How Can Value Elicitation in Adult Basic Education Support Learners’ Success in Goal-Setting Policy?

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Background

- Adult Basic Education
- Learner Goal Setting
- Federal and State Accountability Requirements
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Problem Statement

- ABE learner outcomes, represented as ‘goals’, reflect an emphasis on return-on-investment strategies
- Currently, a greater emphasis is placed on that subset of adult learners’ goals that are easily measured, attainable, and that are associated with public outcomes.
- Current performance standards often do not capture learners’ self-defined goals.
Reveal and disentangle the conflicting preferences fueled by outcome-based accountability requirements

Understand and examine ABE learners’ and teachers’ values associated with the goals setting policy

Provides valuable insights for ABE local stakeholders and policy makers
Reveal and disentangle the conflicting preferences fueled by outcome-based accountability requirements

Understand and examine ABE learners’ and teachers’ values associated with the goals setting policy

Provide valuable information for ABE local stakeholders and policy makers

In the last two decades Mass DOE has made learners’ goal setting and outcome assessment a centerpiece of data reporting

ABE learners’ self-defined goals should drive learners’ success and are often missing from current ABE accountability measures.

Gives a voice to the study population & influences the ongoing debate about whether and how adult learners’ voice could be incorporated into accountability.
WHO ARE ABE LEARNERS?

Approximately 2.5 million adult learners per years are enrolled in ABE; this number represents only 6% of the estimated population that are in need of services.

In Massachusetts, in FY2012, 21,391 students were served. 60% of the student body is comprised by ESOL Learners.

The wait-list in Massachusetts is almost as long as the number of students served – 17,145 adults are still waiting to enroll in one of the ABE classes.

“Workers who study”
Mostly women
Low-income
Mostly immigrants
## ENVIRONMENT OF YOUR COUNTRY

Describe some of the native animals and plants that can be seen in your country.

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### Countable Outcomes Requiring Valid and Reliable Data/Documentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Goal</th>
<th>Main</th>
<th>Date Set</th>
<th>Date Met</th>
<th>Quarterly Follow Up</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Required Documentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a. Enter Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan-Mai Apr-Jun Jul-Sep Oct-Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td>Currently unemployed student gets a job and earns wages one quarter after the goal has been set.</td>
<td>Student who gets a job continues to be employed in the third quarter after the Retain Employment goal has been met.</td>
<td>Data match if SSN is provided Survey student if SSN is not provided Data match if SSN is provided Survey student if SSN is not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b. Retain New Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan-Mai Apr-Jun Jul-Sep Oct-Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Retain Current Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan-Mai Apr-Jun Jul-Sep Oct-Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student who is currently employed continues to be employed in the third quarter after the Retain Current Employment goal has been set.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Data match if SSN is provided Survey student if SSN is not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Obtain GED</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan-Mai Apr-Jun Jul-Sep Oct-Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td>Achieves score that qualifies for GED 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.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Data match regardless of whether or not SSN is provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Complete some adult HS credits and/or MCAS tests toward ADP</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan-Mai Apr-Jun Jul-Sep Oct-Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td>Achieves or successfully completes required high school course work for an Adult Diploma Program or External Diploma Program.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Transcript from adult high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Obtain ADP</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan-Mai Apr-Jun Jul-Sep Oct-Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td>Achieves high school diploma granted by local school committee. Must meet state competency determination as well as local requirements.</td>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a. Enter ABE Transition to Community College program</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan-Mai Apr-Jun Jul-Sep Oct-Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Copy of an acceptance letter or other written verification from transition program on the school's letterhead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 b. Complete ABE Transition to Community College program</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan-Mai Apr-Jun Jul-Sep Oct-Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Signed letter or other document on the school's letterhead confirming enrollment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Obtain More Satisfying/ Appropriate Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan-Mai Apr-Jun Jul-Sep Oct-Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student documents this goal by demonstrating improved employment by either: (1) providing evidence in writing, or a portfolio, or a video, or an audio tape.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# MASSACHUSETTS’ ABE GOAL INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column A (Federal NRS Outcomes)</th>
<th>Column B</th>
<th>Column C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enter/Retain Employment</td>
<td>Participate in community activities</td>
<td>Be removed from public assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain more Satisfying Employment</td>
<td>Buy a domicile</td>
<td>Retain current job by meeting new requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain HiSET</td>
<td>Start a business</td>
<td>Apply for a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter Community College</td>
<td>Register to Vote</td>
<td>Go on a job interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply for U.S. Citizenship</td>
<td>Get a drivers’ license</td>
<td>Learn about debit and credit card use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Quantifiable
- Promotes ‘creaming’ of SMART Goals
- Difficult instrument to be used with the learner
  - Limits the necessary dialogue
  - Ignores mutable, changing goals
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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

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

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

3) How congruent are ABE stakeholders’ perspectives on learner goal setting?
STUDY DESIGN SUMMARY

Conceptual Framework

Study of ABE Learners’ Goals (Descriptive Component)

Analytic Method

Live History Methodology

Documentary Analysis

Stakeholder involvement in Goal Setting and Structuring of Stakeholder Preferences (Exploratory Component)

Value-Focused Thinking

Contributions to ABE Policy and Practice
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

• Proposition 1: ABE Learners Goals are intrinsic factors that affect motivation, retention and gain

• Proposition 2: ABE Learner Goal Setting could be envisioned as a decision problem between stakeholders whose conflicting interests could be articulated and negotiated.
• Which goals do participants in ABE programs see as fundamental and how congruent are ABE stakeholders’ perspectives on learner goal setting?

**Research Design: Mixed-Method**

- **Descriptive phase**: life history methodology and documentary analysis to explore internal and external determinants that influence learner goal setting.

- **Exploratory phase**: decision analytic framework to identify ABE learners’ and teachers’ preferences and gain insights into stakeholder involvement.
STUDY LOGISTICS: DESCRIPTIVE COMPONENT

12 ABE learners: 10 foreign-born, 2 US-Born
STUDY LOGISTICS: DESCRIPTIVE COMPONENT

12 ABE Learners; 10 Foreign-Born; 2 US Born

6 Caucasians
2 Hispanics, 2 Asians, 2 African; all living in Worcester, MA
12 ABE Learners, age 18 and above; 10 Foreign-Born; 2 US Born

6 Caucasians, 2 Hispanics, 2 Asians, 2 African; all living in Worcester, MA

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 12 ABE Learners
STUDY LOGISTICS: DESCRIPTIVE COMPONENT

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Observation of adult learner portfolios and program documents pertaining to learner’ goal setting
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Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 12 ABE Learners

Observation of adult learner portfolios and program documents pertaining to learner’ goal setting

Focus on perspectives of ABE adult learners as they set and meet their goals
ABE LEARNERS’ GOALS: DETERMINANTS

Theme #1: Prior Challenges and Struggles

Theme #1a: Overcoming prior struggles

Theme #1b: Overcoming setbacks

Theme #1c: Overcoming structural barriers

Theme #1d: Overcoming communication barriers
ABE LEARNERS’ GOALS: DETERMINANTS

Theme #2: Opportunities for Growth

Theme #2a: Building opportunities from prior strengths, skills or talents

Theme #2b: Opportunities from ABE local programs

Theme #2c: Systemic and community incentives
ABE LEARNERS’ GOALS: DETERMINANTS

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

Theme #3a: Affirmation of self

Theme #3b: Social activism

Theme #3c: Integration
STUDY DESIGN SUMMARY

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(Descriptive Component)

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Value-Focused Thinking

Contributions to ABE Policy and Practice
WHAT STEPS ARE INVOLVED IN REVEALING AND MAPPING OBJECTIVES?

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

1. Inquire about what objectives do stakeholders attribute to the goal setting process
   - **Question:** What do you expect the goal setting policy to achieve?

2. Structure objectives – distinguish between fundamental and means objectives
   - **Question:** Why is this goal important?

3. Reveal presumed/uncertain relationships between objectives; Build an objective hierarchy
   - **Question:** In what ways can we achieve this goal?

*Figure 2: Map of steps involved in VFT methodology (adapted from Sheng et al., 2010)*
STUDY LOGISTICS: EXPLORATORY COMPONENT

Ex-post analysis of interviews with ABE learners, to extrapolate values associated with their goals

Value-Focused Thinking Workshop with 9 ABE Teachers
STUDY LOGISTICS: EXPLORATORY COMPONENT
ABE LEARNERS

Ex-post analysis of interviews with ABE learners, to extrapolate values associated with their goals.

VFT methodology performed for a representative sample, deriving preliminary finding.

Analysis repeated for more students, until saturation.

Aggregated value structures and modelled a means-end network and a fundamental hierarchy.

Investigated current metrics associated with learners’ goals.
9 ABE teachers participated in a value-focused thinking workshop. Data analysis of in-person discussions, research-only analysis sessions, and multiple rounds of drafts of objective hierarchies. Modelled a means-ends network and a fundamental values’ hierarchy. Investigated current metrics associated with ABE teachers’ values. Reflected on congruence of ABE learners’ and teachers’ values.
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Value-Focused Thinking

Contributions to ABE Policy and Practice

November 15, 2016

Biba + Johnson Adult Education Values
ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

• Present a new conceptual framework to explain ABE learner goal setting;

• First multi-disciplinary, mixed method study of ABE learner goal setting;

• Findings generated by this study are a useful addition to the growing literature of decision modeling in education.
POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- Influence the ongoing debate about whether and how adult learners’ voices and experiences be incorporated into accountability;

- Promote use of decision analysis in solving other problems that involve uncertainty within ABE programs;

- Renew the debate at the ABE state and federal level, of policies that promote mutual or multiple stakeholders’ accountability;

- Contribute to the discussion between educators and learners about learners’ self-defined goals.
FUTURE RESEARCH

• Similar research in other states, in order to examine the relationship between implementation of local accountability policies and learners’ goal setting.

• Comparative studies between states that exhibit differences in the learner goal setting policy and practice.

• New opportunities for action research studies by other practitioners and researchers engaged with the day-to-day practice and delivery of ABE programs.

• Modeling of values for other stakeholders involved in the goal setting process, such as ABE program administrators, counselors, and state directors.
FUTURE RESEARCH

• Research investigating metrics of interest to ABE learners may come up with alternative performance measurement systems for the goal setting policy;

• Similar research on foreign-born, immigrant, ABE learners may provide interesting insights to ABE practitioners and policy makers;

• Examination of power and influence of stakeholders in ABE, using stakeholder theory and stakeholder analysis.
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Questions and Feedback