children in Public Schools	7	70%

Table 8: Characteristics of the Study Sample, ABE Adult Learners, continued

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[8] Statistics regarding types of employment are calculated only for those study participants that were employed.

The diversity of the study population was representative and mirrored at best the diversity

of the population enrolled in ABE programs in Greater Worcester County.

Demographic characteristics of the Greater Worcester County

Facts	Number	Percentage (%)
Population		
Population Estimates	818,963	---
Race/ethnicity		
Caucasians		87.5%
Hispanic		10.5%
African-American		5.3%
Asian		4.2%
Population Characteristics		
Foreign-Born		11.5%
Languages		
Languages other than English spoken at home		18.6%
Education		
High School Graduate or Higher		89.6%
Bachelor Degree or Higher		34.1%
Income and Poverty		
Persons in poverty		11.5%

Table 9: Demographic characteristics of the Greater Worcester County

(Source: U.S Census 2015)

There is an even distribution among the number of ESOL, HiSET and Family Literacy

participants that were recruited for this study, and as explained in the methodology section, this

was executed by design (see Chapter 4). The recruitment plan controlled for a balanced

distribution of study enrollees across ABE educational tracks, to allow for all the voices of adult

learners attending different tracks transpire evenly through the data collection phase. As a result

4 participants were recruited from each ABE educational tracks, i.e. HiSET, Family Literacy and

ESOL classes. Additionally, I aimed to allow for the diversity of participants' demographics flow naturally into my study, with participants selected to represent different age groups, gender, nationality, foreign born and US born status, and variation in educational attainment.

Only two participants (17% of the participants' population) were born in the United States. The rest of the study participants were immigrants. Out of the immigrant population, only two out of ten participants came to the country as refugees. The rest of the study's immigrant population had completed their naturalization process well before enrolling in ABE classes. The length of living in the country also varied: At the time of the interview, the median length of living in US for ABE immigrant students was 12.8 years; one participant had been living in the country for forty two years, the longest among the study's immigrant population.

The ABE immigrant participants recruited for this study came from different countries, with representation from all continents. This diversity in representation mirrors at best the composition of the immigrant population in the city of Worcester, and across the Massachusetts state, representing different historical trends in terms of immigrant arrivals in the United States.

Among the immigrant population recruited for this study, none of the participants reported of using English as their first language at home. Languages that were spoken at home included, Arabic, Albanian, Farsi, French, Spanish, Russian, Lao and Vietnamese. Participants ranged from 18 to 55 with a median age of 38 years.

The educational attainment of study participants also varied: five of the twelve adult learners reported of being high school dropouts (three in US and two in their home countries). Almost all of the HiSET adult learners interviewed for this study were high school drop-outs, except for one. Twenty five percent of the interviewed ABE students had some exposure to college life or reported to having a college degree. Carmen reported of having a Masters' Degree

in Psychology from her country of origin, Ecuador, on top of having a BA in Elementary and Secondary Education and having practiced teaching in grade level for ten years. Two other participants, reported to also having attended higher education institutions in their countries, but having no way of producing transcripts because of civil unrests unraveling their countries. The majority of immigrants in the study sample reported of having studied in their home country and in US.

Table 10 presents individual participants' characteristics in terms of country of origin, age, gender, prior education and level of instruction. Participant names have been anonymized.

Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Country of Origin	Age	Gender	Prior Education	Level of Instruction
Nok	Laos	52	Female	Some college[9]	HiSET
Tung	Vietnam	47	Male	10th Grade High School Dropout	HiSET
Kimberly	US	18	Female	11th Grade High School Dropout	HiSET
Dottie	US	36	Female	9th Grade High School dropout	HiSET
Mario	Columbia	18	Male	9th Grade High School Dropout	ESOL
Dina	Albania	55	Female	College Diploma	ESOL
Sivash	Afghanistan	51	Male	9th grade High School Dropout	ESOL
Ahmad	Chad	48	Male	College Diploma	ESOL
Carmen	Ecuador	40	Female	Masters' Degree	Family Literacy
Jaqueline	Ghana	37	Female	6th grade middle school	Family Literacy
Mona	Syria	33	Female	High School Diploma	Family Literacy
Tatiana	Ukraine	30	Female	High School Diploma	Family Literacy

Table 10: Participant characteristics

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[9] Nok came to United States relatively young, but she states that she was able to finish high school and one year of college in her native country, Laos. She states that because of war, the majority of educational archives in Laos are destroyed, and she has not been able to collect her high school diploma or any other documentation regarding her prior education.

Participants' Prior and Current Employment

Name	Prior Education	Employment in country of origin	Employment Status	Type of employment in U.S.
Nok	Some College	Owned a small bakery	Part-time	Volunteer/ Thrift Store
Tung	10th Grade High School Dropout	N/A	Laid off Recently	Factory worker
Kimberly	11th Grade High School Dropout	N/A	Unemployed	Unemployed
Dottie	9th Grade High School Dropout	N/A	Part-time	Volunteer/ Substance Abuse Center
Mario	9th Grade High School Dropout	N/A	2 Part-time	Polar Soda Forklift Driver
Dina	College Diploma	Design Engineer	Full time	TJX/Ticketer
Sivash	9th Grade High School Dropout	Agriculturist	Unemployed	Unemployed
Ahmad	College Diploma	Accountant Program Assistant	Unemployed	Unemployed
Carmen	Masters' Degree	Elementary Teacher	Weekends Only	Cashier
Jaqueline	6th Grade Middle School	Mid-wife	Housewife	Housewife
Mona	College Diploma	Artist/Painter	Worked from Home	Worked from Home
Tatiana	High School Diploma	Banker	Full time	Secretary/ Senior Day Care

Table 11: Participant' prior and current employment

Table 11 presents participants' prior and current employment. Forty two percent of the interviewed participants reported of having a job at the time of the interview. Nok and Dottie disclosed they were volunteering for non-profit organizations, while attempting to pass the high stakes equivalency exam (HiSET). Two of the study participants that were working had full time jobs; Mario had two part-time jobs and Carmen worked during the weekends. Sivash, Ahmad and Tung reported of being unemployed and looking for a job. None of the participants that were interviewed for this study reported to have found their desired career. For the participants that were currently in the job market, it was clear from the interviews that the jobs they were holding were not sustaining them economically.

All but two participants reported of having children. Seven study participants reported of having children in Worcester Public Schools. Only Ahmad had left his children and his wife in his home country. All of the participants that had children in public schools at the time of the interview reported of having at least one goal related to their children educational advancement.

Determinants of goals

The first research question of this dissertation, regarding goals that learners' set while participating in ABE programs, helps to shed light on the determinants that influence ABE learners' goals. Themes that emerged from participants' interviews helped to construe a picture of learners' dreams and aspirations invested in the ABE educational journey.

Participants shared that their enrollment in ABE constituted a commitment to overcome *prior challenges and struggles*. A few sub-themes emerged here: ABE learners' primary aspirations often came as a result of overcoming *setbacks* in their life journey. *The need to communicate with the world* also emerged as a strong theme, particularly from immigrant' adult

learners interviews. Additionally, the need to overcoming *structural barriers,* such as family, job and institutionally-related barriers permeated participants' determinants of goals.

The second theme that emerged from the interviews had to do with the ability of learners to find and embrace *current opportunities.* Many interviewees reported that *individual* or *structural* opportunities, if seized, contributed to the betterment of life for self or own children. A particular example of structural opportunities that were mentioned had to do with the multitude of opportunities offered by the alternative and higher education systems in the state of Massachusetts.

The third and last theme that emerged from participants' interviews, illustrated the adult learners' desire for *participation, affirmation and emergence of new identities*. Sub-themes of *social activism, integration, and affirmation of self*, pointed to participants' vision and goals for the future.

These subthemes, illustrated with excerpts from participants' interviews, will be discussed in detail below. A detailed discussion of the conceptual framework and methods used to carry the descriptive analysis is narrated in Chapter 3: Methodology. **Table 12, 13** and **14** summarize the determinants' themes and prevalence.

Theme #1: Overcoming prior challenges and struggles

The theme of prior challenges and struggles constitutes the first thread that permeates the determinants of ABE learners' goals. Four sub-themes permeate the learners' determinants of goals: overcoming prior struggles, overcoming setbacks, overcoming structural barriers, and overcoming communication barriers. **Table 12** summarizes Theme #1 subthemes and prevalence.

ABE learners' goals: Determinants' Themes and Prevalence

Themes	Subthemes	Prevalence %	Research Participants
#1: Prior Challenges and Struggles			
#1a: Overcoming prior struggles	Overcome struggles with formal education	42%	Mario; Tung; Kimberly; Dottie; Sivash
	Overcome stigma of 'drop-out'	42%	Kimberly; Tung; Dottie; Mario; Sivash
	Cope with learning disabilities	17%	Kimberly; Tung
	Support education of children with special needs	17%	Carmen; Tung
#1b: Overcoming Setbacks	Restart education journey due to resettlement	25%	Nok; Ahmad; Mario
	With Drug Abuse	8%	Dottie
#1c: Overcoming structural barriers	With Incarceration and Probation	8%	Ahmad
	With Unemployment	17%	Ahmad; Sivash
	With Welfare-to-Work	8%	Sivash
#1d: Overcoming communication barriers	Overcome isolation	42%	Dina; Jaqueline; Tatiana; Ahmad; Mona
	Overcome shame	25%	Dina; Jaqueline; Ahmad
	Communicate with systems	33%	Jaqueline; Ahmad; Sivash; Carmen

Table 12: Theme #1 Overcoming Prior challenges and struggles

Subtheme #1a: Overcoming prior struggles

Many of the interviewed participants reported that struggles with their individual or their

children' educational trajectory shaped their goals. For study participants that *dropped out of*

high school, the determinants pointed to the need of seeking alternative growth from within self

or system wide.

In fact, over forty percent of the study's population reported of dropping out of high school

between 9th and 11th grades (see **Table 12**). For Mario, who dropped out of high school in the 9th

grade, and had to immigrate to US, barriers were multi-faceted:

> And, I liked school. But my family decided [for me] to come here. My father lived here
>
> before, you know. And he said, 'We are giving you and your brother, [a] better chance".
>
> But here, I [don't] speak much English. Universities, here, are good, but I [need to] speak
>
> [more] English.

As new immigrants, Mario and his brother needed to first work, to support their family's

sacrifice of relocation. Despite his inability to enroll into mainstream education, Mario decided

to take a great leap of faith and start with ESOL classes first, in an Adult Basic Education

program:

> [I] mean my chances are [bigger] here, with this program. Cause I can finish my ESOL
>
> class and transit to pre-HiSET and HiSET later. I have this dream of being first to [going]
>
> to college from my family.

Similar to Mario, Tung had to experience immigration in a very young age. Multifaceted

structural barriers, like poverty and resettlement, caused Tung to also enter the labor market at a

very young age. Tung explains that he had to drop out not because he did not like school but

because he was constrained to help his family overcome the economic instability:

I come from Vietnam, as an immigrant when I was a child. I was the oldest kid in my

family. I did not get much education because I had to help with the financials in my

family. Never had much education, really. In my family, [there were] too many kids, and

I did not go much to school… they did not have money to pay the rent. I quit high school,

because I had to go to work. I attended school until 10th grade.

For some other participants, like Kimberly, difficulties with fitting in, hampered her progress,

but did not make her stop looking at other alternatives of fulfilling her goal:

High school was very tough for me. I hated high school, I absolutely hated it. When I

turned 18 I decided to drop-out and that it would be better for me to get my HiSET. My

counselor at my school, told me about [this program].

In Kimberly's and Mario's cases, the determination to continue with the educational path,

coupled with additional structural opportunities along the road, made room for setting a solid

objective. It took a few months for Kimberly to make the simultaneous decisions of dropping out

and enrolling at an ABE local program. This was not the case for Dottie, whose trajectory with

education was far more challenging and with many more twists and turns. But time did not seem

to influence Dottie's return to her initial goal of completing the HiSET. In Dottie's words,

My parents were getting divorced and I think that was one the reasons why I dropped out.

I did not know that at that time. It cost my entire family to be destructive after that, with

the separation of my parents. And we moved from a little town to a bigger city,

Worcester, and the challenges were greater, and I started using drugs and I dropped out of

school. […] I dropped out in the 9th grade. And 30 years later I am back.

It appears that discussing Dottie's challenges related to drug abuse has helped her to strongly re-

affirm this particular goal. In fact, the timing of her 'come-back' have added more determination

to her dream. Dottie's goal is bigger than life; it encompasses a multitude of accomplishments across two generations:

> I have three children and my youngest one is in high school. He is a freshman, so I like to finish my high school before my youngest one finishes his. […]Well, now I have to see this through. […]I would like to be done with my education and I would like to see myself working already, so I can help him through college, when he is ready. That is my goal for now.

Students that come to ABE are not afraid to accept their struggle with school, resulting from individual reasons or because of *learning disabilities*. Seventeen percent of participants in the study reported of having coped with learning disabilities. This determinant is exhibited in words of re-emergence of their learner identity in a later stage, or as a form of renewal of their lifetime goal of getting through with education. Often structural barriers, like intergenerational poverty, immigration and resettlement are coupled with individual barriers, like learning disabilities that learners have experienced in different stages of their life. In the words of Kimberly,

> […] 'Cause I have like a slight learning disability and I learn slower than normal. And I was not getting the help I needed, and so I kept failing every class. I got depressed over it, and so…

For Kimberly, sharing her learning disability with her HiSET teacher becomes an outlet to progress at her chosen pace. The barrier of 'learning slower' transforms into an opportunity with her new teacher, who is also specialized in teaching learners with learning disabilities:

> As I shared with you my greatest obstacle was learning. I learn more now than I learned in high school. My teacher [mentions name] has the patience to sit with me and if I don't get it, she will explain it in a different way.

It seems that all of the learners interviewed in this study that have experienced some form of a learning disability, have not received much help from the formal education system. This in part explains the seeking of an alternative education outlet, with the hope that their goal of education will be fulfilled elsewhere. Tung, like Jennifer, discloses not only his barrier with learning, but goes further by elaborating the sense of isolation often adult learners get when they experience a learning disability:

> When I was in school I was diagnosed with dyslexia when I was 15 years old. I see things different from others. I was reading backwards. I trained myself to fix that and it worked. All these years and still learning and I learn it all by myself.

> […] No, I do not like to learn by myself. But [I did so] because people did not have experience to help me with my problem. It was tough for them to teach me, to get to the point where I would understand. Other people in class would understand what the teacher was teaching, but I had a learning problem, a learning disability. I had to teach myself all from the beginning.

Another strong determinant that surfaced during the learners' interview has to do with supporting education of children with special needs. Seventeen percent of learners participating in the study reported of supporting education of children with special needs. Carmen's case illustrates at best how intergenerational literacy entangles often with the need the mother has to overcome stronger barriers of raising children with special needs. Parallel to Carmen's goal of equipping herself with enough determination to get to her goal of being fully integrated in the society, one experiences Carmen's struggle with the system of formal education and public health that is not much of help. To her as a mother, and to her two children, the struggle becomes the fight of their life.

The doctor say your son would never speak in his life. He speaks now, he is the best

student in art. He has autism but he has extreme abilities, he is highly functional. In the

regular school, I am fighting all the time with the system. I put myself through his school

and I tell [the doctor] and the teachers that he can do it.

[…] I think education in this country is based on an old system. The old system is not

changing.

Carmen identifies this struggle in the form of a need to have time for herself, and for her

learning. The reiteration of her 'need to study' re-emerges after what she considers 'a period of

long stops', whereby her sense of responsibility to raise and strengthen her two kids overcame

her sense of self:

I have two children. Both of my kids have autism. I come to school but sometime I have

to stop. You know they get sick, they have very different [difficulties]… When my

youngest one was six, I needed to go to his school. I had to wait for him, I wasn't very

sure how he would do and I would wait. [I] would wait all day in school. Not an easy life

for me, and it messed with my schooling.

Despite her full attention with her kids' conditions, she finds courage to express the need she has

to refocus, and reconsider that both education of her kids and of herself, could have an immense

potential of supporting other parents of autistic children:

[Now] they need less of their mom. Now I want to learn more English…I have

[completed] higher education in my country. In my country I am a teacher, with a masters

in child psychology. And now that I am here, I want to study, but I need my English.

With my situation with my kids, I don't have time to study, and I need more time to

study. When I am at home, I close my books and everything and I cannot read, I cannot

pay attention. But this year my goal is learning English and going to college.

Despite individual struggles with formal education, participants interviewed for this study seem

to re-emerge with a sense of need to educate themselves and educate others on their struggles,

when they get enrolled in Adult Basic Education. Challenges of adult learners become

opportunities to conquer bigger and greater battles, as will see in detail in the following sections.

Whether if they loved or not their prior education, or started with a deficit caused by the formal

education system' inability to foster and nurture their individualities, ABE adult learners seem to

share into this capacity to see education through and to find and embrace alternative models of

education. Need of furthering their education emerges strongly as a fundamental value, despite

the numerous stops adult learners need to take. Determination to overpass these challenges

becomes then a vehicle of expression of their dreams and aspirations.

Subtheme #1b: Overcoming setbacks

Aside from the above illustrated struggles with formal education, field research revealed

the theme of '*setbacks*' as the next determinant that influences learners' goals (see **Table 12**,

subtheme #1b). Setbacks are defined by this research as perceived backward steps in the life of

an adult learner caused by sudden or prolonged structural or individual barriers. As they

overcome these setbacks, adult learners exhibit a strong sense of motivation that is expressed in

the form of the re-emergence of sense of self, of regaining control of their life situation and of

desiring to achieve a greater good. Some setbacks, as illustrated below, involve particular sectors

of the federal and state system, like law enforcement or welfare-to-work services, to impose

obligatory enrollment in ABE classes for some of the adult learners.

Twenty-five percent of participants reported of having to restart their education due to resettlement. Nok, a Laotian immigrant, had to re-start her education journey from scratch when she decided to marry overseas. Although she completed high school and first year of college in Laos, she unfortunately was not able to receive her transcripts. Her school was destroyed because of war in her home country and school administrators were also not able to assist her with the local archives. She explained she had to start with pre-GED and only when she passed the Massachusetts Adult Proficiency Test (MAPT), she was able to enroll in a HiSET class:

> Oh, yes, I like learning. In Laos I finished my high school and to be honest I finished one year of college, but I do not have the diploma, because of war. And I go back there and nothing [is] the same. I [went] there three times, and I looked for the place [means the school]. But it is not the same, people have changed. If I would have had a transcript of my high school diploma, I would not be stuck here.

Of a different nature, yet more of a prolonged setback, was Dottie's drug abuse issue. As discussed in the previous paragraph Dottie had long recouped her sense of come-back. Her struggle with substance abuse had been transformed into a powerful testimony of perseverance and consideration to help others. Although unemployed, Dottie had dedicated her re-emerging self to volunteering in a nearby substance abuse peer recovery center,

> You know that we have a heroin crisis in America. I started volunteering down here [mentions the name of the substance abuse center] which is a peer recovery group for addicts that come in [and] that are trying to recover from the addiction of drugs. One of the things that I hope to be doing is tell people of my experience. You can leave drugs to the side 'cause I was able to do that.

Outreach, there is a lot of need for a lot of things. A lot of resources are needed in the community. But for me, I will just stick to that. I will just stick to that [laughs].

Subtheme #1c: Overcoming structural barriers

Sudden incarceration and a consecutive six month probation shocked the life of Ahmad, one of the adult learners participating in this study. Ahmad had not long ago entered the country as a political asylee from Chad, when a sudden conflict in his public assistance housing caused Ahmad to be involved and consecutively injured. The following episode of incarceration and a consecutive six month probation caused Ahmad's educational journey to be on hold,

> Discrimination. Misunderstanding. [O]f what the other party [said]. In class we learn [some] English; in life, in situations like in the court, in front of the law, during real life scenarios, we sometimes get in situations that entail misunderstandings. The negativity shouldn't have happened.
>
> In court I was innocent. The court considered me as the victim. Consequences of not understanding the language, could be big, like defending yourself against injustices. I will continue to live. This made me walk back in life, lowered my self-esteem, my definition of life was shattered. I lost many months from school time.

As part of his six month probation, Ahmad was part of a program called 'enhanced intensive supervision' which required Ahmad, among other things, to attend ABE classes. Services like HiSET classes, ABE, or ESOL are often tied with enhanced intensive supervision to address offenders' need but also as an effort to reduce recidivism.

Nevertheless, Ahmad finds *hope* in his goal, which despite a setback, continues to drive his entire life journey.

In February I was in jail for one month, than I had my probation. The system is very

difficult; little by little I do integrate. I am starting to enter the social life. I have hope

now. I have hope I study three years, after that I see my English will get better. I will

[take a] test, and go to university. I hope to study international development.

Structural barrier in themselves, unemployment and receipience of welfare also played the role

of strong determinants for enrollment in ABE. Seventeen percent of participants reported of

dealing with such structural barriers. In some instances, like in Sivash's case, his initiation came

from the Workforce Training and Career Center. Sivash, an Afghani immigrant, had been in

welfare for a while, when ESOL was added to his Welfare-to-Work plan of activities:

And the Employment Counselor at the Workforce Training Center downtown referred me

here. [At] first I was assessed by [mentions name of the facilitator of the center] and [then

placed at the] ESOL. I need to learn the language…

Sivash discloses that his Employment Counselor that manages his case with Welfare-to-Work

Services is not supportive of Sivash's goal of building upon his expertise with agriculture. She

insists Sivash needs to attend workplace training in order to acquire new workplace skills.

My experience in Afghanistan [is in] agriculture. I need to find [a way] in agriculture

here. Employment Counselor [is] not happy; find [a] new job, she says.

Considered more as provider-shaped determinants, rather than personal goals per se, Welfare-to-

Work and probation re-integration services often initiate 'induced goals' for ABE adult learners

participating in Adult Basic Education services. Although participants interviewed in this study

fully embraced their participation in ABE, the matter of the fact is that Sivash's participation or

Ahmad's return in ESOL classes are time-bounded and closely monitored by agreements

between the respective authorities. They are also closely tied to structural expectations and

outcomes that not necessarily coincide with Ahmad's plan of studying international development or Sivash's dream of using his prior experience in agriculture.

Subtheme #1d: Overcoming communication barriers

Communication seems to be one of the most emphasized determinants of ABE learners' goals. Forty-two percent of the study participants revealed that they are in ABE classes for establishing or improving communication in English, with a hope to overcome isolation. All of the participants whose determinant for setting a goal was overcoming communication barriers, were of immigrant origin. Three of the participants, Tatiana, Jaqueline and Mona were enrolled in the Family Literacy class, while Ahmad and Dina were in an ESOL class.

Dina, for instance had decided to enroll in ABE only for establishing communication. She had come to the country in a relatively old age, leaving behind a well-established career in her country of origin, Albania. Her desire to participate in Adult Basic Education and more particularly in ESOL came as a result of her inability to communicate with the world around her:

> I am fifty five now; time for me to go to school and start a new career is over. I had a great career in Albania and I think it is too late here to go to school and become a civil engineer again, isn't it (jokes)… But I do like to communicate. See… communication is like a window for an immigrant, and for as long as this window remains closed, you cannot see the world, experience the greatness, and the warmth of the world…

Dina feels lost without being able to communicate in English; the sense of isolation and fear of speaking in a broken English, is reflected either in her need she have to fluently converse with colleagues at work or with American fellows around town. She explains,

I feel lost without being able to talk to my colleagues… and don't take me wrong… I talk to my supervisor… I understand my supervisor… but that is where it ends. The stigma of not being able to talk… just takes away even these two good words that I think I know… Or I want to catch the news in TV… well I understand some stuff, but then I need to get the dictionary with me, to catch the meaning of the whole phrase. What did he say, what did it mean – these are questions that concern me every day.

Of a similar nature is also the barrier Tatiana experiences. Although Russian language, her mother tongue, seems to help her at first with finding and maintaining a job, Tatiana is unsatisfied with her inability to construe a new identity, outside of her comfort zone:

Because my problem is English. I am Russian; I speak Russian; all my friends are Russian, I work with Russians, so where am I going to practice?

First I feel like I need to speak more to American fellows. I understand immigrants' English very well, but I have a big difficulty to speak to American people, they speak very fast and cut words.

She is hopeful that participation in ESOL classes will improve her communication and socialization skills.

If I were to speak good English, I would change my job. Not that I don't like my job, but because I want to learn to live in America, without being always dependent on me being Russian.

In her call for a better communication, we see a hidden need of immigrant learners to get beyond their comfort zone and challenge the status-quo of their existence. Their call for better communication is also a call for participation in the society; a call for inclusion; a call for finding some sense of direction from her teacher and the community she is aspiring to belong.

Communication is a bridge to accomplishing greater goals sometime. With Jaqueline, a young mother of three from Ghana, communication is the barrier to full participation into her children education.

> Kids go forward, they learn. If I don't understand anything, how am I going to be able to help my kids? I don't want to stay back.

Just like with Tatiana, Jaqueline does not want to accept her status-quo of not being able to communicate in English. Her decision to come to ABE classes becomes a powerful step into breaking this barrier and fighting 'to not stay like this', to institute change for herself and for her three girls,

> Because my kids [help], and if you don't go to school, you stay like this [refers to her inability to speak and read and write]. I don't want to stay like this, do you understand?

As it was established earlier with the case of Ahmad, his struggle to fluently communicate in English influenced heavily in his incarceration. When he is questioned of the roots of his problems and of putting his experience in a larger prospective, Ahmad becomes critical of the refugee adjustment and resettlement services in US, who do support refugees only for the first six months of their arrival. He voices his call for a systematic change, for a change in the mentality of the system, who needs to see beyond legislative and funding requirements. Ahmad calls for more attention from the system toward equipping refugees with additional steps in their long and painful resettlement journey.

> The system of organizations for refugee adjustments, like Catholic Charities, Lutheran Services, or World Relief [is] not that responsible for someone who has newly immigrated into this country. If somebody who comes here, don't know how to speak English, that is a big problem. How does a refugee or an immigrant will know where the

hospital, or the immigration office, or deal with the law, when they don't know any word

in English? The social life in US could be easy for someone who knows the system, but

for someone who does not, it could be a big problem.

As these four cases illustrated, adult learners that participate in ABE struggle to establish

communication with the environment that surrounds them. The immigrant adult learners that

were interviewed in this study, disclosed that communication becomes a barrier since when they

arrive in country, and persists to stay a barrier for all the years they are not offered the necessary

resources to deal with it. As illustrated from interviews, participants that did experience a barrier

in communication varied in terms of length of stay in US. In some of the cases,

miscommunication contributed to unnecessary misunderstandings, which in turn escalated

conflict and problems with the law. In other cases, isolation and fear of misunderstanding

produced stigma, humiliation and under-representation. Interviewees also disclosed the need they

have from the public agencies and the system of adult education to take these factors into

account, and not dismiss them as minimal barriers.

Theme #2: Opportunities for growth

In expressing their goals, participants in this study emphasized another important group

of determinants, defined as 'opportunities for growth'. These perceived opportunities can be

classified across these three dimensions:

- Opportunities steaming from prior experiences or prior strengths, skills or talents

- Opportunities steaming from ABE local provider determinants

- Opportunities steaming from support from community; perceived advantages of

   higher education system; and, building upon personal ties

Table 13 summarizes Theme #2 sub-themes and prevalence.

ABE learners' goals: Determinants' Themes and Prevalence

Table 13: Theme #2 Opportunities for Growth

Themes	Sub-themes	Prevalence %	Research Participants
#2: Opportunities for Growth			
#2a: Building opportunities from prior strengths, skills or talents	Enhancement of prior experiences	25%	Kimberly; Tung; Nok
	Enhancement of prior skills	33%	Tung; Nok; Sivash; Carmen
	The necessity for the learners intellectual inventory to come to fruition	33%	Sivash; Ahmad; Carmen; Mona
	Opportunities from inner talents that had become otherwise shut from oppression	17%	Mona; Sivash
	Opportunities to grow in philanthropic commitments or social activism	25%	Nok; Ahmad; Carmen
#2b: Opportunities steaming from ABE local programs	Availability, accessibility and affordability of ABE services	100%	All participants
	Opportunity to construe a relationship with public schools	33%	Carmen; Jacqueline; Mona; Tung
	Support from ABE faculty and service administrators	42%	Carmen; Kimberly; Sivash; Ahmad; Dina

Themes	Sub-themes	Prevalence %	Research Participants
#2c: Systemic and community incentives	Opportunities steaming from community support	17%	Ahmad; Nok
	Perceived advantages of higher education	33%	Mario; Ahmad; Carmen; Kimberly
	Development of the health sector in Worcester area	33%	Jaqueline; Kimberly; Dottie; Nok
	Career enhancement	58%	Tung; Nok; Ahmad; Mona; Jaqueline; Dottie; Tatiana; Sivash

Table 13: Theme #2 Opportunities for Growth, continued

Subtheme #2a: Building upon opportunities from prior experiences

Twenty five percent of the participants interviewed for this study, aspire to accomplish

goals that entail enhancement of prior experiences. Another thirty three percent of participants

aspire to grow upon prior skills they have acquired. Some of these determinants transcend from

earlier childhood experiences; others get shaped and strengthen in the ongoing process of

personality and character formation. In contrast, others reflect the necessity of the learners'

intellectual inventory to be considered complete and come to fruition. Additionally, inner talents

that could have been temporarily paralyzed or had otherwise been shut from oppression, seek to

find outlets in the promised American Dream of prosperity, self-fulfillment and exercise of all

the liberties of expression.

Kimberly's growth is vetted in her early childhood dream of being a nurse. Her shy nature

blossoms when she speaks how this dream of 'helping others' had been growing into her, and

when she shares her observance and admiration for the field she aspires to belong to:

Since when I was a girl […]. I don't know; there is something about it. Just about helping people, and especially working with children. I love children. I have been a patient in the hospital, and when I am in there, I observe the nurses and the doctors. I am amazed by the dedication and the patience of most providers I had the chance to observe.

She considers enrollment in secondary education as an opportunity to grow her dream in practical terms. She discloses that she had lost confidence of growing and nurturing the passion of nursing when she was attending high school. Kimberly also believes that investments in the adult basic education system to building transition programs to college, could be beneficial to the fulfillment of her dream:

[Community college] has a good school for nursing. I hope there are transition programs from this center to [community college]. I talked to people who went to school there, and they loved their exposure to education. After school, I want to get a nursing job. Having a diploma in nursing – sky is the limit!

Carmen also trusts on transitioning to a community college, once she gains mastery and fluency of English language. She wants to build her intellectual inventory with a Master's in social work, to support insomuch in the struggle of young mothers that are raising kids in the autistic spectrum disorder:

I want to study social work. I know now how to help the parents of children with special needs and I want to contribute with my knowledge. I don't think I need a lot of courses, since I have my master's degree. […] I would like to go to [community college] and take some English courses. [I] don't need additional schooling to get a profession, if you have enough experience, the only thing you need is a license.

Aware of some of the struggles she will have to face when transitioning to college in US, she discloses that she have put some thought on a strategy of how to be successful in this new chapter of her educational journey. Strength of some of adult learners interviewed for this study encompass values of a critical intelligence where potential and dedication are intertwined with passion and a sense of a sublime sacrifice. In Carmen's words,

> I loved education. In Ecuador I worked ten years as a 1st grade teacher. I was studying for my masters in psychology while I was teaching. But I am single, as you can see I have responsibility for everything and now is different you see. Before my family was around me and very supportive of my education; now I am alone here, and I have to go frequently in the hospital with my kids. I have to go frequently to Boston, with trains and buses. It is very different from when I was going through school in Ecuador…

Ahmad and Sivash aspire also to build upon their prior experiences in their native countries. Ahmad gets emotional and proud when he shares his educational accomplishments from his exposure in Chad and Central Africa:

> After finishing my course in accounting, I worked in a big company, in my country, for two years. In Chad I worked as an assistant because it is very different from US. There I did financial accounting, I have my papers at home. After two years, the political system of my country [was] not good. As a result, I got out as a political refugee to the Republic of Central Africa, and I worked there as well, for the French Multi Cultural Centre, assisting with conferences and other activities. As a learner, I like to read a lot, I enjoy autodidactic learning.

Sivash's passion of agriculture grows despite his sudden immigration to US and his inability to continue life as before. He is passionate of what he left back, but also what he carried with him

and of what can be of use from his intellectual inventory into his new community. He speaks so fondly of his winter vegetable garden that he has been given an opportunity to grow and harvest in the adult learning center territory. As seen in the previous paragraphs, he is not defeated, despite the Welfare-to-Work system's intention of differing Sivash's goal and convincing him to embrace another trade or skill.

Ahmad's desire to benefit from more learning and Sivash's love of agriculture exhibit a sense of absence of geographic or time boundaries. Despite their individual temporary 'setbacks', Sivash and Ahmad consider the growth of their intellectual abilities as a contribution to a world with no frontiers, no borders. In the words of Ahmad,

> If I complete my learning, I would transfer [to] a university to pursue a bachelor or a master in international development. Hopefully when I finish my university I hope to get a job in an international organization and possibly work with human rights. In Africa I have a certificate from human rights from United Nations Development Program. My long term goals are to hopefully find a job with UNDP in Africa. I would rather work in my country, because it has a bad situation with development. Lots of problems exist in Chad right now, in agriculture, roads, education, communication, etc. Citizens in my country do not have basic rights.

Of another nature is Mona's desire to grow exposure to her inborn talent. A Syrian immigrant, Mona, carried her passion for drawing and continued to dream big, despite being hurt from displacement, terror, oppression and loss of the community of artists she had once been part when in Syria. The renowned Syrian artists' sole aim is to join an art community at her new 'home'.

And I study English now to find good relations with other people who work with art. I have not been able to open an exhibition here yet. No, I don't need money to exhibit my work. But [the artist] needs good relations with the world of art, with galleries, with people who understand art.

Last by not least is Nok's desire to grow in her philanthropic commitment to helping people in need. Nok's determinant of altruism and of betterment of life of others transpires through different geographies, from her international involvement of giving food donations to people in need, in her local involvement of assisting with interpretation around the Asian community:

Well, I wish I could help them learn, but first they need food to live. So many poor countries in the world, so many poor people need food. And I keep praying for them to have food in the table, a place to live and education.

We collect shoes and clothes with some other Japanese friends and send them to poor countries. [And then] my husband and I buy rice, when we go to Vietnam. We get a truck and cook the rice and feed to the poor. We try to help as much as we can. We cannot help everybody, but we try.

[…] You know, in the TV, they have [this program], they call it 'Food for Poor'. There are seventeen countries where "Food for Poor' delivers aid. I like to help them, and I help a little.

[…] To help people. In the summer, a lot of people came from Laos and Vietnam. They speak Laotian and Vietnamese, but they don't speak English. If I can get the HiSET, I can [interpret for] them.

These are but some illustrations of how determinants of growth play a role in shaping ABE adult learner goals. As it will be discussed under theme #3, this quest to grow in talent or to further own education is the base for emergence of other identities in adult learners.

Subtheme #2b: Opportunities steaming from ABE local programs

In considering ABE program-oriented determinants, this study takes into account the exposure of learners to adult basic education. All of the adult learners interviewed for this study value a group of determinants that have to do with availability, affordability and accessibility of such services. Through interviews, adult learners also express their appreciation for the support of those faculty, administrators and counselors who are truly engaged with their daily teaching and assistance toward meeting their goals.

The existence of ABE classes is compared often with the initial step in the progress toward meeting their goals. Jaqueline and Carmen appreciate the availability of the Family Literacy track which is transforming their understanding on public school, assisting with creating a relationship of adult learners with the school system and also contributing to building their own literacy skills. In the words of Carmen,

> Good teachers matter. You know how many teachers I know. But none like my teacher.
> [You] have the experience related with teaching the grade level. The way how you teach
> our children at grade level, you accustom the program to us. If everybody teaches like
> you, everybody is good – adults grow.

Carmen and Kimberly's interviews are an illustration that passionate and committed faculty truly drives success and determination into their learners. Despite multifaceted barriers, Carmen and Kimberly make a testimony for those teachers whose compassion, commitment,

creativity and innovation become part of their individual repertoire and sole mission to assist learner grow. Carmen expresses all her gratitude in this way,

What I found [is] a good, good teacher. You know why? She knows how [to] help us; she knows writing. She is the little ones [kids] teacher [the instructor taught ESOL for Pre-K to 6th, for many years]. This is the experience she has and she can help us. She starts new directions, she knows everything – what she makes for little ones, she makes it for us. You start writing well, speak very good… I went to many places, I went to [mentions name of community college], [mentions name of another community college], but now this year I am starting to learn. Nothing over there, now for the first time I am learning here…

ABE program-oriented determinants also affect positively those adult learners whose participation is required, like Sivash and Ahmad. Other students, like Dottie, Jacqueline and Kimberly appreciate the extensions tracks like the new addition of the Health ESOL that the center has currently adopted.

However, adult learners also distinguish gaps and have suggestions toward improving some other ABE program-oriented determinants that have to do with the clarity in the provision of next steps; of streamlining services and curriculum among different local providers; of supporting learners with transitioning path to career or educational goals; and of providing feedback on the progress they have achieved with their personal goals.

In particular Tung suggests for the system to have a clear pathway toward meeting learners' goals. He recalls his experience in high school with his learning disability, and gives practical recommendations as to why clarity in the pathway and alignment of the short terms goals could contribute to a more systematic approach into goal achievement,

See, you can talk to anybody. And they lend you an ear, but that's about it. If the counselor who is trying to get information to help you out, is not sitting there to truly help you, I can go about to every person and I can have them to hear my whining and complaining all day long. If you are a counselor act like one! Come with expertise to not only hear the problem but find ways to solve the problem. There is one, two, three goals here; we have met one, let's see how we can meet two and three. Here are the resources to meet two and three, and let's put a date around when we will see these aligned.

Carmen touches also upon the very crucial debate the field of Adult Education is going through of streamlining curriculum across local ABE providers. She expresses her frustration that after fourteen years of trying, she has found a place where ultimately her learning is taking priority:

When I came to this country I went to [college]. At that time I paid $1,300 per semester…Cheap at that time but now is almost $4,000 per semester. To my dismay, although I paid a lot of money, I did understand nothing. I had to buy piles of book, and I did understand nothing. I decided to drop out of school, and I became scared that I would not make it. It took me a while to get to my feet again. This time I went to [another college], at [institute]. I went over there, I think for two years. I did not learn there either. The teachers [were] very young and they would ask us to tell what we wanted to study. They would ask – tell me what you want to study…

With the privatization of some of ABE services, adult learners have to also face paying for tuition and fees of their instructions. This really adds up to the unsurmountable challenges that ABE learners face in order for them to succeed in meeting their goals. Given that these learners are the working poor, it will be virtually impossible if the system of Adult Basic Education in

Massachusetts decides to privatize all the other adult education local programs that so far have provided cost-free services.

Subtheme #2c: Systemic and community incentives

Field research also revealed perceived broader systemic opportunities as determinants that influence learners' goals. These systemic opportunities arise partly as a result of the opportunity for growth learners see with a strong community college education system in the state of Massachusetts in general and in the local area in particular. Some other opportunities were related to the support learners seek within their own community. Market incentives are also playing the role of determinants, in particular with figuring out career or intergenerational educational pathways.

A particular illustration of these opportunities was exhibited in the goals that Ahmad shared with the researcher. When asked if he has personal connections or ties that will assist with meeting his goal, Ahmad responded,

> I have social relations with a Sudanese friend who teaches at a [University]. He tells me, 'Ahmad - go on to study more English for two or three years; [and] after that, if you have [mastered the language] I will help you to transfer to the [University].

Thirty three percent of participants interviewed for this study admitted that their path to their ultimate goal passes through college. Out of this group, none of the participants had intentions of just completing college: Kimberly and Mario had career plans once they completed their higher education in US, while Ahmad wanted to return to his country of origin, to support with the

political and economic transition of his country. Carmen expressed a desire to continue beyond

having a college degree, with the hope that with a Master's in social work, she will not only

complement her academic experience, but also be able to support young mothers raising kids

with special needs. Except for Ahmad, all learners that had higher education goals admitted to

trusting a community college with furthering their education. Age did not play a role and learners

that had higher education goals ranged from 18 to 48 years old.

Market incentives also played a role in some of the goals that were expressed from

learners participating in this study. The strengthening of the health sector in and the around the

greater Worcester area was directly influencing in the goals of an ever growing number of ABE

learners. Thirty-three percent of learners interviewed for this study had a goal of attending

available training with the hope of joining the medical workforce in the future. Except of

Jaqueline, all the other ABE learners were attending a HiSET class. Nok, for example, wanted to

use her prior experience of translation freelance, to land a position as a medical interpreter at the

University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester. Specific dreams were also disclosed

by Jaqueline and Dottie who expressed the goal of embracing the dental hygienist career as soon

as they had completed their ABE journey. In contrast, the youngest of all, Kimberly, wanted to

follow her dream of becoming a nurse.

Other market incentives also played as interim determinants for some other participants.

Tung was in fact the only participant that by the end of this study had two of his primary short

term goals accomplished, that of passing the HiSET exam and of registering for an

apprenticeship certificate as an appraisal writer for insurance companies. For Tung, these two

accomplishments have to do with his determination and his fundamental goal of taking care of

the youngest of his four children, a nine year old who like Tung, displays early problems with dyslexia:

> If I get my HiSET, I will take another class for the insurance company, writing appraisals for insurance companies. [The training lasts] about three months. And after that you have to take the board exam. The school is here in Worcester. If I become an appraiser that will help me financially, but also give me flexible time […]. That would give me time to be with my nine years old, to take care of his educational needs.

Theme #3: Participation, affirmation and emergence of new identities

The field research for the descriptive phase of the study concludes by asserting the themes of participation, affirmation and emergence of new identities of adult learners who set goals. Sub-themes of *affirmation of self*, *social activism, and integration* pointed to participants' vision and goals for the future. **Table 14** summarizes Theme #3 sub-themes and prevalence.

ABE learners' goals: Determinants' Themes and Prevalence

Themes	Subthemes	Prevalence %	Research Participants
#3: Participation, Affirmation and Emergence of New Identities			
#3a: Affirmation of self	Conceptualization of the new acquired identity	33%	Tung; Mario; Dottie; Tatiana
#3b: Social activism	Embrace re-emergence and transform the world around	33%	Nok; Ahmad; Dottie; Mona
#3c: Integration	Ownership of learners' voice and agency	33%	Tatiana; Dina; Ahmad; Jaqueline

Table 14: Theme #3 Participation, Affirmation and Emergence of New Identities

Sub-theme #3a: Affirmation of self

Among other examples comes the case of Mario, a young student who aspires to be a first generation college student. Mario's ABE journey started from an English as a Secondary Language (ESOL) track but in his expectancy model, it translated as the accomplishment of the first step toward the realization of his goal. Despite the time and the multitude of steps that Mario will have to take until college, his participation in ABE classes and the *affirmation* of his goal constituted a big leap toward the conceptualization of his new acquired identity. It is in the cultivation of this very moment, when dreams and aspirations of learners take life and become breathable projects, that policies need to generate practical solutions in terms of clear steps to reaching the final goal, but also of designing a roadmap that involves continuous systematic support of all the necessary mechanisms and actors needed to make his dream a reality.

It is in Tung's determination to goal fulfillment that this research finds the necessary

explanatory power that the goals learners set will eventually come to fruition. This explanatory

power is important and helps on contradicting the thesis that personal goals like the ones that

were cultivated and collected during this research are fluid, not specific and impossible to bring

fruition (Auerbach, 1991; Gabb, 2001; Reyes, 2001; Kelly, 2001). For as much as one can testify

from Tung's determination, it is quite clear that determinants like aspiration, embracing of

perceived opportunities and clarity in crafting, – are the ingredients in the formula of two of

Tung's short term goals' fulfillment,

> […]Hopefully by the end of this school year. Hopefully by the end of July, I will
>
> complete the HiSET. I am not a patient man; I set myself something to do, I would like to
>
> see it finished. I am not going to stop until is done.

Subtheme #3b: Social activism

With participation and fulfillment of goals in the future, some other learners enrolled in this

study saw themselves in a transformational curve. *Social activism* emerged as a determinant in

Nok, Ahmad, Dottie's and Mona's goals. Their goals transpired not only a sense of affirmation

of self, but of how they saw themselves as change actors. The empowerment they got through the

acquisition of learner's identity, coupled with their perceived opportunities, played a powerful

role not only in overcoming current barriers and obstacles, but also in expressing a sense of

expectancy in the role they will assume in the future. Particular examples of social activism for

example, transpire in Ahmad's dream of supporting his native country through transition and

social restructuring. In Ahmad's case one finds a particular activism that is borne from the desire

to take what is best from the immigration experience and transfer it as a human investment for betterment of the society as a whole.

Nok's social activism, similar to Ahmad's, created room for experiencing the belonging of the learner to both worlds, where Nok assumes the identity of the 'tie' between the developed and the undeveloped world; the empowerment with her philanthropic mission encompassed a variety of constructs and a desire to stretch herself beyond practical terms.

> I always wanted [to] help people. Wherever I go, I like to help people. I wished I could help poor people. If I have food, I'd like to share. Now I go to Vietnam or Laos. I am not rich, but I have little money left, and I like to help people. Whenever I go to a poor country, I wish [exhales] I helped them all. […]

Dottie's social activism is more concentrated on her ability to transcend her past experience of substance abuse into the new reality of her re-emergence and her transformation. Dottie's legacy, whereby the sense of self gets absorbed by the testimony she has to share with people she wants to help, is remarkable:

> It is amazing that if we see the reason behind all of what we do, and stick to that, we will be able to come through. And if the reason is for me to re-emerge strong and just share my experience with others, let that be, because that is the reason.

A subtype of social activism is exhibited through some of the goals expressed in support of the betterment of the generations to come. Intergenerational transformation through intergenerational literacy is one of the particular examples that was elaborated in detail with goals set by Tung, Carmen and Jaqueline. The sublime sacrifice of raising a family while on a journey for self-

affirmation transpires through these unifying acts that show accordance in some social values that adult learners fundamentally embrace.

Subtheme #3c: Integration

In a quest for *integration* are thirty-three percent of the learners that were interviewed for this study. Tatiana, for example, asks through her goal for a chance to become who she once aspired to, when she started her immigration journey. In Tatiana's words,

> [I am here] because I want to learn to live in America, without being always dependent on me being Russian.

Overcoming struggles with communication was metaphorically compared to "an open window to see the world". This 'opened window' for Dina meant ability to fully participate in her place of work and in the community where she resided. For Tatiana, it meant fulfillment of the 'American Dream' of inclusion and integration; for Ahmad, hope to start anew, and for Jaqueline commitment to her aspiration for intergenerational literacy.

In the simplicity of their statements is buried an agenda of inclusion, through recognition of potential, embracement of diversity and extension of possibility. Tatiana's call for inclusion and Dina's concern for greater opportunities of integration in the American society mirror at best the adult learners' voices, which despite being in different milestones of their education journey, or facing multifaceted barriers toward self-fulfillment, look positively toward a future where they would like to re-emerge integrated.

Were learners' goals met one year after participation?

In responding to the first question of this research, twelve adult learners participating in ABE classes were interviewed at length about the goals they set during the process of learning, the determinants that influenced such goals and whether these goals were met one year after participation. Learners' goals were analyzed at depth and the findings on the influencing determinants were revealed at length in the descriptive phase of this study.

This study is also charged with giving an answer to the question of whether learners' goals were met one year after participation. The purpose of this inquiry has to do with the yearly requirement imposed by the federal and state goal setting policy, charging local program not only on setting but also meeting learners' goals on a yearly basis.

This study concludes that the majority of learners' goals that were shared during this study were not met one year after participation. **Table 15** calculates median and ranges of estimates shared by learners of meeting their self-defined goals. The interviews with the twelve adult learners recruited from three of the ABE educational tracks reveals that learners come to ABE with crafted goals. As illustrated at length above, these goals are specific, but they are configured with a different metric than the one the state and federal government has imposed on local ABE programs.

Learners' time estimates of meeting goals

Table 15: Time estimates of meeting goals

Pseudonym	Level of Instruction	Goals expressed during the interview	Expressed estimates of meeting goals (In Years)	Target of Goal Completion (In Years)
Nok	HiSET	-Pass HiSET -Upon passing HiSET, enroll and complete the medical interpreter training -Find a job in the medical field as an interpreter	1 2 1	4
Tung	HiSET	-Pass HiSET -Upon passing the test, enroll and complete the insurance appraisal trade training -With the flexibility provided by new trade, provide additional support to young child enrolled in public school	1 1 1	3
Kimberly	HiSET	-Upon dropout from high school, enroll in ABE -Pass HiSET -Upon passing the test, transition to college (nursing)	0 2 1	3
Dottie	HiSET	-Regain focus on education -Graduate with HiSET on or before son graduates from high-school -Attend training to become a dental hygienist	0 1 2	3
Mario	ESOL	-When completing ESOL, attend HiSET class -Become a first generation college student	3 1	4
Dina	ESOL	-Improve communication -Overcome isolation from inability to communicate -Fully integrate in the society	1 1 2	4
Sivash	ESOL	-Improve communication -Pursue career in agriculture	1 1	2
Ahmad	ESOL	-Integrate after incarceration -Improve language skills -Enroll in higher education -Pursue MA in International Development -Work for United Nations Development Program	1 2 1 2 1	7
Carmen	Family Literacy	-Regain focus of education - Enroll in higher education to pursue a	0 1	3

Pseudonym	Level of Instruction	Goals expressed during the interview	Expressed estimates of meeting goals (In Years)	Target of Goal Completion (In Years)
		Masters' in Special Education - Fully support the education of her two kids	2	
Jaqueline	Family Literacy	-Improve language skills -Attend dental hygienist training -Get fully involved with schooling and education of her three kids	1 2 1	4
Mona	Family Literacy	-Improve language skills, with the hope to find an art community that will support her fine artistry	3	3
Tatiana	Family Literacy	-Improve communication skills -Fully integrate in the American society	1 3	4
Median (range)				3.6 years (2-7 years)

Table 15: Time estimates of meeting goals, continued

With a median of at least *three years* to goal fruition (median 3.6 years; range varies from a minimum of two years to a maximum of seven years) the time-required element embedded in the SMARTT Goat Setting Policy is not achieved either. These goals, as demonstrated during the analysis, are asymmetrical in terms of cohort rates of accomplishment. Goals shared by learners could be attainable if a series of institutions with commitment and specific supportive mechanisms are involved. As demonstrated through learners' interviews, ABE as a sector could not be solely deemed accountable for the fulfilment of learners' goals.

One easily sees that employability and career enhancement are but long term goals sought by adult learners. Fifty eight percent of the participants enrolled in this study consider career enhancement as part of their goal (see **Table 13**, Sub-theme 2c). Based on the study's participants expressed estimates, a projection as to when these learners will re-enter the labor

market reveals that it will be *at least in a period of two to seven years after participation in Adult Basic Education* (see **Table 15**: Target Goal of Completion in Years).

The majority of learners who had expressed employability and career enhancement goals during the interviews, explained that they see a career only after the fulfillment of a prior goal, such as educational achievement. This study critiques the confinement imposed by the current ABE learner goal setting policy, in that it just defies the very nature of the learners' goal, which is in fact open but specific, measurable but not within a certain solid timeframe, mutable as the learner grows, and timed within its own rhythm and tone.

From the documentary analysis, this study also concludes that participants' goals are unfortunately not the ones that the policy on goal setting is following; as seen from **Table 16**, SMART goals teachers and counselors have set together with learners in the beginning or during the academic year, are in the majority of the cases, of a different nature and content. Only 4 goals (or 12% of all goals expressed) are the same between program-defined goals and self-defined goals: they are all expressed by HiSET learners and they all have to do with the ABE learners' objective of passing the HiSET exam. Otherwise, there is an evident difference between the program-defined goals met versus the self-defined goals that were collected as part of this study. While the documentary analysis revealed that as many as 74% of program-defined goals were reported to have been met during the academic year (24 out of a total of 31 set goals, with 2-3 set goals per participant), the interviewed participants revealed that their self-defined goals not only were not the ones collected during the intake process, but only 33% of them were met (11 out of a total of 33 goals expressed by participant, ranging from 1-7 goals per participant).

Table 16: Program-defined Goals versus Self-Defined Goals

Pseudonym	Goals Set by Program (SMARTT)	Met? Y/N	Goals expressed during the interview	Met? Y/N	Level of Instruction
Nok	1) Pas HiSET	N	-Pass HiSET	N	HiSET
			-Upon passing HiSET, enroll and complete the medical interpreter training	N	
	2) Create a resume	Y			
			-Find a job in the medical field as an interpreter	N	
Tung	1) Enter employment	N	-Pass HiSET	Y	HiSET
			-Upon passing the test, enroll and complete the insurance appraisal trade training	Y	
	2) Pass HiSET	Y			
	3) Learn about or use community organizations or resources	Y	-With the flexibility provided by new trade, provide additional support to young child enrolled in public school	Y	
Kimberly	1) Pass HiSET	N	-Upon dropout from high school, enroll in ABE	Y	HiSET
	2) Participate in community activities	Y	-Pass HiSET	N	
			-Upon passing the test, transition to college (nursing)	N	
Dottie	1)Pass HiSET	N	-Regain focus on education	Y	
			-Graduate with HiSET on or before son graduates from high-school	N	HiSET
	2)Volunteer in a program, community school, daycare	Y	-Attend training to become a dental hygienist	N	
	3)Participate in community activities	Y			
Mario	1)Retain current employment	Y	-When completing ESOL, attend HiSET class	N	ESOL
	2)Increase Earnings	N	-Become a first generation college student	N	
	3)Increase computer literacy skills	Y			
Dina	1)Retain current employment	Y	-Improve language skills	Y	ESOL
			-Overcome isolation as a result of inability to communicate	N	
	2)Learn about US Culture	Y	-Fully integrate in the society	N	
	3) Participate in community activities	Y			

Pseudonym	Goals Set by Program (SMARTT)	Met? Y/N	Goals expressed during the interview	Met? Y/N	Level of Instruction
Sivash	1)Enter employment 2)Create a resume	N Y	-Improve language skills -Pursue career in agriculture	Y N	ESOL
Ahmad	1)Enter employment 2)Create a resume	N Y	-Integrate after incarceration -Improve language skills -Enroll in higher education -Pursue a Masters' in International Development -Work for United Nations Development Program	N Y N N N	ESOL
Carmen	1)Retain current employment 2)Help children with homework 3) Participate in community activities	Y Y Y	-Regain focus of education - Enroll in higher education to pursue a Masters' in Special Education - Fully support the education of her two kids	Y N Y	Family Literacy
Jaqueline	1)Help children with homework 2) Get drivers' license	Y Y	-Improve language skills -Attend dental hygienist training -Get fully involved with schooling and education of her three kids	Y N N	Family Literacy
Mona	1)Enter employment 2)Participate in community activities 3)Get and use library card	N Y Y	-Improve language skills, with the hope to find an art community that will support her fine artistry	N	Family Literacy
Tatiana	1)Retain current employment 2)Help children with homework 3)Buy a domicile	Y Y Y	-Improve language skills -Fully integrate in the American society	Y N	Family Literacy

Table 16: Program-defined Goals versus Self-Defined Goals, continued

Required by the state and federal government to collect only goals that satisfy the SMARTT metric (S-Specific; M- Measurable; A-Attainable; R-Result-driven; and, T: Time-bounded) program-defined goals reveal a different facet from the goals that were collected through interviews with learners themselves. In the best of the cases, goals that are followed by the Massachusetts' present framework track just isolated steps of some of the goals expressed by learners. For example, Nok or Tung's goal of completing the HiSET exam coincide with the SMART goal recorded on the intake. The difference is that the state and federal goal setting policy considers a HISET diploma an end point, while in reality for Nok and Tung this is only the first step they could complete toward another greater goal. A HiSET Diploma in this case is indeed an outcome of the education process that assists learners to continue climbing the accomplishment ladder.

Not only goals are fragmented but in the majority of the cases, when possible, a Column A goal has been set. **Table 16** reveals that all but one student has been "assigned" with a Column A goal, such as entering or retaining employment or passing the HiSET exam. Through the value-focused thinking workshop with teachers, it was revealed that employment-related goals are in most of the cases initiated at intake by program staff, despite of whether the learner has expressed such goals or not. Column A goals, as explained in the literature review section of this study, are those goals that measure, among all, outcomes of employment, specifically learners' entry in the job market; learners' entry in occupational training; job retention and increase of earnings. Column A goals are the goals that are weighted with the highest number of points in the yearly competitive evaluation process, when goals set and met are calculated by the state agencies and a score is assigned to each and every local program operating with state and federal government funding.

Additionally some SMARTT goals that were collected during the documentary analysis, reveal that were set as part of a cohort effort to satisfy state accountability requirements. With particular emphasis are goals that repeat among cohorts like 'knowing or understanding of community organizations' or 'participation in school and community activities' or 'learn about US culture' that as illustrated in **Table 16** are set as cohort/group goal, assigned by program staff in an effort to align the curriculum and school activities with the goal setting process.

Yet, some of the goals recorded by the local program enrollment intakes are not either learners' goals or outcomes of participation. A particular example is Jaqueline's goal of acquiring her drivers' license or Tatiana's goal or buying a house. Both outcomes do not come as a result of participation in Adult Basic Education, nor they were present in Jacqueline's or Tatiana's revealing of their personal goals. There is an increased emphasis in SMARTT goals setting policy in assuring these goals to be measurable, attainable, result-driven and time-bounded. In this analysis, I conclude that SMARTT goal setting policy seem to exhibit more virtues of an outcomes' collection policy rather than of goals expressed by learners.

Chapter summary

To answer the question we posed in the beginning of this chapter, becomes then a dilemma; whose goals were then met? Learners' goals, expressed by participants recruited for this study, are running beyond the walls of the local adult basic education center. Learners do not consider their goals as confined within the four walls of their class or attainable only by the local provider that they have entrusted with their education.

The analysis of the first phase of this study concludes that SMARTT goals set by the local program as part of the Massachusetts policy are not the personal goals that learners expressed in the course of this study. Learners self-defined goals encompass uncontained movements from past to present and then forward and are timed within the learners' own rhythm and tone.

Additionally, the analysis revealed several themes that permeated participants' self-defined goals. The first theme pointed to participants' commitment to overcome *prior challenges and struggles*. A few sub-themes emerged here: ABE learners' primary aspirations often came as a result of overcoming *setbacks* in their life journey. *The need to communicate with the world* also emerged as a strong theme, particularly from immigrant' adult learners interviews. Additionally, the need to overcoming *structural barriers,* such as family, job and institutionally-related barriers permeated participants' determinants of goals.

The second theme that emerged from the interviews had to do with the ability of learners to find and embrace *current opportunities.* Many interviewees reported that *individual* or *structural* opportunities, if seized, contributed to the betterment of life for self or own children. A particular example of structural opportunities that were mentioned had to do with the multitude of opportunities offered by the alternative and higher education systems in the state of Massachusetts.

The third and last theme that emerged from participants' interviews, illustrated the adult learners' desire for *participation, affirmation and emergence of new identities*. Sub-themes of *social activism, integration, and affirmation of self,* pointed to participants' vision and goals for the future.

Findings from this phase inform the exploratory phase of the study, in which I applied a decision-analytic framework to identify ABE local stakeholders' perspectives with the goal setting process. The findings emerging from this chapter shed light into stakeholders' conflicting perspectives with regards to goal setting, and in particular, into how federal and state accountability requirements further fuel the divide among the disagreeing perspectives.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS: EXPLORATORY PHASE

This chapter starts by discussing the findings of the exploratory phase, examining the

perspectives of different groups of ABE stakeholders with regard to goal setting. In particular,

this chapter reveals the conflicting perspectives that fuel ABE local stakeholders' dividing

strongholds regarding the goal setting policy. The first part of the chapter presents the reader

with value hierarchies for ABE learners and teachers. The chapter concludes by arguing that

learners' self-defined goals are consistently distinct from program-defined goals; that ABE

teachers recognize this disjunction; and, that efforts to reconcile the two could yield significant

improvements for ABE learners' goal setting policy.

Value focused thinking: Data treatment and data cleaning

The analysis carried in this chapter aims at answering a series of research questions

related to values associated with ABE learners' self-defined and program-defined goals. The

literature reviewed for this study posed the argument that a focus on measurable outcomes, that

are broadly speaking quite instrumental in nature, and that are intended or designed to

correspond particularly to learners' labor market success, or education achievement, may not

very well match with the goals that learners express. I recall this phase of the analysis was

particularly important in investigating current metrics that were associated with ABE learner

goal success, while noting the discontent among practitioners and researcher alike regarding the

state of the metrics that local programs were asked to periodically collect and report to state and

federal agencies. Exploring the differences between learners' self-defined and program-defined

goals was therefore considered as one of the major questions that the exploratory phase aimed to

answer. The extent of these differences also became part of the scope and rationale of the

analysis carried for this phase of the study.

As a result, the following sub-questions drove data collection and analysis:

- Are student goals and values different from those of other stakeholders, for example teachers?
- Are students' goals and values generally consistent or quite distinct from those that can be inferred from state-defined outcomes? To what extent?

As explained in the methodology section, I applied value-focused thinking to the current study in

a manner that differs slightly from the conventional model (Keeney 1992; 1997). The traditional

VFT model that calls for different representatives of ABE learners to engage collectively in the

same room was not feasible for this particular part of the study, because some of the study

participants exhibited various literacy levels in English language, increasing their inability to

freely converse or hold a debate in a group. As such, value hierarchies for ABE learners were

created in an ex-post fashion, based on objectives that were identified from interview sessions

using structured questions adapted from Keeney's value-focused thinking methodology (Keeney,

1992; 1997). Literature reviewed for this part of the study revealed no previous studies that

employed ex-post VFT analysis, so in this regard this study constitutes the first attempt to

analyze VFT data in an ex-post fashion. The structure for the data cleaning and data treatment

phase followed three distinct steps: the methodology was first performed for a representative

sample, deriving preliminary findings. The analysis was then repeated for more students, until a

saturation point was reached. Last, I aggregated value structures and modelled a means-end network and a fundamental values hierarchy.

Kimberly's profile of values

Personal Characteristics: 18 year old,

High-school drop-out, HiSET track

Learning disability: Greatest obstacle was learning at a fast pace

Goals: Upon dropout from high school enroll in ABE

Dreams of being a nurse

Helping people, especially children

Impressed by the dedication of medical providers

Upon passing HiSET wants to go to college

Values: Maximize hope for future

Maximize sense of fulfillment

Maximize opportunities for achievement

Figure 4: Illustration of learners' goals and values

To ensure validity of my data and for the purpose of data triangulation, I first created profiles of all the students' goals. These profiles were narratives containing themes that resonated within each and every learners' interview. **Figure 4** illustrates themes that emerged from Kimberly's profile of goals.

I adapted the VT methodology by choosing students that were as distinct and representative in their own group or educational track, yet, when considered together captured the diversity of the whole study population. The diversity metric was designed to be along study participant biographical characteristics (such as differences in age; gender polarization; family structure; first language used at home; immigrations status) and educational characteristics (such as educational achievement; prior educational track; high-school drop-out status; degree of desirability of attending public education). I started first with creating sample group hierarchies, based on similarities of treats among these student goals' profiles. I choose my first value hierarchy set to be inclusive of a younger HiSET learner like Kimberly who was also a high-school drop-out. The nucleus was then adapted to add Ahmad's profile of values, a middle aged refugee attending an ESOL class, who had also been incarcerated. Last I choose another yet distinct goal and values' profile, that of Anna, representing the family literacy track as well as a diverse family structure from the other two study participants.

I set myself the goal of creating composite means-ends networks for a representative group of students first including Kimberly, Ahmad and Anna. I then added to the network by choosing similar student groups that I thought together were a good representative of the population of ABE learners. The final sample included 10 student interviews to help me create the final value structures. As an example, Mario's goals resonated particularly with Kimberly's goals, in that they both assumed the responsibility of breaking the traditional chiasm of high

school drop-outs. Instead, both Kimberly and Mario chose to return to an alternative model of education and despite difficulties, aspired to succeed in their pathway to college. Likewise, while factoring in Ahmad's values, other students' goals resonated in, like Sivash's and Mona's. Like Ahmad, Sivash and Mona were determined to pursue goals that would challenge the status quo of unemployment by building upon prior skills or talents that they had treasured while in the immigration journey. With Carmen, the intergenerational literacy value was factored in, but also the particular aspiration she carried to support education of children with special needs. The hierarchy presented values of similar students attending the family literacy track, like Jaqueline and Tatiana, while at the same time accounting for similarities that resonated among Carmen and Tung who both shared the common value of supporting education of children with special needs.

Using a consistent language, I tried to illuminate some way of learning from these value hierarchies and distilling what was really important. My assumption in this process was that evaluating in a rigorous way these values structures would help me aggregate what I learned from different learners' group. I also inferred that if I was learning similar things from these group value hierarchies, I would build a value structure that would be a reasonable extension of the value-focused thinking methodology (see Keeney 1992, Johnson 2011, 2014). My other assumption rested with the fact that there were possible combinations of these values, in that they were complementary.

ABE learners' values

The means-ends objectives derived for ABE learners are presented in **Figure 5**. We remind the reader that a causal map of values, articulating relationships between means-ends, is referred to by Keeney (1992) as a network. As explained in the methodology section, questions

that were posed to elicit means-ends values were explicitly around the notion of how these values had influenced learners to set their particular goals.

Although the interviewees did not answer questions that were explicitly fixed around or inspired by problem structuring methods, I did carry an ex-post analysis, whereby I leveraged and extended my substantive understanding of the students' experiences with regard to goals that influenced them to enroll in ABE classes. In that respect, I have gone beyond the words they spoke in their interviews to extract meaning from their words, in order to make connections to what they wanted to achieve during the time of the interview with something that was more fundamental that speaks to the conditions of their lives.

As a result more than 40 values were first extrapolated from learners' interviews. **Table 17** lists all the initial values that were first extracted from the transcribed interviews,

Table 17: ABE Learners Means-Ends Objectives (First Iteration)

Learn how to communicate
- *Communicate with systems*

  -Education

  -Human Services

  -Benefits

  -Courts and Justice Systems

  -Employment
- *Communicate with others*

  -Small Talk (build social ties)

  -Other Americans (not just ELLs)
- *Avoid misunderstandings that result in personal setbacks*

  -criminal justice

  -human services
- *At place of work*

-With supervisors

-With colleagues

- *Feel like they belong*

-Integrate fully in the community

-Understand politics

-Access print and TV

-Overcome shame and fear

Support child's education
- Advocate for child's need

-Medical

-Educational

- Speak with teachers

- Help children with homework

Complete HiSET
- Further own education

- Advance career goals

-Achieve medical careers (nursing, medical interpreter, dental hygienist)

- Support family

- Support community growth and achievement

- Overcome barriers, strive for more

Maximize quality of life
- Advance own and others' lives

- Achieve stability

- Defend human rights

- Plan future

-Self-worth

-New identity

- Develop a sense of belonging in the community

- Continue one's journey

Table 17: ABE Learners Means-Ends Objectives (First Iteration), continued

With these initial values and using questions around the notion of how these values had influenced learners to set their particular goals, I first modelled a means-ends objective network for study participants. **Figure 5** depicts ABE learners' means-ends objective network.

Figure 5: ABE Learners' Means – Ends Network

Fundamental objective

Maximize Social Value

(Max) community social value

(Max) opportunities or achievement

Reconcile past with present

(Max) sense of fulfillment [in the present]

Max hope for future [something to live for]

(Max) sense of efficiency [Ability to achieve goals, inspire others]

(Max) sense of self-worth [Esteem, intrinsic value, pride, confidence]

(Max) sense of stability [Place, experience-based construct]

(Max) sense of belonging [Spiritual, social construct]

Means-Ends Objective Hierarchy

(Max) family investment

Establish social ties [outside home]

Communicate with systems

Build new identity [place in society]

Career Advancement

Further education

(Max) ability to understand own environment

(Max) ability to communicate in English

Gain or transfer knowledge

Value all expressed goals, aspirations, objectives

Recognize and value differences (esp. by teachers)

Active Listening (by students and teachers)

Life History Methodology

Decisions, Policies, and Education Practice, (Initiatives, Choices)

-Communicate with, -Relate to, -Support family members -Advocate for child's need

-Employment -Human Services - Public Schools -Courts -Justice System -Benefits -Local gov. Politics -CBOs

-Politics -Movies -Read print -Navigate media

-own -children

-Speak -Read -Write -Understand

Legend:
Presumed relationships
Uncertain relationships

Fundamental objectives
Means-ends objectives

The value-focused structure developed for ABE learners was not a simple hierarchy. Means-ends objectives not only linked with the higher conceptual level, but also among themselves. The structure illustrated in **Figure 5** still formed a directed graph, with objectives related with presumed relationships with each other through one end note that fed directly into the next level (Johnson 2012). Reflecting the ABE learners' focus on the outcomes of learning, the structure contained a considerable number of means-ends objectives. Three of the fundamental objectives that were identified in the learners hierarchy **[Level 2]**(maximization of hope for future [something to live for]; maximization of opportunities for achievement; and, maximization of community value) were long term objectives (observed when the learner had not only completed participation but also achieved his long term goals) while the other two (maximize sense of fulfillment [in the present]; and, reconcile past with present) were more of a medium term nature (possibly achieved in the range of 1-3 years after enrollment).

ABE learners aspired to maximize their sense of belonging **[Level 3]**. This spiritual and social construct reflected Tatiana's dream of being integrated and feeling accepted, or Ahmad's and Monas' desire to grow roots in the new environment. Building a new place in society and a new identity **[Level 4]** was a means objective that linked to the upper level objective of maximization of sense of belonging.

This value, in turn, was closely linked with learners' aspiration of stability **[Level 3]**, construed otherwise as a place and experience-based construct. Stability for some study participants had to do with their ability to use prior skills and inborn talents in the new setting, like in the case of Mona and Sivash. Two lower level means-ends objectives **[Level 4]** were intrinsically linked with this value, i.e. furthering of education and of career advancement. In other students, it reflected their need to establish social ties, outside of home. Nok otherwise

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dreamt to inspire others with her philanthropic commitment. So did Carmen, in her desire to assist younger mothers of children with special needs.

Learners interviewed for this study also aspired to maximize their sense of self-worth in the form of growing their own esteem **[Level 3]** (Tung; Nok); pride (Tatiana; Carmen) and confidence (Dina; Jacqueline; Mario and Ahmad). Maximization of their sense of efficiency was also an important value that many learners seemed to share: Dottie for instance aspired to graduate on or before her son would graduate from high school, while Tung grew confident that soon his goal choices would yield the greatest returns for him and for his younger son.

Communication **[Level 5]** was one of the most reiterated means objectives that learners had expressed during the interviews. Within communication, there were two important values; maximizing the ability to communicate in English and maximizing the ability to understand own environment. For students like Tatiana, Jacqueline and Dina, there was an aspiration to maximize their ability to understand English, which is really a tangible important goal. But persisting in classes is expected to do more than increase the ability to communicate in English, in the sense that even if one is not communicating with others, there is an equally important need to understand the world around. Dina, for example, aspired to be able to watch movies without subtitles, understand print and TV, politics and the voting process. Additionally overcoming shame and fear were important values that perspired during participants' interviews. These values were in turn connected to maximization of self-worth, esteem and pride.

Reflecting on these means-ends values I also depicted a fundamental values hierarchy (Keeney 1992; Johnson 2012).

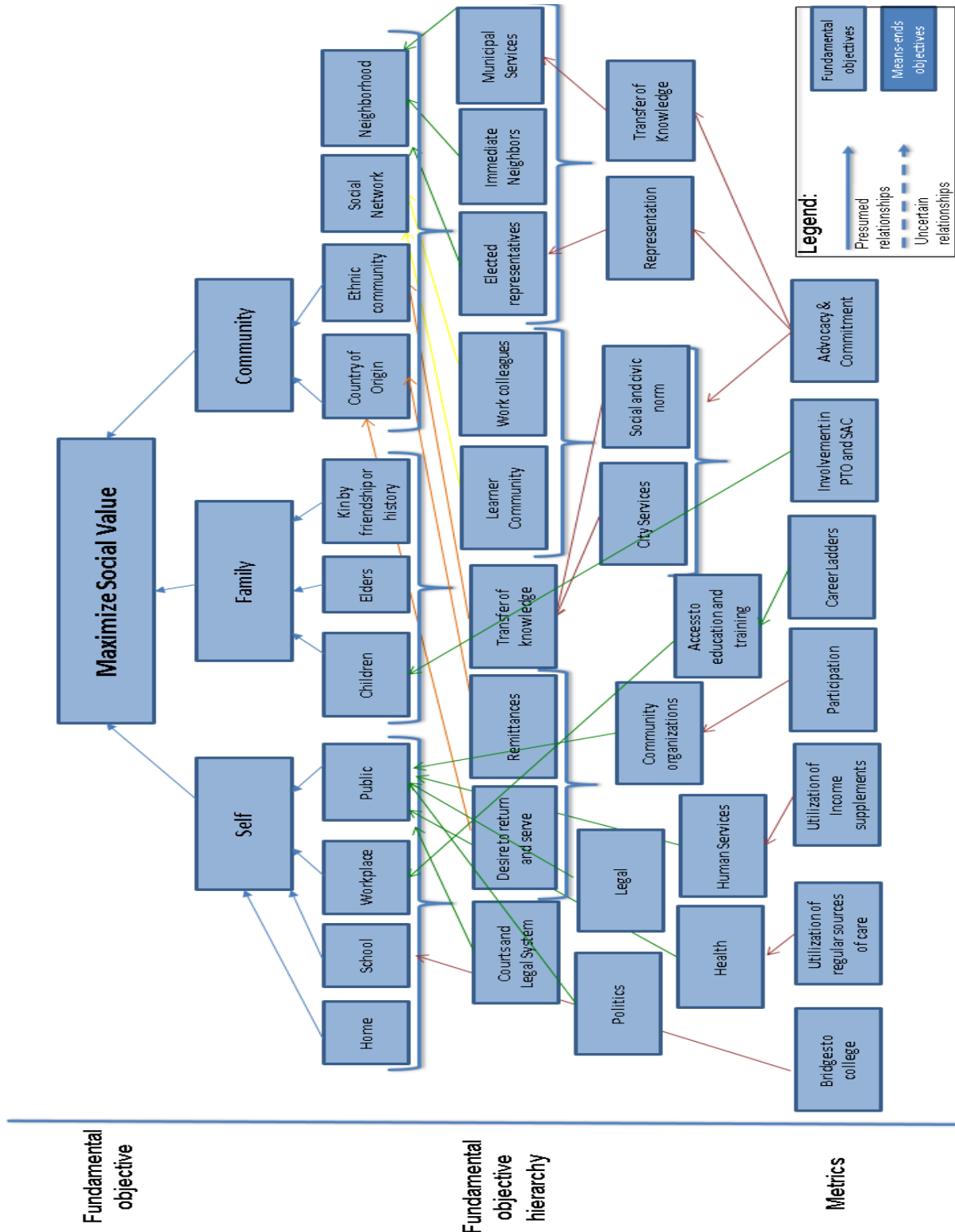**Figure 6: ABE Learners' Fundamental Values Hierarchy**

Figure 6 depicts a fundamental value hierarchy. A logical decomposition of values, starting from the most general to the most specific is referred by Keeney (1992, 1997) as a hierarchy. I remind the reader that to model a fundamental values hierarchy questions like "this objective is a specific example of what?" or "this dimension could be understood along which dimensions, or for which groups?" were asked. I started building the fundamental values hierarchy from the top, since my purpose was to also elicit metrics of importance to learners themselves, captured or not by the actual Massachusetts' goal setting policy.

Dimensions that were important for maximization of learners' social values seemed to elaborate around three concentric geographies: one's self, one's family and one's community **[Level 2]**. With respect to self, one could say that the complementary objectives that presented themselves were around geographies of interest like home, school, workplace and public. For family, these geographies extended to children, elders and kin (by friendship or history) **[Level 3]**. Kimberly and Dottie particularly reiterated of family as their support system. Similarly, foreign born learners, like the ones that participated in this study, do use the network of kin as a support system, or for the provision of their first guest dwelling. In terms of communities, geographies of interest extended to country of origin, ethnic community, social network, and neighborhood **[Level 3]**. These were all not mutually exclusive, since they were distinct concepts.

Since the values of 'work' and 'school' were separately depicted in the hierarchy, under 'public' I included human services, politics, community organization, health services, benefits and the legal system **[Level 4]**. The legal system, in turn, included citizenship and the criminal justice system. Under health services **[Level 5],** one metric of interest not otherwise measured under the actual Massachusetts' goal setting policy was utilization of regular source of care **[Level 6]**. In

other words, achieving some measure of access to health care could be an important metric or an important outcome to ABE learners. Other metrics **[Level 6]** did surface in the hierarchy: for 'school' an important metric otherwise not measured or collected was 'bridges to college''. For 'human services' it was 'utilization of income supplements, like SNAP, TANF, WIC, HUD funding, etc. For 'community organizations' it could be 'attendance', a measure that collides with the actual goal setting policy. For 'children' it could be metrics that are collected and analyzed to measure parents' involvement with parent-teacher organizations (PTOs), or school advisory committees (SAC). For neighborhoods and municipal services, it could be advocacy and commitment.

The rationale behind these metrics was that through analysis one could find an alternative set of measures that speak to students' aspirations and goals. These metrics could be quantified, through particular administrative datasets. No value judgments were placed in these set of metrics, to say than one system was more important that the other. The intent of this analysis was rather to getting insights to learners' and teachers' decisions processes, and through analysis to be able to compare and contrast values but also provide insights to questions that help to tell the complete story behind Massachusetts' goal setting policy.

ABE teachers' values

I turn the readers' attention now to study findings regarding ABE teachers' values. As presented in Chapter 3, nine faculty of the Worcester Adult Learning Center participated in the value focused thinking workshop (for statistics on teachers' population, please refer to **Table 4**: Characteristics of the Study Sample: ABE teachers). All of the study participants were female, US born, and had been part of the WALC faculty for up to fifteen years. No foreign-born

teachers were among study participants. About fifty five percent of the teachers that participated

in the workshop had contractual obligations with Worcester Public Schools, working

simultaneously as grade teachers in the public school system. Their involvement with ABE

constituted their second job.

The mean-ends objectives identified by teachers during the workshop are illustrated in

Table 18. Each individual involved in the workshop identified around 2-3 means objectives in

the discussion. Collectively, around thirty mean-ends objectives were identified in total from the

teachers' value-focused thinking workshop. A wide range of objectives that were not previously

explicit to teachers were revealed. **Table 18** groups the mean-ends objectives in several different

areas, in an effort to structure and simplify the means-ends objective hierarchy.

Table 18: Teacher's Means-Ends Objectives

Maximize Learner Fluency
- Competency in Reading and Writing

- Comfortability with Understanding and Speaking

Maximize Incremental Growth
- Set pathways for learners to achieve long term goals

- Create the sense of prospective goals

- Maximize sense of growth by setting small steps goals

Maximize Learner Accomplishment
- Instill sense of accomplishment with low level learners

Maximize Employability
- Focus on employability as a long term goal

Maximize Functionality
- Contextualize curriculum along job-readiness lines

- Maximize alignment of curriculum with cohort-based goals

- Increase meeting of cohort-based goals

Maximize Return-on-Investment
- Maximize sense of Return-on-Investment

- Maximize interception of outcomes through daily communication

- Maximize the number of SMART Goals Set and Met

Maximize Funding Stability
- Ensure compliance with funders' accountability

- Convince funders that goals setting process matters

Maximize Program Continuity
- Maximize Responsibility to Learners

- Respect hard work that learners put to meeting goals

- Maximize teacher availability

- Maximize the human aspect of goal setting

Maximize community investment
- Increase learning opportunities for older adult students

Maximize Economic Well-Being
- Increase opportunities for highly educated learners

Maximize Learner Responsibility
- Maximize sense of learner accountability

- Maximize seriousness of the learning process

Maximize Educational Achievement
- Maximize sense of educational achievement

- Define purpose of participation in ABE

- Minimize dismissal of learner goal or need

Maximize Family Literacy
- Increase communication between parents and children

Maximize Intergenerational Literacy
- Maximize sense of investment in children education

Maximize Socio-Economic Diversity
- Honor uniqueness and recognize diversity

Maximize Accessible Opportunities'
- Maximize opportunities to access community
  resources

- Acknowledge the 'common ground' rule

- Maximize opportunities to communicate

Table 18: Teacher's Means-Ends Objectives, continued

The teachers' focus group made reference to the current goal setting policy and instrument currently used by ABE local programs in Massachusetts. As shown in **Figure 7** the results in the structure formed a direct graph. Some particularities were specific to the means-ends objectives that teachers attributed to the goals setting process. Adult Basic Education faculty recognized the impositions that mutual accountability requirements pose to local programs **[Level 3:** Maximize accountability to state and federal agencies**]**. The existing goal setting policy, implemented by the National Reporting System (NRS) maintains that goal setting measures program performance by comparing student outcomes to their stated goals. As such, goals become simply quantitative data that are imputed by programs into state and federal accountability data systems, while the process of setting and meeting leaners goals and the support that goes behind that, goes unnoticed. According to teachers interviewed for this study, the goal setting *process* seems to be the critical element that has been overlooked in the goal setting decision problem as addressed in practice by teachers **[Level 5:** Convince state and federal agencies that process matter**]**. Teachers disclosed that they have minimal time during class to talk about goals; most often they use the before-and-after class time to listen to students' individual progress with goals. Establishment of a rapport and maintenance of the rapport with the learner is therefore crucial in learners' goal setting. As this research has revealed, qualitative or motivational interviewing based on life history methodology could be beneficial with goal setting.

Figure 7: ABE Teachers' Means-Ends Network
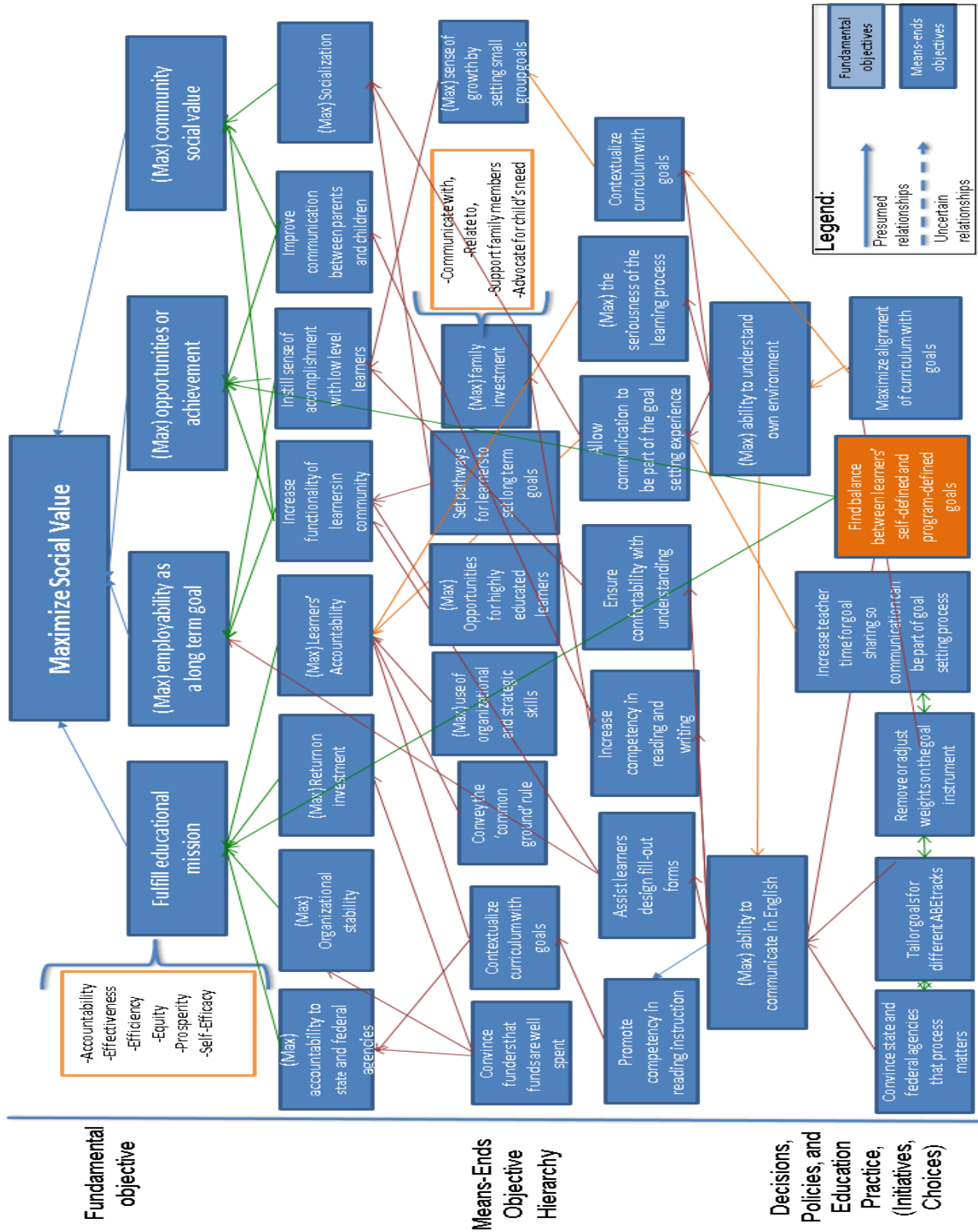
Balancing accountability to learners and funders was the overarching decision that ABE

teachers offered as a solution to the accountability dilemma posed by the goals setting policy

[Level 7: Find balance between learners' self-defined and program-defined goals**]**. After

identifying and weighing in all the values associated with the goal setting policy, ABE teachers

gave a few key alternatives as to how this balance would be achieved.

The first alternative offered by teachers had to do with the adjustment of the scoring

model that is associated with the SMART Goals Setting Instrument **[Level 7:** Remove or adjust

weights on the goal setting instrument**]**. Teachers agree that instruments that are used during the

goals setting process, particularly the SMARTT goal intake, need reconsideration. As explained

in the literature review section, the scoring model weighs in the aggregate number of goals that

are met by a local program. These goals are weighted (see **Appendix C** for a detailed view of

how goals are weighted) are through a scoring model that attributes the highest number of points

to Column A goals. Additionally, teachers disclosed that they are often constrained to set the

same goal for their students every year. In this way, local programs that meet other important

goals expressed by learners but that fall in other lower scored categories, get penalized in the

competitive granting process. As expressed by one of the teachers, Column A goals seem to be

imposed upon programs mechanically and inflexibly,

> I think [column] A Goals are important to people that work. They are the hardest to
>
> achieve, [yet] they are the most important to the state and federal government. As a
>
> teacher, I am really happy if they achieve a C goal. One of my important C goals is get a
>
> library card. Because if they just came to the country they cannot buy a house. They have
>
> to achieve the C goals to get to the B goals to get to the A goals. The rubric seems
>
> backwards. They should have [made] the C goals [the initial goals to meet].

Additionally, an alternative goals setting policy was discussed in the policy roundtable, that tailors individualized goals for different ABE tracks [**Level 7:** Tailor goals for different ABE Tracks]. A 'one-size-fits-all' policy on goal setting is considered by ABE faculty as another constraint for local programs. In the words of another teacher,

> Let's just categorize goals: goals for Family Literacy, for ESOL, for HiSET…They should be categorized. They are not one-size-fits-all.

There is no surprise that *accountability* **[Level 3]** dominated the discussion on the values that influence the goals setting policy. Teachers that were interviewed for this study see accountability in two different aspects: accountability to funders, in the form of meeting the state requirements embodied with the SMARTT goal system, and accountability of learners to the education process. Among other things, teachers seem to support the state accountability imposition of community awareness and job readiness goals, which require setting and meeting of learner group goals. These goals, which LaBarbera (1992) coins as "politically correct educational activities" promote certain massive educational activities tied particularly to the labor market accessibility, like mock interviews, 'dress for success' fashion shows, resume building, or hosting of job fairs. Learner sense of accountability, as stated by teachers interviewed for this study, had more to do with the return on the educational investment expected by ABE learners. Tied closely to the other ABE performance standard of average attended hours, this fundamental value seems to also point to the responsibility required by learners toward the systems' educational investment.

Functionality of learners in the community **[Level 3]**, as expressed by the participants in this study, had to do more the promotion of those goals that enable learners to put the newly acquired skills in use. As an example, teachers interviewed in this study promote the contextualization of

the curriculum as a way to assist learners building their functional literacy. Use of samples of reading instructions or generation of forms used to assist family literacy learners with their organizational and strategic skills are a reminder of what Auerbach (1999) sees as concerning in the pedagogical practice of functional literacy. Promotion of functional goals through reinforcing messages built in the existing curriculum –as expressed by one of the study participants, i.e. 'with your class conversations, with your morning messages, with your summing up or with the answering of the questions' - discounts the value of goals expressed by learners themselves.

Maximization of learners' *competency and comfortability* with the English language **[Level 5]** is also one of the values that is expressed by teachers participating in this study. In one of the teachers own words,

> My students, if you ask them in the beginning of the year, what goals they have, they will tell you, read, write and speak. And if you ask them, why is that important, they will tell you that if they know how to read, write, and speak they will find a job. If they can do that, they can move on with their education. If they can do that, they will become fluent. That is what they believe. A lot of them depend on the ability to read, write and speak. And a lot of them believe they will be OK once they have that degree of fluency. Comfortability and competency in reading, writing speaking and understanding English is what their ultimate goal will be.

Competency and comfortability with language is imperative for all the instructional levels. In ESOL learning, for example, many learners recruited for the study, shared the important goal of achieving comfortability with the English language, as a prerequisite for meeting long term educational or career related goals. In HiSET exams, competency with writing and reading are required for three out of five portions of the exam. Family Literacy learners, likewise ESOL and

HiSET learners, also expressed a similar need to acquire full competency of the English language, to be able to fully play an active role in the education of their children and participate as active stakeholders in the public school system.

Teachers in ABE also consider maximization of learners' sense of *growth* **[Level 4]** as a means-ends value of the learner goal setting process. According to the interviewees, learner' growth through meeting goals comes with implementation of strategies that break long term goals into smaller and more 'realistic' goals. Two particular strategies are supported by teachers in this regard; one has to do with setting pathways for learners to achieve long-term goals. The second supports the concept of prospective goals, by leading learners to accomplish a series of related steps of smaller, timed-goals, and sharing progress and feedback on their timed accomplished.

The bottom level of **Figure 7** and **Figure 5** have great policy significance for the goal setting practice and policy. The decision alternatives expressed by teachers and ABE learners could influence the learner goals setting practice in the field. Efforts to reconcile the two could yield significant improvements for ABE learners' goal setting policy.

The fundamental value structure (**Figure 8**) developed for ABE faculty was not a simple hierarchy. Means-ends objectives not only linked with the higher conceptual level, but also among themselves. Reflecting the ABE faculty's focus on the outcomes of learning, the structure contained a considerate number of means-ends objectives. One of the objectives that was identified in the faculty hierarchy (learners' individual well-being) was a medium-term objective (possibly achieved in the range of 1-3 years after learner enrollment) and the other (betterment of community) was more of a long term nature (observed when the learner had not only completed participation but also achieved his long term goals).

Figure 8: ABE Teachers' Fundamental Values Hierarchy
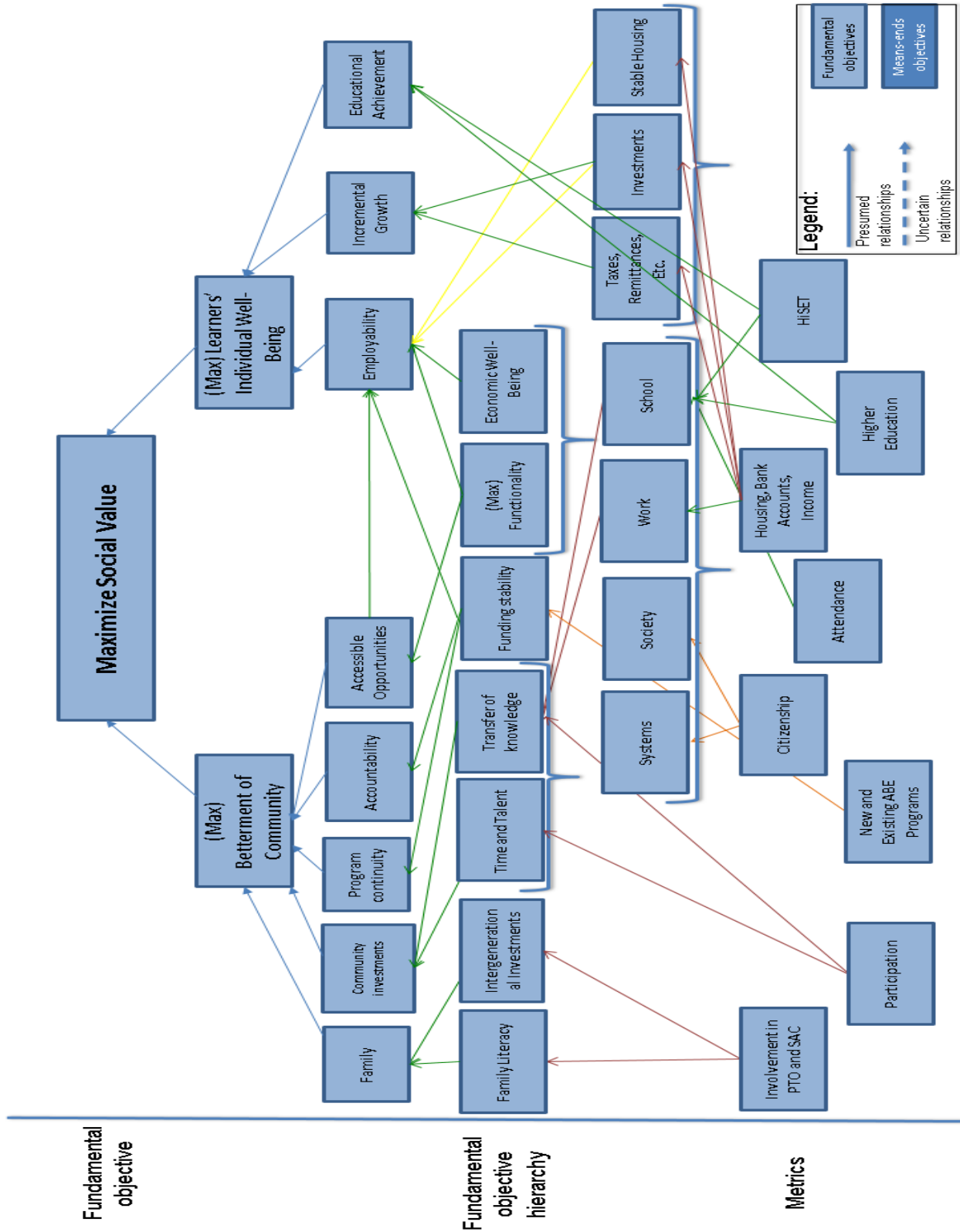
Reflections on congruence

      The notion of maximizing ability to communicate in English and to understand one's environment were not attributed as performance measures in the Massachusetts' ABE Students' Goal Instrument. However both ABE learners and teachers, recognized these values as vital and instrumental to their understanding of the goal setting policy in particular. In this closing section I will explore the degree of congruence of perspectives of ABE stakeholders. The extent of that congruence, defined as the agreement (or the disagreement) between teachers' and learners' goals and values will also be further discussed. I take this space to remind the reader of the particular questions that were asked in the course of this study, respectively:

- Are students' goals and values generally consistent or quite distinct from those that can be inferred from state-defined outcomes? To what extent?
- Are student goals and values different from those of other stakeholders, for example teachers?

What motivated this research was that the state and federal government, in their definition of outcomes, emphasized success metrics that stakeholders felt did not reflect or respond well to students' self-defined goals. Therefore I first questioned of whether learners' goals and values were generally consistent or quite distinct from state-defined outcomes. From extensive analysis and elaboration of findings in the first phase, it was clear that student goals were quite distinct from those that were reported to state and federal agencies in a yearly basis. The SMARTT goal model (SMARTT metric, where S-Specific; M- Measurable; A-Attainable; R-Result-driven; and, T: Time-bounded) embraced by the state of Massachusetts for more than a decade now, honored only those goals that satisfied the above metric. From analysis, but also from teachers' perspectives it became clear that the Learners' Goal Setting Instrument (sample exhibited in

Appendix B) was in fact 'leading' the goal setting process. Consequences of using the instrument as a standardized rubric for learners' goals led in some extent to the *favoring* of some goals over some others. Dottie for example, had been volunteering all along in the substance abuse rehabilitation center, well before enrolling in the HiSET class. Although clearly 'telling her story to empower others' and 'overcoming setbacks' were two of the most important determinants that influenced Dottie to make the decision of returning to school, the matter of the fact was that Dottie's goals had nothing to do with volunteering in community organizations, schools, or daycare centers. Similarly, with Tatiana, who was in the process of buying a home, or Jacqueline, who was in the process of getting a driver's license, the experience of setting personal goals got mixed with events or accomplishments in the learners' life. The assumption here, also expressed clearly by teachers, is that outcomes occurring in the learners' life during enrollment, were assumed to be a by-product or a consequence of the learning process, which is not always true. See for example, one of the teachers' account on goal setting, which clearly indicates the counterintuitive mindset of the goal setting policy,

> I think if your classroom is set up in such a way that you allow communication to be part of your learning experience, and you build goals into your own curriculum, with your conversations, with your morning messages, with your summing up or with the answering of the questions […] However you want to set it up – there is when a goal comes up: Hey, I am trying to look for a new apartment. You are? You are about to also set up a new goal.

Although some of the goals that participants' expressed during this study were associated with particular metrics, the matter of the fact is that outcomes and goals are quite distinct concepts

when related to the individual's educational journey. Simply put, *an outcome is associated with a metric but that is distinct from a goal* and *practitioners seem to not recognize the difference*. For Tung, an outcome was his certification as an insurance appraiser; that was quite distinct from his goal, which was to be able to acquire a certain skill or trade that would enable him to support his younger's son needs and also prepare Tung for future professional success. In this regard, one conceives of outcomes as metrics that are exhibited at the bottom of the fundamental values' hierarchy, whereas the goals or values as the objectives that are at the very top of the means-ends networks.

Based on the literature that I reviewed for this study, I also suspected that a focus on measurable outcomes, that were broadly speaking, quite instrumental in nature, and that were intended or designed to correspond to themes like labor market success, or educational achievement, may not have matched very well with the outcomes that students may express, that are associated with their goals and values. I charged this study with the scope of investigating not only this hypothesis, but also the extent of the differences between learners' and teachers' value structures.

In particular, there appears to be a distinct difference between what value teachers and learners' place to *employability*. Although learners truly recognize the impact jobs have for their individual and family well-being, employability is not the immediate determinant that influences goals they set. For Sivash, although unemployed, it made sense to fight for his own right of getting to use his prior skills and talent of agriculture, rather than subsuming under the pressure of the unemployment authorities to get the first job available. Like Sivash, Carmen was working a part-time, weekend job, knowing that if she invested in her education, she was going be able to not only achieve her dream of being a teacher, but also helping other mothers going through

similar struggles and journey. Rather than employability, learners seemed to be invested in *career enhancement* opportunities and values. For the majority of them employability is a mean goal rather than an end goal, that would come only after they had gone to college, or achieved a prior intermediate goal.

Unlike learners, teachers saw employability as an end goal. They conceived of employability as a necessity and as a norm. Findings revealed that metrics like 'income generation' and 'survival skills' had long permeated teachers' goal setting vocabulary. According to teachers interviewed for this study, employability increases functionality of learners in the community, like in this example:

> They need to learn how to read and listen in English so they can function in our community. And they know that. They came to America for a reason, they did come here for a better life and for more opportunities.

There was also some degree of internal debate among teachers interviewed for this study regarding the notion of employability. Although the group embraced the notion of employability as a fundamental value, a few of the teachers appended the discussion by showing a different angle of what employability entailed for them. As illustrated by the words of one teachers,

> …They are aware of the restrains on them. Yes, employability might be a huge long term goal, but that is not what they are here right away for. And they know that is going to get a long time for them to get it. But they will work part-time jobs, knowing that once they acquire the language, they can definitely move on.

I argue that the fragmentation among teachers' notion of employability shows to some extent their affiliation and agreement (or otherwise disagreement) with the state and federal requirements of the goal setting policy. Further studies to investigate the power and influence of

groups of ABE teachers to critique the current goal setting policy or their ability to offer alternative solutions to negotiating mutual or multiple stakeholders' accountability could be beneficial to the ABE field in general and Massachusetts' goal setting policy in particular.

Obviously teachers' values were heavily influenced by accountability objectives, a part which was intuitively expected to be absent in the ABE learners' hierarchies. As discussed elsewhere in the chapter, teachers were cognizant of the fact that participant self-defined goals were consistently distinct from their goals, and that efforts to reconcile the two could yield significant improvements in ABE program outcomes.

Accountability fundamental objectives affected all of the teachers' decisions (lower level of MEN labeled Decisions, Policies, and Education Practice [Initiatives, Choices], **Figure 7**: Teachers' Means-Ends Hierarchy) regarding changes proposed to the actual Massachusetts' Goal Setting Policy. Learners' decisions otherwise were more elastic, reflecting choices that entailed all stakeholders' involvement (see, lower level of MEN labeled Decisions, Policies, and Education Practice [Initiatives, Choices], **Figure 5:** Learners' Means-Ends Hierarchy).

This study's intention, among other things, was also to generate a range of *illustrative metrics* that captured what was important to various stakeholders with an invested interest in the goal setting policy. The idea around populating these sets of metrics was also to find alternative measures that might measure achievement along the learners' values' dimensions. Additionally, I was interested to populate a particular set of metrics that was representative of learners' values and goals only.

As with other values, my preliminary assumption was that among stakeholders, I would be able to gauge a certain extent of differences, influenced by the impositions of the actual federal and state accountability system. Illustrative metrics gained from the learners'

fundamental values hierarchy pointed to an interesting set of indicators that had not been previously included in the goal setting instrument. Metrics like 'bridges to college', 'utilization of regular sources of care'; 'utilization of income supplements'; 'participation in community organizations'; 'career ladders'; 'involvement in PTO and SAC'; and, 'advocacy and commitment' were all pointing to measures that were important to ABE learners' only **[Level 6, Figure 6]**. The majority of the metrics for teachers were correlatives of the indicators of the goal setting instrument (HiSET diploma; Housing; Bank Accounts; Income; Attendance [school]; Citizenship) **[Level 6, Figure 8]**. However some of them were found to be congruent with learners' metrics (Involvement in PTO and SAC; and, participation in community organizations). Accountability metrics also made it to the list (New and existing ABE programs).

Chapter summary

I close this chapter by summarizing the most important findings that were revealed by applying the value focused thinking methodology. As discussed above, this chapter delineated illustrative models of value structures for a group of learners and ABE teachers. As with goals, findings pointed to consistent differences between values that influence learners and teachers' perspectives with the goal setting decision problem. The propositions that I got from the findings pointed not only to the fact that participant self-defined goals are consistently distinct from teacher-defined goals, but also that teachers recognize this disjunction, and that efforts to reconcile the two could yield significant improvements in ABE program outcomes.

In particular, the study revealed a distinct difference between what value teachers and learners place to *employability*. Although learners truly recognize the impact jobs have for their

individual and family well-being, employability is not the immediate determinant that influences goals they set. Rather than employability, learners seemed to be invested in *career enhancement* opportunities and values. For the majority of them employability is a means rather than an end goal, that would come only after they had gone to college, or achieved a prior intermediate goal. Unlike learners, teachers saw employability as an end goal. The value-focused thinking workshop also revealed that teachers promote *functionality* of learners in the community, expressed as the promotion of those goals that enable learners to put their newly acquired skills in use. Elicitation of functional goals through reinforcing messages built in the existing curriculum, revealed to discount the value of goals expressed by learners' themselves.

ABE teachers and learners' objectives were congruent around the notion of maximizing *ability to communicate in English* and *to understand one's environment*. Such objectives were not attributed as performance measures in the Massachusetts' ABE Student Goal Instrument and both ABE teachers and learners recognized these values as vital and instrumental to their understanding of the goal setting policy in particular.

This section of the study among other things generated a range of *illustrative metrics* that captured what was important to various stakeholders with an invested interest in the goal setting policy. Elicitation of such metrics is important to all stakeholders in the ABE local level in particular not only to reveal the differences around values they place in the goal setting process, but also to consider alternative ways how these metrics can be quantified, with particular administrative datasets. The value-focused thinking portion of this study proved to be important in furthering the debate on how to honor learners self-defined goals besides meeting state and federal accountability requirements imposed by the current legislation.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study has been to understand the ABE learners' goals and the goal setting process from the perspective of ABE program participants and ABE teachers. Using a novel, mixed-method approach, this dissertation presented ABE learners' goal setting as a decision problem in order to reveal and disentangle the conflicting preferences fueled by outcome-based accountability requirements. The study consisted on two thematically related components: a descriptive phase explored internal and external determinants that influence ABE learners' goal setting. Findings from the descriptive phase informed the exploratory stage of the study, in which a decision-analytic framework was applied to reveal learners and instructors' preferences and gain insights into stakeholder involvement.

The rationale in conducting this study steamed from recent trends in federal legislation and Massachusetts' state ABE policies to linking adult learners' educational outcomes to performance systems and accountability requirements. These outcomes, represented as *learners' goals*, have reflected an emphasis on return-on-investment strategies and outcome-based accountability measures. Current policy places greater emphasis on that subset of adult learners' goals that are easily measured, attainable, and that are mostly associated with public outcomes. Local programs are therefore required to set primary and secondary goals for every learner, and ensure that primary goals are met over the one-year grant period (Gabb, 2001). Practitioners and researchers alike, have long argued for an assesment system that is based on authentic goal setting and learner self-defined purposes; not measured with time

limits and tests; carried as a self-evaluatory process in a continuous dialogue with the practitioner; and that credits goals that are as mutable as life (Auerbach, 1991; Gabb, 2001; Reyes, 2001; Kelly, 2001). By a stark contrast, what drives learners goal setting in the field currently, is a lengthy list used by programs as a pre-post measure, with a rubric of fabricated goals and the requirement that goals that are set need to be attained, measured, and verified (Gabb, 2001, p. 18). Massachusetts ABE is required by the state and federal government to collect only goals that satisfy the SMART metric (S-Specific; M- Measurable; A-Attainable; R-Result-driven; and, T: Time-bounded). Additionally, learner goals in the list are weighed, with the NRS goals (defined as *primary* goals, pertaining to Column A of the Massachusetts Student Goal Sheet) weighing more than goals recorded in Column B and C together. Column A goals are those goals that measure, among all, outcomes of employment, specifically learners' entry in the job market; learners' entry in occupational training; job retention and increase of earnings.

Given the rationale for studying ABE learners' goal setting process, this dissertations' research questions were as follows:

> *Which goals do learners in ABE programs see as fundamental, and how congruent are*
> *ABE stakeholders' perspectives on learner goal setting?*

The following three sub-questions contributed in answering the over-arching research question, by unpacking and shedding light into important parts of the scientific inquiry, respectively:

1. What are the goals that ABE adult learners set while participating in ABE local programs and are these goals met one year after participation?

2. Which goal-related objectives do ABE learners and instructors see as means to an end?

3. How congruent are ABE stakeholders' perspectives on learner goal setting?

The descriptive component of this study used a qualitative research design, following a conceptual framework based on grounded theory and life history methodology (Glasser & Straus, 1967; Straus & Corbin, 1990; Bingman and Ebert, 2000; Polinghorne, 1995; Munro, 1995). . Methods of inquiry for this phase of the study included in depth interviews with 12 ABE adult learners, observations of participants' portfolios and documentary analysis pertaining to program outcome data reporting. The findings from the descriptive component informed the exploratory stage of the study, in which a decision-analytic framework was applied in order to identify ABE learners and teachers' preferences and gain insights into stakeholder involvement. Value-focused thinking hierarchies were construed to yield new insights of ABE stakeholders who had consistently expressed conflicting preferences at the goal setting process (Keeney 1992, 1997). This phase of the study involved flexible and facilitated conversations with 9 ABE local instructors situated at a local ABE program and approximation of means-ends and fundamental hierarchies for 12 ABE learners and 9 ABE instructors. Additionally this phase of the study used ABE learners' interviews, originally conducted for the descriptive analysis. The data generation method of choice was value-focused thinking and the study generated value-structured hierarchies and identified commonalities and differences of objectives across stakeholder groups.

In this chapter, I begin by summarizing the study findings and then connecting major themes with the supporting literature. Additionally this chapter will present the reader with implications of this study's findings for research, policy and practice.

Discussion

The major findings can be summarized under major themes that align with the three research questions. Determinants that influence participants self-defined goals will be discussed first. Next, the discussion will center on the major finding of this study that participant self-defined goals are consistently distinct from teacher-defined goals; that teachers recognize this disjunction; and, that efforts to reconcile the two could yield significant improvements in ABE program outcomes.

Findings: What do goals reveal?

This study sought to investigate goals that adult learners set while participating in ABE classes. Themes that emerged from participants' interviews helped to construe a picture of learners' dreams and aspirations invested in the ABE educational journey. Participants shared that their enrollment in ABE constituted a commitment to overcome *prior challenges and struggles*. A few sub-themes emerged here: ABE learners' primary aspirations often came as a result of overcoming *setbacks* in their life journey. Ahmad, Nok, Dottie and Sivash's goals revealed various setbacks that often caused ABE learners' lives to take unexpected turns and reconfigure in different directions. It is in the process of configuration of next steps that learners that participated in this study found the courage and hope to get back into their feet and re-embrace their initial goals. Nok was able to restart her education journey that had been paused due to her resettlement in US; Ahmad found hope in joining an ESOL class and overcoming the shame and stigma of incarceration and probation; Dottie's earlier drug abuse served as a powerful story of survival and inspiration for her comeback goal of graduating with the HiSET at the same time as her son would be graduating high school.

The need to communicate with the world also emerged as a strong theme, particularly for immigrant' adult learners. Dina, Jaqueline, Tatiana, Ahmad and Mona all aspired to overcome isolation and shame that had built up from their inability to communicate fluently in English with the surrounding world. Additionally, the need to overcoming *structural barriers,* such as family, job and institutionally-related barriers permeated participants' determinants of goals. T*he need to communicate with systems* like public schools, state employment agencies, human services, courts and justice system, etc. surged as an equally important theme for Ahmad, Carmen, Sivash and Jaqueline.

The second theme that emerged from the interviews had to do with the ability of learners to find and embrace *current opportunities.* Many interviewees reported that *individual* or *structural* opportunities, if seized, contributed to the betterment of life for self or own children. Sivash, Ahmad and Carmen felt a necessity for the learners' prior intellectual inventory to come to fruition. Mona and Sivash preferred mostly to grow upon inner talents that had become otherwise shut from oppression. A particular example of structural opportunities that were mentioned had to do with the multitude of opportunities offered by the alternative and higher education systems in the state of Massachusetts.

The third and last theme that emerged from participants' interviews, illustrated the adult learners' desire for *participation, affirmation and emergence of new identities*. Sub-themes of *social activism, integration, and affirmation of self*, pointed to participants' vision and goals for the future. Determinants of goals for Tung, Mario, Dottie and Tatiana pointed to the emergence and affirmation of new identities. Nok, Ahmad, Dottie and Mona vowed to not only embrace their re-emergence but also transform the world around them. The theme of integration, through

exercise and ownership of learners' voice and agency permeated the goals of Tatiana, Dina, Ahmad and Tung.

In light of these findings, I hypothesize that the ABE adult learners' goals that were shared by participants in the study allow ABE learners to be characterized as *strivers*. In this regard, I embrace Reddy's (Reddy, 2012) definition of a *striver learner identity*, for the ability of ABE learners to persevere in their goal attainment, despite setbacks or challenges. Although Reddy's study had a particular emphasis on a specific group of ABE learners who had graduated from ABE programs and had been accepted in higher education institutions, I believe the emphasis on goal attainment makes her theoretical statement fit for the group of ABE adult learners participating in this study.

In particular, this study's findings revealed that ABE learners' goals are shaped in such a way that they provide pathways to overcome prior challenges and struggles. Despite being in a new environment, ABE learners are able to embrace new alternatives to better the lives of themselves and their children. Ahmad's and Tung's interviews revealed that despite being in a new country, ABE learners possess inner strengths that they could use to get through struggles and difficulties they face. Carmen's and Jacqueline's testimonies, among others, illustrated that ABE learners are hard workers and forward thinkers, making educational investments for themselves and their offspring. Profiles of ABE learners like those interviewed for this study illustrated that they are great strategists and they know how to couple their intellectual riches with opportunities that could come across. It is to be said that in this respect, ABE learners are not afraid to invest time and effort and respect the investment that is made in them by teachers, local programs and state and federal agencies.

Additionally this study revealed that their aspirations grew when opportunities were offered to them. Most importantly, ABE learners like the ones that participated in this study needed attention and voice, so their story is heard. As progressive educators and researchers have long argued (Fingeret 1983; Lytle and Wolfe, 1989; Bingham and Ebert, 2000; Quigley, 1997) ABE learners know how to make investments that yield the biggest return. Adult learners interviewed in this study also revealed that they had their own internal navigation systems in identifying and preparing for the 'window of opportunity' to open, when they could reach their goals.

Last but not least, a portion of this study also revealed that if potential and support is given to their goals, ABE learners could institute change. It is in this particular determinant of learners' self-defined goals that I argue for the ABE learners' goals framework to be complemented by the *learner as transformer' identity.* I argue that if opportunities are given to ABE adult learners' goals to come to fruition, they could transform themselves but also the world that surrounds them. I find the deterministic power in Mario's aspiration to becoming a first generation college student; Nok's goal of completing the HiSET and aiming at becoming a medical interpreter; and, in Ahmad's goal of learning English to pursue his dream of completing a Masters' in International Development and of returning to serve in Chad's transformation and social restructuring. Both parts of the framework, together and inseparable, are important in reminding other stakeholders with an interest on the goal setting policy of the potential ABE learners could bring to the policy table.

ABE learners' and teachers' values

The exploratory portion of the study presented illustrative models of value structures for a group of learners and ABE teachers. As with learners' self-defined goals findings pointed to consistent differences between values that influence learners' and teachers' perspectives with the goal setting decision problem. The propositions that I got from the findings pointed not only to the fact that participants' self-defined goals are consistently distinct from state-defined outcomes, but also that teachers recognize this disjunction, and that efforts to reconcile the two could yield significant improvements in ABE program outcomes. The study also demonstrated that the ABE goal setting problem is amenable to decision analysis, and that findings derived from application of specific decision-analytic methods aid in identifying stakeholder preferences and gain insights into stakeholder involvement.

Teachers recognized that the outcomes occurring in the learners' life were assumed to be a by-product or a consequence of the learning process. In particular, the study revealed a distinct difference between what value teachers and learners place to *employability*. Although learners truly recognize the impact jobs have for their individual and family well-being, employability is not the immediate determinant that influences goals they set. Rather than employability, learners seemed to be invested in *career enhancement* opportunities and values. For the majority of them employability is a means rather than an end goal, that would come only after they had gone to college, or achieved a prior intermediate goal.

Unlike learners, teachers saw employability as an end goal. They conceived of employability as a necessity and as a norm. Findings revealed that metrics like 'income generation' and 'survival skills' had long permeated teachers' goal setting vocabulary. According to teachers interviewed for this study, employability increases functionality of

learners in the community. Obviously teachers' values were heavily influenced by accountability objectives, a part which was intuitively expected to be absent in the ABE learners' hierarchies. Accountability fundamental objectives affected all of the teachers' decisions (lower level of Means-Ends Hierarchy, labeled Decisions, Policies, and Education Practice [Initiatives, Choices], **Figure 7:** Teachers' Means-Ends Hierarchy). Teachers that participated in this study saw *accountability* in two different aspects: accountability to funders, in the form of meeting state requirements embodied with the SMARTT goal system, and accountability of learners to the educational process (see objectives in Level 4, **Figure 7**, that are directly connected to the objective "maximize accountability to state and federal agencies"). Among other things teachers reported that they support the state accountability imposition of *group goals*, expressed by setting and meeting learners' job readiness goals.

The value-focused thinking workshop also revealed that teachers promote *functionality* of learners in the community, expressed as the promotion of those goals that enable learners to put their newly acquired skills in use. Elicitation of functional goals through reinforcing messages built in the existing curriculum, revealed to discount the value of goals expressed by learners' themselves.

ABE teachers and learners' objectives were congruent around the notion of maximizing *ability to communicate in English* and *to understand one's environment*. Such objectives were not attributed as performance measures in the Massachusetts' ABE Student Goal Instrument and both ABE teachers and learners recognized these values as vital and instrumental to their understanding of the goal setting policy in particular.

Learners' decisions otherwise were more elastic, reflecting choices that entailed all stakeholders' involvement (see, lower level of Means-Ends Hierarchy labeled Decisions,

Policies, and Education Practice [Initiatives, Choices], **Figure 5**: Learners' Means-Ends

Hierarchy). ABE learners' means-ends network emphasized use of active listening by students

and teachers; recognition and value of differences, especially by teachers, and the importance in

valuing all learners' expressed goals, aspirations and objectives.

This portion of the study among other things generated a range of *illustrative metrics* that

captured what was important to various stakeholders with an invested interest in the goal setting

policy. The rationale around populating these sets of metrics was also to find alternative

measures that might measure achievement along the learners' values' dimensions. Particularly, I

was interested to populate a particular set of metrics that was representative of learners' values

and goals only.

Illustrative metrics gained from the learners' fundamental values hierarchy pointed to an

interesting set of indicators that had not been previously included in the goal setting instrument.

Metrics like 'bridges to college', 'utilization of regular sources of care'; 'utilization of income

supplements'; 'participation in community organizations'; 'career ladders'; 'involvement in PTO

and SAC'; and, 'advocacy and commitment' were all pointing to measures that were important

to ABE learners' only.

The majority of the metrics for teachers were correlatives of the indicators of the goal

setting instrument (HiSET diploma; Housing; Bank Accounts; Income; Attendance [school];

Citizenship). However some of them were found to be congruent with learners' metrics

(Involvement in PTO and SAC; and, participation in community organizations). Accountability

metrics also made it to the list (New and existing ABE programs). Elicitation of such metrics is

important to all stakeholders in the ABE local level in particular not only to reveal the

differences around values they place in the goal setting process, but also to consider alternative

ways how these metrics can be quantified, with particular administrative datasets. The value-focused thinking portion of this study proved to be important in furthering the debate on how to honor learners self-defined goals besides meeting state and federal accountability requirements imposed by the current legislation.

The policy environment and the accountability dilemma

Although Adult Basic Education has a seat in at the table in WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2014) and a lot of other legislation that fund education, the matter of the fact is that the driving force of current legislation is *learner employability* and *job related training*. With the goal setting policy in mind, this would entail outcomes that directly or indirectly are tied with the entry and performance of ABE learners into labor markets.

As highlighted from findings of this dissertation, many of the ABE learners interviewed for this study, aspired to join the workforce. ABE learners expect to join the workforce eventually, and see employment as a means to an end, while current law emphasizes short-term employment as an end in itself. Carmen needed some additional training to achieve her goal of becoming a special education teacher and so did Kimberly whose dream was to become a nurse when she would complete college. ABE learners may need training, or go to college but they also aspire to get better careers, be able to support their families, and prosper.

The current legislation, in contrast, expects ABE learners to join the labor market. With WIOA's passing, there are expectations built up in the legislative jargon, whereby the Workforce Investment Boards or the Regional Employment Boards, upon identification of important industries in certain areas, almost require Adult Basic Education combined with Workforce Training to equip ABE learner with jobs in these industries (WIOA, 2014). Take for example the

case of Sivash, who would like to use his prior education and talent as an agriculturist in his new acquired community: he might be eventually pushed to join the healthcare industry in the Greater Worcester Area, just because there is where the Regional Employment Board thinks growth is. Sivash might be pushed by the workforce training center to start training as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and possibly join the healthcare industry, whether he likes it or not. And if Sivash continues to reject the path he is offered, which he shared he has done so far, he could be denied further welfare support.

It is likely that legislators in the current Congress know little about who ABE learners are. The lattices, or layers or ladders so well metaphorized throughout the legislation need to be individualized and tailored for a complex population such as ABE learners. The majority of ABE learners in Worcester Greater Area are the working poor; it would be great if they had one job only, but right now they cannot afford to get to job training, because they cannot afford to give up the job they have.

As this study documented, there are learners in ABE programs, such as Tung and Kimberly, with profound learning disabilities, diagnosed or undiagnosed, that cause them to have difficulties in school and ultimately drop-out. There are other learners, such as Ahmad and Dottie, that shared that they had personal issues that caused them to drop-out, whether it was trouble at home, re-location, substance abuse, mental health, incarceration, etc. The ABE population is diverse, including US or foreign-born learners with a 3rd or 4th grade reading level; or foreign-born learners who are illiterate or unable to write in their own language.

Policy-makers expect ABE adult learners to enter the job market or receive a HiSET diploma in a year. Accountability measures seem in fact to focus mostly on those ABE learners *who did not get a job during the year of service*. In this respect, it is imperative for policy-makers

to understand that the lives of ABE learners who enroll in ABE programs are not as linear as they expect them to be. They have to understand that often ABE learners have to stop out. Unless one understands and unpacks the necessity of Dottie's comeback after 30 years of fighting with drug abuse; of Ahmad's life to get to a turning point where shame and stigma were no more the issue; or for Tung's intergenerational challenge of coping with learning disabilities, one would not be able to figure out what works and what not for these particular learners.

ABE learners with courage and determination, are busy working and going to school, taking care of families, and dealing with other issues, so sometimes they are not able deal with school and work at the same time. It is not just the people who do not have the current inward grit who will stop out: people with grit and determination might take ten years to succeed. Policy-makers need to *understand that this journey with goal accomplishment is not timed with quarterly or yearly milestones*, but is rather an individual undertaking which certainly requires further understanding and continuous support.

The fact that the field of ABE has come divided from learners' interest is mostly attributed to the fact that across the board, from legislators to program staff, *a mindset of numbers and statistics is prevailing*. Under data requirements lies the bigger problem of looking at the data and not looking at information, of what can one do with data. It is a fact that many of the legislators that have drafted these policies have not been able to talk to ABE learners. As this dissertation has argued, in order for the goal setting policy to ease the conflict with the accountability dilemma, both legislative policy-makers and stakeholders need to look both at the stories and the values that ABE learners bring when set and meet their self-defined goals.

Are ABE learners' self-defined goals met yearly?

The study revealed that in exchange for a seat in an ABE local program, ABE learners that participated in this study had signed an one sided agreement with local programs, whose conditions were negotiated by one party only, i.e. the federal government. Through use of the goal setting instrument, federal agencies had restricted the range of opportunities, and had binded many of the ABE learners to enter the job market insomuch as in one year.

In particular, learners' self-defined goals pointed to a distinctly different group of aspirations from the ones represented by the goal setting instrument. Tatiana had expressed in class that she was about to buy a house and it had automatically been carried to her repertoire of set goals. Tatiana's self-defined goal had nothing to do with buying a house, but rather of being able to communicate in English and be fully integrated in the American society. Jaqueline was in the process of getting a driving license, and so, just like Tatiana, a driving license goal was also added to her goal rubric. Mona, whose sole goal was to learn English and join an artist community who could be supportive and appreciative of her art, had been 'assigned' the goal of applying for and getting a library card.

This dissertation finds nothing wrong with applying for a library card or getting a drivers' license. However, by listing these outcomes as goals, we are not really answering the very question that drives ABE learners' self-expressed goals. In particular, for Jacqueline, Tatiana and Mona, by adding these goals to their learning plans, we are saying to them that a driver license or a library card are *ways* to maximizing ABE learners' ability to communicate in English or understanding their own environment. But aren't these learners' abilities limited in communicating in English? It is by far confusing to say that in order to demonstrate the ability to communicate in English, one can get a drivers' license or buy a house. It is also counterintuitive

to say that the metric to measure someone's' ability to communicate in English is getting a library card, since these student's abilities to communicate in English are limited.

This dissertation asserts the reviewed literature's view that Massachusetts current goal policy credits learners outcomes and not learners' self-defined goals (see for example Demetrion, 1996 and Kelly, 2001). This study also validates Kelly's point (2001) that the current ABE goal setting policy has inadvertently created a duality of systems: one, where learners are getting charged with meeting certain *'program-defined outcomes'* that are 'metered' with rigorous metrics and that serve local ABE system to ensure that goal setting quotas and accountability requirements are satisfied; and another one, whereby both learners and stakeholders involved with the delivery of ABE local programs capture the growth and progress with *learners' self-defined goals*.

And so I asked in the beginning of this paragraph, are ABE learners' self-defined goals met yearly? Findings from this study highlighted that learners' self-defined goals did not vary in systematic, predictable ways according to class taken or learner personality treats, but rather from determinants that sourced from learners' own motivation. Additionally, learners' aspirations were not following a certain linear trajectory and clearly were not bound by yearly expectations.

Both ABE teachers and learners also argued that process of goal setting need to be more important than the output, despite the current emphasis on outcomes rather than on the process. The focus on "one-size-fits-all' goals reminds the reader of Merrifield's (1998) metaphor of the 'widget factory' whereby the goal setting policy requires that all learners have goals that meet the state and federal specifications. A particular illustration of such goals were cohort-based goals, like "participate in community activities", "learn about US culture", or "create a resume". Induced or group goals, as demonstrated throughout this study, reinforce the dominant culture,

by emphasizing and offering what LaBarbera (1992) calls "politically correct" educational activities. For example, each year, ABE local programs engage in allocating resources and promoting certain massive educational activities tied to the job market accessibility, like mock interviews, "dress for success" fashion shows, resume building, or hosting job fairs.

This study revealed that ABE learners' trajectories with education are not linear and they require multiple stops. The policy-makers need to take in consideration these stops and the determinant that bring ABE adult learners to ABE local programs. This study revealed that for as long as there exists a system that cultivates learners' self-defined goals and there are clear steps that will move a learner from conception to goal fruition, there will be definitive success for learners' goals. The way how the current system is designed, whereby the ABE goal setting policy ignores learners' self-defined goals; honors ready-made, 'one-size-fits-all' goals; and, promotes goal fragmentation, is a formula set for failure. For Mario's ambition of becoming a first generation college student to come to fruition, one needs local ABE programs to engage with other systems, like the higher education network of institutions, and likewise a commitment for collaboration of these institutions to work toward creating a clear pathway and detailed milestones with clear transition points and possible bridges that will facilitate his success. For other students, like Kimberly, the system needs to accommodate more public and private actors getting involved with aligning her career plan, like systems that offer opportunities for her to practice nursing skills. For both Kimberly and Mario, incentives of some sort need also to be discussed at the proposed policy table, since both of these learners represent non-traditional college level students. This study is proposing an alternative to the current goal setting system, which not only cultivates learners' self-defined goals but also assists by removing barriers, enables growth and emergence of learners' identity, and forges learners' transformation. The

goals that were cultivated by this study are a testimony to the proposed investment of learners in

the society. The argument I make in closing this study is that policy actors need to unify around

learners self-defined goals, which is a cause as sublime, transformative, and a multi-faceted

investment for ABE learners and the community that surrounds them.

Implications

I argue that recognition of the framework of *learners as strivers* and *learners as

transformers* has potential to institute change and ease the negotiation of the conflicting

preferences of stakeholders with regard to the goal setting policy. I argue that insofar the field

has accepted and leaned more on the argument of *learners as strivers* and less on recognizing the

transformation power ABE learners self-defined goals could bring if supported appropriately. I

believe there is of significant importance to gather momentum around the theory that credits

ABE learners as *strivers* and *transformers*.

Implications for policy and practice

With WIOAs (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) re-authorization in 2014

Adult Basic Education further subsumed under the Workforce Development System. As

elucidated in the literature review section, ardent critics like Merrifield (1998) and Belzer (2003,

2007) had long argued for the implied philosophical shift this multi-agency effort would have

brought forward. What local stakeholders are experiencing in the field right now is a sense of

restrictiveness with the way how the new legislation has been written, in terms of what level of

ABE students are going to be accepted into local programs in the future. Their expressed concern is that the doors of ABE might close further, letting in only those learners that are going to show progress with employability goals within a certain amount of time. If local stakeholders don't fight and debate the proposed policy changes, soon enough they might be asked to set local benchmarks based on student goal performance, tied to showing that a certain percentage of enrolled ABE learners are getting into workforce, or into workforce training right at the start. Another implication of the new WIOA policy change is that documentation might be more stringent, asking local stakeholders to document progress with benchmarked goals not only during enrollment, but also years after ABE learners graduate from local programs.

In this respect, it is anticipated that if policy changes will be implemented as they are proposed in the legislation, the gap of who gets accepted in ABE programs will be widened. Said simply, ABE learners might be hand-picked, based on goals they set when they enroll in ABE local programs. Obviously they will be opportunities for some learners, but not for those that are at the lowest reading levels, or for those who need it the most. Such emphasis on workforce development and workforce training has already started to be present with the new embraced ESOL framework, centered on content rather than learning about the English language.

I argue that stakeholders with an interest in the goal setting policy need to galvanize enough power and influence to challenge the philosophical shift centered around theories of 'return-on-investment' or 'learner employability' by engaging in debates around values embodied with the ABE goal setting policy, using similar value elicitation exercises that were employed during this study. As this study elucidated, although the emphasis on employability was increasingly predominant among ABE teachers that were interviewed for this study, groups

of teachers within the interviewees, have the potential to establish and maintain a debate about values and principles that need to drive learners' goal setting policy.

The proposed VFT type process might first involve other local stakeholders with an interest in the goal setting policy, like program administrators, councilors and program specialists, to discuss and debate internal values that drive the goal setting policy. Translation of value-focused findings, into tangible guidance for administrators could make the next step to addressing mutual accountability concerns. ABE state directors, as an example, could be invited to join the VFT process, in an effort to reconcile the conflict and enable learners and state policy to find common ground. Value structures could capture something fundamental or important about other stakeholders' values, even if those characteristics are not easily influenced or controlled.

Regional or State Workforce Development Boards can also be informed of the current state and future directions of the ABE learners goal setting policy, and the accountability dilemma posed by new legislation. Discussion about mutual or multiple stakeholder accountability needs to take the centerpiece into state or regional forums.

ABE local stakeholders need to also invest some time in thinking of generating possible public and private partnerships that could aid with accomplishment of learners' self-defined goals. As elaborated during this study, agencies like public and private higher education institutions, human services, public school boards, city officials, community organization, neighborhood associations, etc., need to be involved with the notion of networking and discussing of ways how they can assist with removal of barriers, ways to enhance transfer of knowledge, and learners' success in accomplishment of their self-defined goals.

Another proposition, supported in part by reviewed literature (see for example NCSALL Adult Persistence Study, Comings at al., 2000) proposes a*n alternative system* of measurement of progress with goals that speak both to the progress learners make with their self-defined goals and state and federal accountability requirements centered around learning outcomes. As with this dissertation, I hope that value-focused analysis can generate a range of metrics and decision alternatives that capture what is important to various stakeholders with an interest in the goal setting policy. As suggested by teachers participating in this study, learners' goals could no longer be "one-size-fits all". In this respect, stakeholders need to be engaged in an open discussion that would entail the definition of metrics that capture what is important to learners and other stakeholders with an interest in the goal setting policy.

Learners' agency and empowerment

This dissertation illustrated the emergence of criticality within groups of stakeholders, especially teachers, in terms of recognizing the deficiencies of the actual goal setting policy. I argue that there is a tendency among stakeholders to recognize where problems are, and engage in identification of values that are at stake, but there is rather an absence of defined processes by which roles have to be identified to achieve and embrace values that could speak to learners themselves. Institutionally, local programs have no clear strategy as to how they can influence policy by bringing students' voice in the upward circles.

This study embraces the concept that goal setting in Adult Basic Education need to be expanded to embrace the concept of adult lives as they perceive them. As this study elucidated, ABE learners have 'reasons' why they enroll to Adult Basic Education. But these 'reasons'

cannot be understood without first acquainting the life story that accompanies the learner; the impact that the immigration journey or the current circumstances of life have played; or the place the learner is enabled to share and take in the society.

If ABE local stakeholders are invested to achieving student' success, the learners' voice first and foremost needs be heard. As this dissertation revealed, the process of learning about what students' aspire need to be central to the goal setting policy. There is no discussion that in the process of learning about students' aspirations, local stakeholders can involve direction from those who hold such aspirations. Covey's (2004) theory of building voice within self and others, could be intrinsically transformative to adult basic educators who are invested in their learners' success. As Covey argues, caring about learners involves not only listening but also observing where the potential is and expressing enthusiasm for that potential. Only in such way, by empowering others, by believing in one's potential, the voice of learners can be developed and strengthened. Embracing the worm's-eye view, i.e. of establishing rapport with the environment of learners as they experience it, rather than the bird's-eye view, could assist ABE stakeholders with adopting the learners' view of the reality.

Covey's theory of communication of others' worth for the sake of establishing trust and voice, could be beneficial not only in preparing an adequate adult basic leadership for the future but also in establishing an appropriate policy agenda for embracing the proposed framework of *learners as strivers* and *learners as transformers.* Paulo Freire's liberatory education theory could be the vehicle to including into this progressive agenda learners' voices themselves, by helping them reflect on their life journeys and encouraging them to use their critical reflections (Freire, 1968; Mackie, 1980; Heaney, 1995). Learners interviewed for this study asserted that they found enthusiasm and potential in sharing their aspirations and talking at length about their

life challenges and ways of how they can transform their realities. Although indirectly, this study was also a testament of how life history methodology can give a voice to adult learners to express their individualities with the goal setting process. It is expected that findings of this study also influence policy-makers and adult basic educators to think about ways how to include adult learners' voices in the accountability policy debates and strategic thinking processes about the future of Adult Basic Education.

Implications for future research

One of the most immediate research projects that could emanate from this study has to do with further use of value focused thinking to build other stakeholders value hierarchies with regard to the goals setting policy. In this regard, the research project could be envisioned either as an action research study, carried by local faculty and staff, or program specialists involved in local programs, as a research initiative of the Adult and Community Learning Service (ACLS), or as an independent investigator research study.

Using this study's VFT results, researchers could formulate and solve decision problems whose solutions can provide specific guidance to policy makers and practitioners. By taking in account the metrics and decision alternatives identified in the course of this dissertation, future studies could be a great promise to introducing practical changes to the current Massachusetts' goal setting framework.

Research that identifies decision alternatives and metrics of interest, particularly for learners, could also serve as an immediate study who could be carried by groups of researchers interested at investigating alternative performance measurement systems for the goal setting policy. This proposed study could also answer the question of whether learners' voice can

influence accountability policy debates in the state of Massachusetts or other states where goal setting policy continues to be one of the ABE performance standards.

Comparative studies with the focus on ABE policy in other states could be beneficial to shed light in differences and similarities of practices involved with the implementation of the goals setting policy and provision of illustrative case study evidence of how different states have solved the multiple accountability dilemma. The research questions could also be extended to examine the power and influence of certain groups of stakeholders in different states in infusing learners' voice into the accountability debate.

Since 83% of the study population was foreign-born learners, a study investigating only foreign-born learners' self-defined goals could provide interesting insights to ABE policy and practice. Research questions similar to the ones raised during this study could be shedding light to issues of particular concern for the foreign-born ABE population and possibly to value structures that could provide considerable insight to state and federal policy makers.

Another important area for future research could be around mutability of goals. This study did not directly investigate of whether learners' self-defined goals change over time. However this study pointed to considerable interest in the literature on the question of mutability of goals (see for example, Fingeret 1992). Studies in the form of action research could be beneficial to principal investigators involved in the delivery of adult basic education classes, whereby the practitioner or educator could form a group of study participants and investigate longitudinally, for periods longer than an academic year, of whether learners self-defined goals change shape and content.

Additionally, another important area for future research could be around the agency of learners' goals. The study could investigate research questions around the notion of how aware

are learners about use of this agency and about entitlement to fulfil their self-defined goals?

Additional research questions could attempt to answer questions about learners' conception of

success with goals, and how do ABE learners perceive the mission of ABE education. These

studies, in particular, are of importance in terms of demonstrating the learners' ability to

influence public policy and highlighting community networks and powerful mechanisms that

learners believe are of help to fulfilling their self-defined goals.

Conclusion: "Whose goals am I meeting?"

> *"For a long period of time Adult Education relied on people's stories. They told these*
>
> *stories and they were very moving. I went and testified before the US DOE on the re-*
>
> *authorization of the Adult Education Act a few years ago. And everybody brought in*
>
> *students. The students told wonderful stories, great things that have happened to them.*
>
> *Everybody was very impressed. But what they [US DOE] said was, 'you brought in*
>
> *twenty people in from your programs, we spend millions of dollars on Adult Basic*
>
> *Education. We need to know how much of an impact [we are] having. What you showed*
>
> *us today is that Adult Basic Education has a huge impact on a few lives, but if you have a*
>
> *million students, how many among one million students are you helping?"*

This excerpt from one of the teachers' interviews brings us to the reality of Adult Basic

Education today. As this study has illuminated, new legislation that regulates Adult Basic

Education, including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), has imposed a

philosophical shift in Adult Basic Education today. With particular interest to this study, is the

emphasis to link adult learners' educational outcomes to performance systems and accountability

requirements. These outcomes, represented as *learners' goals*, reflect an emphasis on return-on-investment strategies and outcome-based accountability measures. Greatest emphasis is placed on that subset of adult learners' goals that are easily measured, attainable, and that are associated with public outcomes.

This dissertation sought to understand the goal setting process from the perspective of learners and local ABE stakeholders. Using a novel, mixed methods approach, the study considered ABE learners' goal setting as a decision problem in order to reveal the conflicting preferences fueled by outcome-based accountability requirements. This study was divided into two distinct phases: descriptive analysis, to identify themes that occurred in traditional interviews, analyzed according to traditional science methods, and exploratory analysis, to identify objectives, organized into values' structures according to decision analytic methods associated with value-focused thinking techniques.

The dissertation is expected to contribute to both the scholarly literature and ABE practice and policy. On the academic side, it has introduced a new perspective on determinants that influence learner goal setting, given the particular experience of Massachusetts' state accountability system supporting the collection of such data. It has also identified learner goal setting as an amenable problem to decision modeling, making this research the first known applications of such methods to ABE in general, and learners' goal setting in particular. Findings generated by this study will hopefully be a useful addition to the growing literature of decision modeling in education.

On the policy side, this research will hopefully influence the ongoing debate about whether and how adult learners' voices and experiences need to drive accountability. Motivated by the desire to help local programs identify useful solutions to problems that concern multiple

stakeholders, this study might set itself as a trailblazer to promoting use of decision analysis in solving other problems that involve uncertainty within ABE programs. It is to hope that the study will also assist policymakers and policy analysts at the ABE state and federal level to debate policies that promote mutual or multiple stakeholders' accountability, involving discussions on how learners' perspectives can drive performance at the local level.

This study opens new avenues for similar research with the focus of ABE policy in other states, in order to examine the relationship between implementation of local accountability policies and learners' goal setting. The findings from this study could be also be useful in conducting comparative studies between states that exhibit differences in the learner goal setting policy and practice. Finally, it is hoped that findings generated by this dissertation, will create opportunities for action research studies by other practitioners and researchers engaged with the day-to-day practice and delivery of ABE program.

APPENDIX A: ADULT BASIC EDUCATION LEVELS OF INSTRUCTION

	ESOL	**HISET**	**Family Literacy**
Scope	English for Speakers of Other Languages	High Stakes Equivalency Test	Ensure parent participation in child's education
Literacy Level	Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced English Literacy Skills	$9^{th} - 12^{th}$ reading and math equivalency level	Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced English Literacy Skills
Prior Education	Ranges from no schooling to graduate degrees	No high school diploma	Ranges from no schooling to graduate degrees
Origin	Foreign-born population	US Born and Foreign Born population	Mostly Foreign-Born population
Completion Point	$9^{th} - 12^{th}$ reading level	Passing of HiSET Exam	No completion point

Study Participants' Summary

The study is focused on the field of ABE (Adult Basic Education) and the population is selected from three particular tracks: ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages); HiSET (High Stakes Equivalency Test); and Family Literacy.

ESOL	**HISET**	**Family Literacy**
Sivash	Dottie	Anna
Mario	Jennifer	Mona
Ahmad	Nok	Jaqueline
Dina	Tung	Tatiana
Completion point: 9th- 12th Grade Reading Level (Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced)	Completion Point: Passing of HiSET (High Stakes Equivalency Test)	No Completion Point: Family Literacy is for parents to acquire enough understanding of public schools and ensure parent participation in children's education. Considered also an extension of ESOL, since the majority of participating parents/grandparents are of immigrant origin.

State/Federal defined countable outcomes apply uniformly across all classes, despite the differences in ABE tracks or students' individual goals. Outcomes are measured, i.e. expected to be set and met during the year of participation and associated with metrics and documentation.

APPENDIX B: MASSACHUSETTS STUDENTS GOAL SHEET, FY 2015 (SAMPLE PAGE)

Student Goal	Date Set	Date Met	Definition	Required Documentation
1a. Enter Employment			Currently unemployed student gets a job and earns wages one quarter after the goal has been set.	Data match if SSN is provided Survey student if SSN is not provided
1b. Retain New Employment			Student who gets a job continues to be employed in the third quarter after the Retain Employment goal has been met.	Data match if SSN is provided Survey student if SSN is not provided
2. Retain Current Employment			Student who is currently employed continues to be employed in the third quarter after the Retain Current Employment goal has been set.	Data match if SSN is provided Survey student if SSN is not provided
3. Obtain high school equivalency credential			Achieves score that qualifies for high school equivalency credential during enrollment; or up to 8/5 in prior fiscal year ending 6/30; or after 8/5 in current fiscal year up to 6/30.	Data match regardless of whether or not SSN is provided
4. Complete some adult HS credits and/or MCAS tests toward ADP			Achieves or successfully completes required high school course work for an Adult Diploma Program or External Diploma Program.	Transcript from adult high school
5. Obtain ADP			Achieves high school diploma granted by local school committee. Must meet state competency determination as well as local requirements.	Survey student to obtain either: (1) copy of diploma; (2) student's transcripts signed by the principal or director; (3) student's permanent record card.
6a. Enter ABE Transition to Community College program			Student in a Community Adult Learning Center program enrolls in a program specifically designed to enhance a student's chance of succeeding in post-secondary education for at least 3 months in duration.	ABE Transition to Community College program must enter an enrollment record into SMARTT showing at least 1 hour of attendance.
6b. Complete ABE Transition to Community College program			Student in a Transitions to Community College program successfully completes a transitional program of at least 3 months in duration. Meets requirements as determined by the program that indicates that a student can be enrolled as a matriculating student in a program leading to a certificate, certification, or Associates degree.	ABE Transition to Community College program must enter an enrollment record into SMARTT for the student showing attendance for at least 1 semester.

For the full version of the Massachusetts Student Goal Sheet, please visit
http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/smartt/forms/goals.pdf

Setting and Meeting Student Goals

Definition:
- Total number of goals set divided by the number of students enrolled in the program
- Total number of goals met divided by the number of students enrolled in the program

Standard:
- Programs set, on average, at least 2 goals per student per year.
- Programs meet, on average, at least 1 goal per student per year.
- Programs are eligible for Column A, B, and C goal attainment points as noted below.

http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/smartt/forms/goals.doc

Benchmarks:

	# of points	Cut Points for Learner Gain
Goals Set	1	Set at least 2 goals/student
Goals Met	2	Meet at least 1 goal/student
Column A/B Goals	3	If majority (50%+) of met goals are Column A&B goals, **and** if the program meets at least 1 goal/student, program earns 3 Column A/B points.
Column A/B Goals	2	If majority (50%+) of met goals are Column A&B goals, **and** if the program meets less than 1 but at least .5 goals/student, program earns 2 Column A/B points.
Column C Goals	1	If program meets at least 1 Column C goal/student, program earns 1 Column C point.

	# of points
Advanced	5 – 6
Meets Standard	3 – 4
Needs Improvement	1 –2
Remedial Action	0

Note: maximum performance points in any combination of the above are 6.

Includes:
- Projects with fund codes 340, 345, and 359
- Students with attendance greater than 0 hours

- Obtain high school equivalency goal includes date met up to 9/30

Excludes:
- Students enrolled <u>only</u> in "Transitions Math" or "Transitions Writing" non-rate based classes.
- Distance Learning directly enrolled students **--** those directly referred to the Hub by the Community Adult Learning Center (CALC) Option 1 or 2 sites

I have been involved with ABE for the last eight years, as a teacher and a curriculum coordinator and have taught students from all levels in ESOL and Family Literacy classes. I entered ABE by the 'back door'[10], but embraced the field passionately and dedicated myself entirely to the advancement and progress of my students. I identify with adult learners in ABE programs, since I am one of them. As such, the format of my interviews is meant to be conversational and unstructured and not too formal. These interviews need to be as comfortable as possible, allowing the participants to express their lived experiences in the program in the context of their everyday lives. Here is my line of question for the first interview:

"Hello *<participant's name>* and thank you for taking time to meet with me today to help me understand your goals of participation in ABE classes *(specify the type of program and the level, if appropriate; i.e. HiSET, Family Literary, ESOL).* The purpose of this interview is to understand your experience in the program, goals that you have set for yourself to meet during this year in the program and your long term expectations. I have given you a consent form to review and sign, if you agree to participate in this study. If at any time you wish to stop the interview, please let me know. Please be assured that everything that will be discussed during this interview will be confidential. Do you have any questions for me at this time?"

1. Background questions
The following background questions (1-3) are just to understand the prior experiences that the participant had in his life with regard to education:

1. Tell me about yourself and the reason why you decided to participate in ABE classes *(specify the type of program and the level, if appropriate; i.e. HiSET, Family Literary, ESOL).*

2. What is your experience with education?
   Potential Probes: When did you start school? How many years of schooling do you have? What were your experiences with schooling? How would you consider yourself as a student, in your prior years of education? What factors would you consider key to succeeding with your prior education? What were some of the goals you set for yourself during your school (specify the type of school, i.e. elementary, middle, high, college, etc.)? Where you able to meet the goals you set for yourself after you completed school (specify the type of school, i.e. elementary, middle, high, college, etc.).

3. . What do you want to accomplish through participation in ABE classes *(specify the type of program and the level, if appropriate; i.e. HiSET, Family Literary, ESOL)?*

2. Interview Questions

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[10] Lin (2010) dedicates her dissertation to understanding Adult ESOL teaching profession and practice. She uses the metaphor to characterize the majority of ABE teachers who, like me, enter the field serendipitously.

1. What are the goals and objectives you have set to accomplish during this year of participation in ABE classes *(specify the type of program and the level, if appropriate; i.e. HiSET, Family Literary, ESOL)?*

2. Have you talked to your teacher, counselor and/or classmates about the goals that you have? In what form did you share the goals with your teacher, counselor and/or classmates (*Potential Probes: one-to one, class format, interview with teacher/counselor; educational plan; etc.,)*

3. In your opinion, how did participation in the ABE program *(specify the type of program and the level, if appropriate; i.e. HiSET, Family Literary, ESOL)* helped you with meeting these goals? What other factors, beside participation in the ABE program, helped you with meeting these goals?

4. How would you rank the goals that you have established so far, in terms of time of accomplishment?

5. To this date, have you met any of your initial goals?

6. Can you please let me know if the program helped you meet the prior goals and how? What other factors, beside participation in the program, helped you meet your prior goals?

7. If your initial goals have changed, can you please let me know what constituted the reason(s) of the change?

8. Have you talked to your teacher, counselor and/or classmates about the new goals or the change you are experiencing?

9. For the goals that were not met during your participation in the ABE program *(specify the type of program and the level, if appropriate; i.e. HiSET, Family Literary, ESOL),* what are the reasons that they were not met?

10. In your opinion, what are some ways the program can help you to accomplish the goals you set for this year of participation *(specify the type of program and the level, if appropriate; i.e. HiSET, Family Literary, ESOL)*

11. Would you continue to participate in the ABE program in the following year? What goals do you see having in the following year of participation?

APPENDIX E: VALUE-FOCUSED THINKING WORKSHOPS PROTOCOL

1. Background Questions/Setting the Stage for the Workshop

"Hello *<participants group name>* and thank you for taking time to meet with me today to discuss the goal setting process from the perspective of (*Specify group in attendance*). The purpose of this workshop is to clarify *(Specify group in attendance)* strategic and operational goals and objectives related to ABE goal setting process with the ultimate objective of making connections between the learners and programmatic goals. I have given you a consent form to review and sign, if you agree to participate in this study. If at any time you wish to withdraw from this workshop, please let me know. Please be assured that everything that will be discussed during this workshop will remain confidential. Do you have any questions for me at this time?"

The following background questions (1-6) are just to set the stage for our interactive discussion and understand your perspective and your experience with using the goal setting instrument:

1. How long have you been using the goal setting instrument in your practice *(specify the role assumed by participants of the group in attendance, i.e. faculty, administrator, counselor).*

2. How do you track learners' goals and what protocols *(probes: instrument, tool, additional material)*, if any, do you use to set and oversee programmatic and/or learners' goals?

3. What technical and personnel resources do you have to apply to the goal setting process, and what resources would you like to have? How much time do you estimate you spend (in average) to talk *(probes: set, met, discuss, listen to)* with learners about their self-defined goals?

4. What data or knowledge about goal setting do you have, and what do you like to have?

5. What advantages and disadvantages do you see with the current goal setting process?

6. In your opinion, what does the future looks like for goal setting in Adult Basic Education?

2. Workshop protocol for Faculty

1. *In your opinion, what should the goal setting process achieve? (Alternative questions: What are the ultimate objectives of the goal setting process? What is that you want to achieve with the goal setting process? What Adult Basic Education (ABE) as a field would like to accomplish with the goal setting process?)*

2. From your perspective, what goals do learners desire to achieve?

3. What goals do affect (maximize/minimize) learner's social value? In what ways do these goals affect (maximize/minimize) learner's social value?

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4. What goals do affect (maximize/minimize) learners' quality of life? In what ways do these goals affect (maximize/minimize) learners' quality of life?

5. What programmatic goal interacts with learners' goals? In what ways? Can you please describe the type of relationships you see between these two (direct; presumed; uncertain)?

6. In what ways can the programmatic goals and learners goals be achieved?

APPENDIX F: CONSENTS

Consent Form for Interviews

Including Audio-Taping and Transcription

University of Massachusetts Boston
John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Introduction and Contact Information:

You are asked to take part in a research study that seeks to understand the ABE goal setting from the perspective of learners and local stakeholders with an interest in it. The principal investigator is Alma Hallulli-Biba, Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs, John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston.

Please read this consent form and feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions later, Mrs. Biba can discuss them with you. Her phone number is 508-769-8314 and her email address is Alma.Biba@jax.ufl.edu .

Description of the Project:

Questions in this interview will be focused on internal and external determinants that influence goal setting. Questions will also address the perspectives of adult learners as they set their goals throughout participation in ABE classes and if their goals are attained one year after participation. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview which will last approximately one hour.

Risks and Discomforts:

There is minimal risk or discomfort associated with this interview.

Confidentiality:

The information which you provide for this research study will be kept confidential at all times. Data files will not identify your name. The information you will provide during this interview will be accessible only to the researcher and stored on a secured computer and in a locked file cabinet.

Voluntary Participation:

The decision whether or not to take part in this research is voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should inform Alma Hallulli-Biba at 508-769-8314 of your decision.

Rights:

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form ant at any time during the study. You can reach Alma Hallulli-Biba at 508-769-8314.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at University of Massachusetts Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building-2-080, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA, 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or email at 617-287-5370 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Audio Taping and Transcription:

This study involves the audio taping of your interview with the researcher. The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the tape erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to taping or participation in this study. The consent for taping is effective until May 29, 2016. On or before that date, the tapes will be destroyed.

Signatures

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

Consent Form for ABE Value-Focused Thinking Workshops

Including Audio-Taping and Transcription

University of Massachusetts Boston
John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Introduction and Contact Information:

You are asked to take part in a value-focused thinking workshop that will identify ABE local stakeholder preferences and gain insight into stakeholder involvement in the goal setting process. The principal investigator is Alma Hallulli-Biba, Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs, John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston.

Please read this consent form and feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions later, Mrs. Biba can discuss them with you. Her phone number is 508-769-8314 and her email address is Alma.Biba@jax.ufl.edu .

Description of the Project:

Questions in this workshop will be focused on fundamental questions regarding the goal setting process. Questions will also address your perspective about what should the goal setting ought to achieve and what advantages and disadvantages you see with the current goal setting process. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a workshop which will last approximately 2 hours.

Risks and Discomforts:

There is minimal risk or discomfort associated with this workshop.

Confidentiality:

The information which you provide for this research study will be kept confidential at all times. Data files will not identify your name. The information you will provide during the workshop will be accessible only to the researcher and stored on a secured computer and in a locked file cabinet.

Voluntary Participation:

The decision whether or not to take part in this research is voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should inform Alma Hallulli-Biba at 508-769-8314 of your decision.

Rights:

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form ant at any time during the study. You can reach Alma Hallulli-Biba at 508-769-8314.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at University of Massachusetts Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building-2-080, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA, 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or email at 617-287-5370 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Audio Taping and Transcription:

This study involves the audio taping of your workshop with the researcher. The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the tape erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to taping or participation in this study. The consent for taping is effective until May 29, 2016. On or before that date, the tapes will be destroyed.

Signatures

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

University of Massachusetts Boston
John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Study: "Whose goals am I meeting? Policy and Practice Dilemmas for Adult Basic Education in the Era of Accountability"

Eligibility: Adult Basic Education Learners, aged 18 or above, who have consented to participating in the study, and have been previously interviewed.

Potential participant's name: _____

Phone number(s): _____

Dates of calls: Result: (no answer, left message, disconnected, moved, not interested, interested, other)
___/___/____ _____
___/___/____ _____
___/___/____ _____

Hello. May I speak with *<participant's name>*?

If potential participant is not available: Would you please ask *<participant's first name>* to call Alma Hallulli-Biba at 508-769-8314?

If potential participant is available: Hello, *<participant's first name>*. My name is Alma Hallulli-Biba and I'm calling to follow up on our prior interview regarding the voluntary research study that I am conducting. I was wondering if I could speak with you about it for a few minutes.

If potential participant is not interested to a follow-up interview: Thank you very much for your time.

Date of call: _____ Time: _____

APPENDIX H:
SAMPLE VALUE FOCUSED THINKING (VFT) WORKSHOP AGENDA

University of Massachusetts Boston
John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

"Whose goals am I meeting? Policy and Practice Dilemmas for Adult Basic Education in the Era of Accountability"
Value-Focused Thinking Session – (*Specify group in attendance*)
Date

Meeting purpose:
The purpose of this 'value-focused thinking' session is to clarify *(Specify group in attendance)* strategic and operational goals and objectives related to ABE goal setting process with the ultimate objective of making connections between the learners and programmatic goals. During the workshop you will be asked to try to make a distinction between the ultimate objectives of the goal setting process and the ways how these objectives can be achieved. The workshops are expected be very interactive, involving thinking hard about fundamental questions regarding the goal setting process, and what it would like to do.
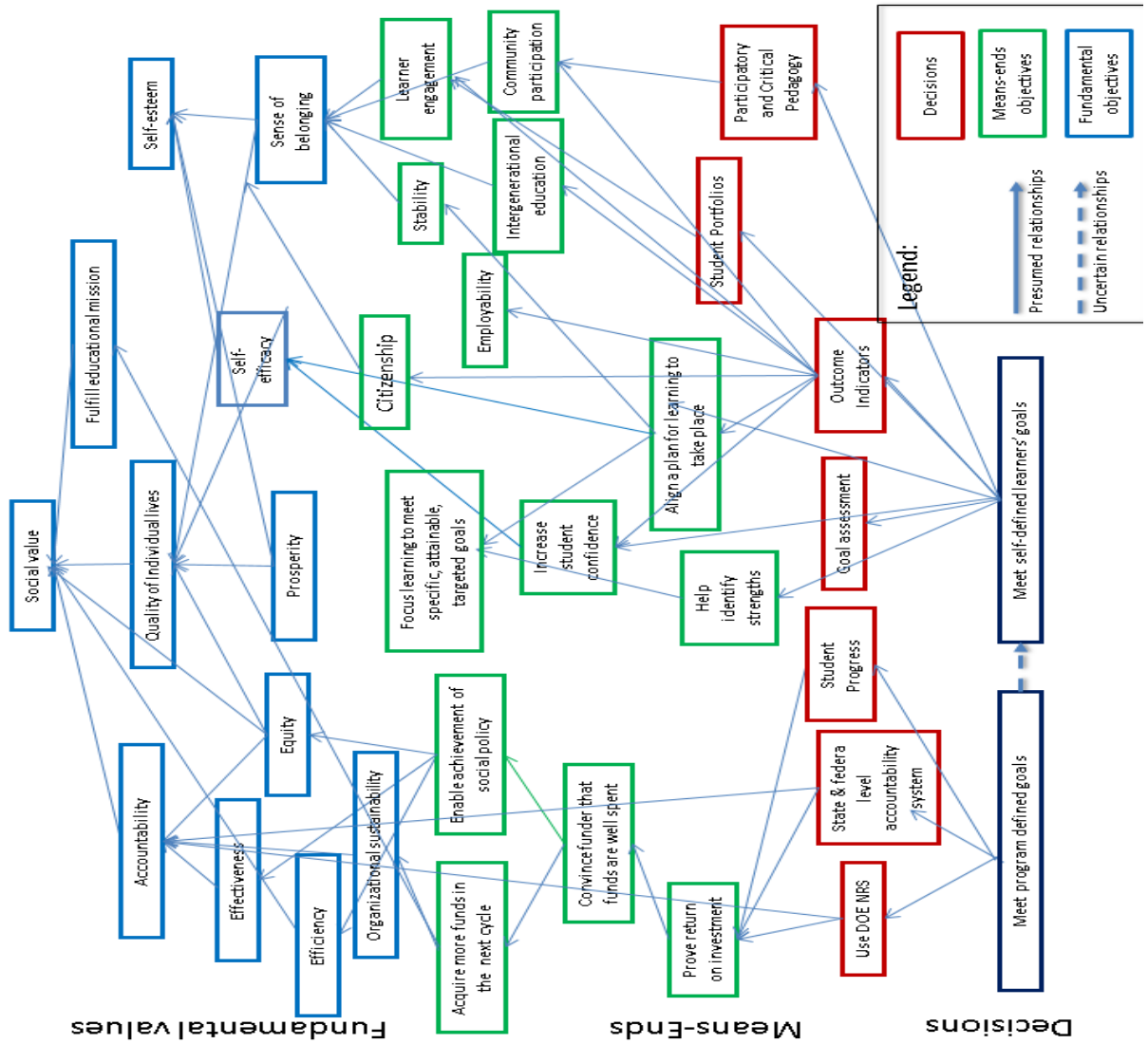

Adult Learning Center Team:

Researcher:
Alma H. Biba (University of Massachusetts Boston)

Agenda:
9:30   - set up, introductions, sign participation consents
09:30 - 10:30 - initial discussion of goals and values
10: 30- 11:00 - break for lunch (researcher will organize the goals and objectives and draw
                   relationships between them)
11:00 - 11:30 - reconvene to discuss VFT structure of *(Specify group in attendance)* objective
                   hierarchies.
11:30   - wrap-up

Pseudonym	Goals Set by Program	Met? Y/N	Interview Excerpts	Level of Instruction
Nok	3) Pas HiSET 4) Create a resume	N Y	*'So if I get the HiSET, I can go to the hospital and become a medical interpreter. I used to go to translate, you know, to the place for the abortions. They continue to call me, but I don't like to do that.'*	HiSET
Tung	4) Enter employment 5) Pass HiSET 6) Learn about or use community organizations or resources	Y N	*'I just want to do something more [pauses for some time to think about the choice of words] intelligent actually, using less of my physical strength'.* *I will take another class, [w]riting appraisals for insurance companies. That would give me time to be with my nine years old, to take care of his educational needs.*	HiSET
Kimberly	1) Pass HiSET 2) Participate in community activities	N Y	*'I hated high school, I absolutely hated it. When I turned 18 I decided to drop-out and that it would be better for me to get my HiSET. My counselor at my school, told me about here'.*	HiSET
Dottie	1)Pass HiSET 2)Volunteer in a program, community school, daycare 3)Participate in community activities	N Y Y	*'And we moved from a little town to a bigger city, Worcester, and the challenges were greater, and I started using drugs and I dropped out of school'.* *'I dropped out in the 9th grade. And 30 years later I am back'.* *'[My son] is a freshman, so I like to finish my high school before my youngest one finishes his'.*	HiSET
Mario	1)Retain current employment 2)Increase Earnings	Y N Y	*'[I] mean my chances are [bigger] here, with this program. 'Cause I can finish my ESOL class and transit to pre-HiSET and HiSET later. I have this dream of being first to [going] to*	ESOL

Pseudonym	Goals Set by Program	Met? Y/N	Interview Excerpts	Level of Instruction
	3)Increase computer literacy skills		*college from my family'.*	
Dina	1)Retain current employment 2)Learn about US Culture 3) Participate in community activities	Y Y Y	*'I am 55 now; time for me to go to school and start a new career is over'.* *'But I do like to communicate'.* *'See… communication is like a window for an immigrant, and for as long as this window remains closed, you cannot see the world, experience the greatness, and the warmth of the world…'*	ESOL
Sivash	1)Enter employment 2)Create a resume	N Y	*'I have to be here, you know, because of my unemployment'.*	ESOL
Ahmad	1)Enter employment 2)Create a resume	N Y	*'In February I was in jail for one month, than probation'.* *'..little by little I integrate. I have hope now.'* *'My long term goal is to hopefully find a job with United Nation Development Program in Africa'.*	ESOL
Carmen	1)Retain current employment 2)Help children with homework 2) Participate in community activities	Y Y	*The doctor say your son would never speak in his life. He speaks now, he is the best student in art. He has autism but [also] has extreme abilities, he is highly functional. In the regular school, I am fighting all the time with the system* *'I want to study social work. I know now how to help the parents of children with special needs and I want to contribute with my knowledge. I don't think I need a lot of courses, since I have my master's degree.'*	Family Literacy

Pseudonym	Goals Set by Program	Met? Y/N	Interview Excerpts	Level of Instruction
Jaqueline	1)Help children with homework 2) Get drivers' license	Y Y	*'Because my kids [help], and if you don't go to school, you stay like this [refers to her inability to speak and read and write]. I don't want to stay like this, do you understand?'* *'Kids go forward, they learn. If I don't understand anything, how am I going to be able to help my kids? I don't want to stay back.'*	Family Literacy
Mona	1)Enter employment 2)Participate in community activities 3)Get and use library card	Y Y	*'I [taught] math before but now I don't think to continue [to teach math], because I just [do] art'.* *'And I study English now to find good relations with other people who work with art'.*	Family Literacy
Tatiana	1)Retain current employment 2)Help children with homework 3)Buy a domicile	Y Y Y	*Because my problem is English. I am Russian, I speak Russian, all my friends are Russian, I work with Russians, so where am I going to practice?* *If I were to speak good English, I would change my job. Not that I don't like my job, but because I want to learn to live in America, without being always dependent on [me] being Russian.*	Family Literacy

Table 3: Program-defined Goals versus Participants' Interview Excerpts

APPENDIX K: MEANS OBJECTIVES, TEACHERS' VALUE STRUCTURES

Means Objectives	Evidence from Interviews
Improve communication between parents and children	[Learner] came to me and said "My kids are getting in trouble at school because they are always late". And so I helped her to make a chore chart and what they would do at night and they [her kids] would check it off, you know, what they would get ready for the next morning. We had it color coded per child and ready to put on her refrigerator.
Increase awareness of community organizations	Like the goal in the SMARTT rubric about being aware of community organizations and things like that. We set up classes to go to trips to the State House and other places. An entire class meets a goal like that, and we make sure that it happens.
Maximize alignment of curriculum with goals	And other things that we try to align with our curriculum, goals and the teaching process like the mock interviews, the dress for success fashion show and the job fair.
Allow communication to be part of the learners' experience	I think if your classroom is set up in such a way that you allow communication to be part of your learning experience, and you build goals into your own curriculum, with your conversations, with your morning messages, with your summing up or with the answering of the questions, than you are making time for your class to feel like a community. However you want to set it up – there is when a goal comes up: Hey, I am trying to look for a new apartment. You are? You are about to also set up a new goal.
Instill sense of accomplishment with low level learners	And what we did in the classroom, since I have the low level readers, and the non-English readers, I tried to be focused on each one of them personally, where they were and what they needed to do. If someone was learning the vowel sounds, maybe the goal for the next week or two would be to learn the vowel sounds. I had a paper that read "steps to goals" and we would have the date the student set the goal and if she met the goal will be that date.
Maximize sense of growth by setting small step goals	If you give them the same assignment that you give them a few weeks before, and they breeze through it and they say in two minutes 'I am finished' And you look at them and you say "Are you? In two class periods?" Because a week in ABE is that - only two class periods.
Responsibility to learners	They are dedicating time and effort to come to school and it is my responsibility to make most of that time well spent, in the way that it would benefit them the best. That is where the planning, and teacher training comes to play.
Convince state and federal agencies that process matters	And to see how hard they try. I think nobody takes that into account. That really bothers me when they [learners] state these goals. What the state requires is the fulfilment of these goals. Nobody really sees what work goes into the accomplishment of these goals. I wish DOE or ACLS come and sit into a class and see how hard they work.

Means Objectives	Evidence from Interviews
Respect the sense of hard-work that learners put to meeting goals	Our learners are used to going through hardship. It is built in their character; it is the way how they go on in life.
Maximize the number of SMARTT Goals	What can they achieve and what are realistic goals. What can be reasonable for us teachers, to help them achieve with the time and finances we have.
Set pathways for learners to achieve long-term goals	Let's take citizenship. My students are in their year one in class. They cannot have it as a goal because citizenship is a process that rather takes a long time. So we have to have them set their goals in a realistic and proper manner with seeing citizenship as a long term goal, and setting a pathway, how we are going to get there.
Create the sense of prospective goals	At this extent, we have to help them break down this goal into what is realistic into the given timeframe, and how we can do that. Well, one of the things we can do is come to school every day, so we accomplish the goal of our attendance. That is one way how we are going to get into that one goal. Things of that nature, putting it into their prospective, so they can understand the value in it.
Maximize sense of learner' accountability	They have to be accountable. As Grace said, they have to come to class, their attendance have to be excellent. Learners need to be accountable to themselves, to the program.
Maximize sense of return-on-investment	We are not setting the goal by saying you are going to achieve this test score this year or you are out of the program. With the smaller steps they achieve day by day, goals are attainable when they come to class. Students will see that teachers are certainly invested in their wants and their needs and their desires, but you have to see that they are giving it back to you also.
Maximize seriousness of the learning process	Up against them being an adult, a parent and a worker, and somebody needs to pay bills, and I am in class tired and I have been working 12 hours at night… It is a very special school and we come with that understanding. It is not a typical classroom teacher that does not understand why the homework isn't done and why you are 45 minutes late. And what do you mean you have to take that phone call to your child's school? No phone calls here! We have to be flexible, but they have to see the seriousness as well.
Ensure compliance with state accountability	I think we as teachers can perfectly take care of the state accountability. We know we are a grant-funded program. And if we need to show our state for accountability purposes that our students are involved in community activities, then we put our community activities right here in the school. We have job fairs, and we have coffee hours, and we take them to the museum, and at the library and at all those things. Yes, we know it benefits them. But primarily, we know we are doing this for our jobs, to keep getting the money.

Means Objectives	Evidence from Interviews
Find balance between meeting learners goals and programmatic goals	Is it super-important for them to know where exactly the historical museum is? Probably not! But is it important for them to get in here and write a complete sentence, so when they go home at the end of the day they can help their child write a complete sentence? That is huge, you know. So we are doing what we have to do, to complete our job as a grant funded center, and do one hundred ten percent for our learners. I think we have to find a balance, how am I going to do it all? That is what it boils down to.
Maximize availability of teacher time for goal sharing	What I struggle with, when they are going to the ABE side of the things, when they are going to get their HiSET degree. You know in our classrooms, is reading and writing and math and world language, and listening skills and dictation. And all of this is geared toward improving their MAPT [standardized testing] scores, so they can move to the next level. But we still have to make time to talk about their families, their individual lives, why they feel sad in the weekends. Time [for students] to talk to us is limited. There is not enough time for everything, to share their true purpose in life, their dreams and aspirations…
Minimize dismissal of learners' goals or needs	The longer we are here, the easier is for us and our learners, since the majority of us taught in grade level. I taught 4th and 5th grade. It is easier for me to say, I will talk to you, I promise you, and stay ten minutes after class. But right now, if we get out of topic here, I am going to lose all these students. And we have to just persevere, we have to move forward, right here, right now. But I promise, I am all yours after class. So you are not dismissing their goal or their need.
Maximize sense of socialization	It is hard, so many times I feel I am in a counseling crew, or is a community center where people have the need to socialize.
Competency in reading and writing	My students, if you ask them in the beginning of the year, what goals they have, they will tell you, read, write and speak. And if you ask them, why is that important, they will tell you that if they know how to read, write, and speak they will find a job. If they can do that, they can move on with their education. If they can do that, they will become fluent. That is what they believe. A lot of them depend on the ability to read, write and speak. And a lot of them believe they will be OK once they have that degree of fluency. Comfortability and competency in reading, writing speaking and understanding English is what their ultimate goal will be.
Comfortability with understanding and speaking	
Maximize expression of learners' voice	And the other thing is they do not want translators. When they go places they want to speak themselves because thing are personal. They want the control of themselves. They want their own voice in this language.
Employability as a long term	A lot of them want great jobs eventually, but that is not their primary

Means Objectives	Evidence from Interviews
goal	goal, because they know they cannot get them. They are aware of the restrains on them. Yes, employability might be a huge long term goal, but that is not what they are here right away for. And they know that is going to get a long time for them to get it. But they will work part-time jobs, knowing that once they acquire the language, they can definitely move on.
Remove or adjust the weights on the goal instrument	I think the A Goals are important to people that work. They are the hardest to achieve, but they are the most important to the state and federal government. As a teacher, I am really happy if they achieve a C goal. One of my important C goals is get a library card. Because if they just came to the country they cannot buy a house. They have to achieve the C goals to get to the B goals to get to the A goals. The rubric seems backwards. They should have put the C goals at the top.
Increase opportunities for highly educated adult learners	But some of our students are very well educated. Some are not educated at all, but some are very well educated. When you ask them are you looking for a job, they know they are not near where they are ready to go to their field. And they are realistic about that. And also they know the state of the labor market now, after the recession. Fewer jobs and fewer opportunities in the job market for our students.
Increase learning opportunities for older adult students	Most of the time my students are happy to learn something about the world out there. Some of them are older, they are happy to learn something new every day. The new world they came in, something about the new setting they are in. And they are very proud to learn their vocabulary.
Increase functionality of learners in community	They need to learn how to read and listen in English so they can function in our community. And they know that. They came to America for a reason, they did come here for a better life and for more opportunities.
Convey the 'common ground rules'	I want you to come to my potluck, I want you to come to my church, I want you to meet my minister, let's go and celebrate. I want to celebrate your diversity, I also want to celebrate our uniqueness, but now we are in common ground and we need to learn the language, we need to learn how to speak.
Honor uniqueness and celebrate diversity	Don't get rid of your culture, because you are you and your culture defines you. That is what America is, we are a salad bowl; we are not a melting pot. You are not expected to come here and put your Red Sox hat on and eat hot dogs and drink beers on Friday night.
Tailor goals for different ABE tracks	Let's just categorize goals: goals for Family Literacy, for ESOL, for HiSET. They should be categorized. They are not one size-fits-all.

APPENDIX L: SITE AGREEMENT

To Whom It May Concern,

I have spoken to Ms. Biba and discussed at great length her research project. I am aware of what the project involves and the potential involvement of our students and staff.
Ms. Biba has permission to interview our students and staff and to access whatever data that she needs to complete her project.

Sincerely,

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Administrator of the Adult Basic Education Learning Center

APPENDIX M: UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, BOSTON

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
617.287.5370
Institutional Review Board

To: Ms. Hallulli-Biba
        Alma Hallulli-Biba
Public Affairs

From: Kristen Kenny, BFA
        Administrative Chair, Institutional Review Board
        University of Massachusetts Boston

Title of Protocol: Whose goals am I meeting?: Policy and practice dilemmas in adult basic
education in the era of accountability
Type of Review: Expedited
IRB Approval Date: 6/12/2015
IRB Expiration Date: 6/12/2016
2015121

This Project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Massachusetts Boston IRB, Assurance
FWA00004634. As Principal Investigator you are responsible for the following:
1.   Submission in writing of any and all changes to this project (e.g., protocol, recruitment
materials, consent form, etc.) to the IRB for review and approval prior to initiation of the change(s).
2.   Submission in writing of any and all unexpected event(s) that occur during the course of this
project.
3.   Submission in writing of any and all unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
4.   Use of only IRB date stamped copies of the consent form(s), questionnaire(s), letter(s),
advertisement(s), etc. in your research.
5.   Submission of a continuation prior to the IRB expiration date.
6.   Submission of a final report upon completion of this project.

The IRB can and will terminate projects that are not in compliance with these requirements. Please be aware of your expiration date, all research must have a yearly continuing review by the IRB. Please direct all questions, correspondence and IRB forms to me in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. Please contact me by phone at (617)287-5374 or email at kristen.kenny@umb.edu.

Sincerely,

Kristen Kenny, Research Compliance Specialist

IRB Administrative Chair, IACUC and IRB Administrator

Office of Research and Sponsored Projects

University of Massachusetts Boston

T 617.287.5370   Kristen.Kenny@umb.edu

Alma H. Biba, M.Sc., M.P.A., M.A.

Academic Appointments:

Position

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ESOL Teacher **Worcester Adult Learning Center** **Worcester Public Schools,** Worcester, MA	April 2007-June 2013
Family Literacy Teacher **Worcester Adult Learning Center** **Worcester Public Schools,** Worcester, MA	April 2007-June 2013

Administrative and Research Appointments:

Position

_____

Clinical Quality Program Coordinator **UF CARES** **University of Florida, College of Medicine** Jacksonville, FL	February 2014 – Present
AETC F/C Program Coordinator **UF CARES** **University of Florida, College of Medicine** Jacksonville, FL	February 2014 – Present
Research Assistant/Editorial Assistant **Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs** **University of Massachusetts, Boston,** Boston, MA	September 2006 – June 2013
Administration Director **John Snow Inc.** **USAID Funded Project,** Tirana, Albania	January 2004 – September 2004
Administration Director **Catholic Relief Services,** Tirana, Albania	October 1998 – December 2003
National Education Coordinator **International Rescue Committee,** Tirana, Albania	September 1996 – October 1998

Education:

University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA
Doctor of Philosophy, Education Policy
Dissertation Title*: "Whose Goals Am I Meeting?" Policy and Practice Dilemmas in Adult Basic Education in the Era of Accountability*
Major Areas: Adult Basic Education, Accountability, Decision Models
Committee Chair: Michael P. Johnson

University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA
Master of Science, Public Policy, June 2009

University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom
Master of Arts, Contemporary European Studies, June 2006

University of Nebraska & University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania
Master of Public Administration, June 2004

University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania
Bachelor Degree, Language and Literature, June 1995

Research

Current Projects:

- Issues of stigma among HIV positive homeless population: a qualitative study among Path Home SPNS Grantees investigating how HIV stigma negatively impacts clinical outcomes and housing status

- "Jax Health Matters" Initiative, Healthy Living Leadership Academy

- How can values elicitation in Adult Basic Education support goals-setting for student-success?

- Hepatitis B incidence among refugees and immigrants in Jacksonville, Florida; recommendations for future interventions

- Adult Basic Education Policy in the era of immigration reform and workforce development

- Health Literacy and HIV Care: How is literacy impacting access to services, clinical outcomes and the HIV Treatment Cascade

Grants and Scholarships:

Department of Homeland Security, "Citizenship Classes for ABE". Funded at 100,000 USD. Principal investigator, John McGovern, Worcester Adult Learning Center.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Capacity Building Grant for Family Literacy Classes". Funded at 33,000 USD. Principal investigator, John McGovern, Worcester Adult Learning Center.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Adult Basic Education 5-year grant". Funded at 498,000 USD. Principal investigators: Sergio Paez, Worcester Public Schools John McGovern, Worcester Adult Learning Center.

Soros Foundation, Graduate Research Fellowship, Sussex University, July 2004 – June 2005, funded at £18,000.

FCO (Foreign Commonwealth Office), Graduate Research Fellowship, Sussex University, July 2004 – June 2005, funded at £18,000.

Publications:

Stanford, J., **Biba, A**., Khubchadani, J., Webb, F., Rathore, M.H. "Community-engaged strategies to promote hepatitis B testing and linkage to care in immigrants in Florida", *Journal of Epidemiology and Global Health*, 2016.

Johnson, M.P., Hollander, J. and **Hallulli, A**. "Maintain, Demolish, Re-purpose: Policy Design for Vacant Land Management using Decision Models", to *Cities*, 2013.

Editorial Work:

Johnson, M.P., Keisler, J., Solak, S., Turcotte, D., Bayram, A. and R.B. Drew. 2015. *Decision Science for Housing and Community Development: Localized and Evidence-Based Responses to Distressed Housing and Blighted Communities*. In press, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Johnson, M.P. (Ed.) 2012. *Community-Based Operations Research: Decision Modeling for Local Impact and Diverse Populations*. New York: Springer. ISBN: 978-1-4614-0805-5.

Presentations:

"How Can Value Elicitation in Adult Basic Education Support Goal Setting for Student Success?" (With Michael Johnson), INFORMS Fall Annual Meeting, Nashville, TN, November, 2016.

"Data Sharing between Institutional Electronic Health Records (EHR) and CAREware®-Bridging the Chasm" (with Mirza Ayesha; Maraqa Nizar, Guthrie, Kendall and Rathore, Mobeen), 2016 National Ryan White Conference on HIV Care and Treatment, Washington DC, August, 22, 2016.

"Maintain, Demolish, Re-purpose: Policy Design for Vacant Land Management using Decision Models" (with Justin Hollander and Michael Johnson), Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs Seminar Series, University of Massachusetts Boston, December 4, 2012.

"Maintain, Demolish, Re-purpose: Policy Design for Vacant Land Management using Decision Models" (with Justin Hollander and Michael Johnson), INFORMS Fall Annual Meeting, Phoenix, AZ, October 16, 2012.

"Decision Models for Residential Housing Planning in an Era of Municipal Shrinkage" (with Justin Hollander, Michael Johnson and Ching-Mei Lin), INFORMS Fall Annual Meeting, Charlotte, NC, November 13, 2011.

"Decision Models for Residential Housing Planning in an Era of Municipal Shrinkage" (with Justin Hollander and Michael Johnson), INFORMS Northeast Regional Conference, Amherst, MA, May 7, 2011

"From Conscientization to Workforce Development: Examining the Effects of Neo-liberalism on the Radical Underpinning of both Adult Basic Education Programs and Public Higher Education for Adults in Massachusetts" (with Ann Withorn), NEPSA New England Political Science Association Annual Conference, April 23, 2010

Previous Experience:
Journalist, Albanian Press, Albania (1995 - 2000)

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