LEARNING STRATEGIES OF YOUTH IN

TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD IN

THE URBAN LIFE-SKILLS

PROGRAM OF A POCKET

FULL OF HOPE®

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a difference in the way young people approach how they learn. They can now see themselves as learners.

I would like to thank my doctoral committee members, Dr. Lynna Ausburn, Dr. Charles (Bob) Davis, and Dr. Kouider Mokhtari, for their counsel, guidance, and brilliant minds.

I would like to say a special thanks to Linda Conti for always saying kind words that were reassuring and timely. You are the greatest!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

<u>Youth At-Risk</u>

> If a person is accepted, fully accepted, and in
> this acceptance there is no judgment, only
> compassion and sympathy, the individual is able to
> come to grips with himself, to develop the courage
> to give up his defenses and face his true self.
> (Rogers, 1961, p. 305)

Today's adolescents face a different social reality
than their parents did. Contemporary music, sexual activity,
gender confusion, violence, gang participation, and risky
behavior are a few examples of challenges that face today's
youth (Carroll, 1999). However, when youth are given a
chance to develop high self-esteem and confidence and to
gain control over a portion of their lives, they are better
able to negotiate the turbulent path from childhood to
adulthood. Education and training in life skills through
school peer mediation, peer tutoring, and peer facilitation
can empower these individuals to approach learning with new
strategies in this transition stage of their lives. Adult
learning concepts support this approach to learning.

Tracing the exact origins of the term "at risk" as it
applies to education and youth can be a daunting task. In
attempting to understand the concepts and issues that
surround the term at-risk, many problems are encountered.
Such problems focus upon definition, cause and effect,

assessing and determining the population, and development
and implementation of both prevention and crisis management
programs that impact the various destructive behaviors that
place youth at risk. The term has appeared frequently in
educational literature, federal reports, and legislative
mandates. The term at-risk youth and adolescence are used
somewhat interchangeably. It appears that to be at-risk is
to be between the ages of 13 and 18 (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000).
At-risk youth are youth who are less likely to complete high
school or who are apt to graduate considerably below their
capabilities.

These youth are at-risk because of various societal
factors. At-risk factors include chemical dependence,
teenage pregnancy, poverty, disaffection with school and
society, high mobility families, emotional and physical
abuse, physical and emotional disabilities, and learning
disabilities that do not qualify students for special
education but nevertheless impede their progress (Capuzzi &
Gross, 2000). Factors such as these can not only cause
school problem but can also lead to problems with the-
judicial system. In 1997, 19% of all persons arrested in
America were under the age of 18, and 6% were under age 15.
The female juvenile violent crime arrest rate increased
almost 42% between 1990 and 1996 and rose from 44.9 arrests

per 100,000 female juveniles to 63.7 arrests at that time (Bennett, 1999).

The statistics associated with being at-risk are staggering (Bennett, 1999). The percentage of births to unmarried mothers among at-risk Blacks increased 200% between 1960 and 1997. Currently, more than two-thirds of all Black children are born out of wedlock. In 1997, 69.2% of birth to Black mothers, 40.9% of births to Hispanic mothers, and 25.8% of births to White mothers were to unmarried women. This amounts to a total of more than 1.25 million births out of wedlock.

<u>Life Skills Training Program</u>

A life skills training program is a program that focuses on promotion, prevention, and intervention alternatives for at-risk youth (Price, Cowen, Lorion, & Mckay, 1988). A life-skills training curriculum consists of five main components.

1. Students are given information about the short-term consequences of substance abuse; biofeedback demonstrates the immediate effects of cigarette smoking.
2. Decision-making skills are taught to foster students' critical thinking. Counter arguments to advertising appears are formulated.
3. Coping skills are taught so students deal with stress more effectively.
4. Social skills training for resisting peer pressure is implemented. The training sessions include such topics as dealing with shyness, coping with dating, and

assertiveness skills.

5.   Self-improvement is emphasized by helping
     students to develop a positive self-image
     using learning principles. (Botvin, 1986, p.
     498)

Life skills training programs are used in many
different ways. One example is the CHOICES (Challenge, Hope,
Opportunity, Insight, Change, Empowerment, and Success)
program. CHOICES focuses on helping youth make good healthy
life choices through weekly life-skills group meetings, drug
and alcohol education, cultural enrichment activities,
community service, and self-esteem building exercises. On-
site staff counselors help at-risk youth stay in school and
develop leadership skills.

Another innovative delinquency-prevention life skills
training program that is positively affecting youth is
called "Stages". Stages combines drama performance with
prevention activities. Counselors meet once a week with
youth to develop self-awareness, self-esteem, and a positive
self-image through socialized role-play and modeling.

Transition to Adulthood

In 1971, Margaret Mead concluded in her famous study
Coming of Age in Samoa that adolescence characteristics are
solely determined by each culture. Some cultures use
ceremonies to clearly establish a point at which a child has
become an adult. For example, one native culture uses a

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special ceremony for boys. The ritual includes isolation from the community, starvation, and circumcision. After this process, the boy is then given equal status with his elders in the men's house and allowed to hunt (Slavson, 1965). On the other hand, Native American children are given a great deal of freedom and are allowed to explore and be independent quite early in their lives. Disliking a show of temper, Native Americans rarely discipline their children unless real danger exists. As part of the normal progression from childhood to adulthood, they believe that a child should be allowed to make mistakes and to learn the natural consequences of misbehavior (Johnson, 1967).

Another anthropological study in the Eskimo society found that youth were never physically separated from his family (Cavan & Cavan, 1968). As adult skills were learned, the child's status increased, and in some groups, special recognition was given as each new stage is reached. A special step toward adulthood was reached when a boy was given his own kayak, usually about 12. The capturing of the first major meat called for a special celebration, and the boy was now considered ready for marriage. This journey from childhood to adulthood has an alliance of family and community-based activities.

In traditional African societies, there is no ceremony

at all to mark the transition to adulthood (Fortas, 1970).
They believe that adolescence is not a separate stage of
life, and people of different ages are not separate from
each other. The social sphere of adult and child is
undivided.

However, today's African-American society is
considerably different than the traditional African society.
African-American females, particularly those from low
socioeconomic groups, are confronted with several risk
factors as they progress through adolescence into adulthood.
Some challenges encountered by African-American girls may
not be experienced to the same degree by girls from other
ethnic groups. African-American girls often at an early age
undertake adult responsibilities such as the care of younger
siblings or doing household duties (Henly,1993; Scott-Jones,
Roland, & White, 1989).

Despite these challenges, African-Americans female
adolescents exhibit strength and resiliency in many areas.
Because these girls often assume adult responsibilities
early, they may internalize high self-confidence and
independence. For example, African-American female
adolescents have lower levels of substance use (Gottfredson
& Koper, 1996) and generally have higher self-esteem (Dukes
& Martinez, 1994) and a more positive body image than White

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female adolescents (Akan & Grilo, 1995).

Some adolescents, especially those from low-income families, may feel that life has little to offer in terms of middle class wealth; therefore, having a child may be one way of achieving status and of demonstrating self-expression. For some teenagers, having a baby is a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood (Read, 1988).

The young African-American male is commonly appointed as the man of the house usually between the ages of 11 and 14 (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 2000). This is attributed largely to an increase in single parent female-headed households. The transition to adult years of young African-American males can be a time of extraordinary challenges. The African-American male is continually faced with many individual challenges that may not be issues for young White middle-class male. These challenges include staying alive to the age of 25 and encountering racism, prejudice, and discrimination (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 2000). Other challenges include taking on the role of father, brother, and caretaker for the family.

In addition to family and societal pressures, young African-American males face personal pressures. For the African-American male, personal growth is often complicated by poverty, urban living, limited educational and

occupational opportunities, and a host of other social
problems (Franklin, 1999). In recent years, terms such as
"crisis," "at-risk," "marginal," and "endangered" have been
used with increasing regularity to describe the plight and
condition of young Black males (Anderson, 1990; Kunjufu,
1985; Madhubuti, 1990; Taylor-Gibbs, 1988).

Family background characteristics are more favorable
for Whites. For example, parental education is lower for
Hispanics and higher for Whites. Broken homes are more
prevalent among Blacks and least common among Whites. Family
incomes in the adolescent years are highest for Whites and
smallest for Blacks (Cameron & Heckman, 2001).

As awareness of the acute nature of the problems facing
young Black males has grown, an array of innovative
educational programs aimed at preventing hardships and
addressing the particular needs of these youth have been
initiated. These initiatives have included various mentoring
and job training programs that match youth with adult role
models (McPartland & Nettles, 1991) as well as rites of
passage programs aimed at socializing and preparing young
males for manhood, fatherhood, and community responsibility
(Watson & Smitherman, 1996). On the other hand, young
females, particularly African American, can be consciously
prepared for a sociopolitical environment of racial, gender,

and economic oppression by fostering the development of a
resistance that will provide the necessary tools to think
critically about oneself, about the world, and about one's
place in it (Robinson & Ward, 1991). In relationships like
mother figures and "sister friends" or "sister girls",
African-American girls have safe spaces for speaking up
about their own realities which affirm their womanhood in
connection with their community (Iglesias & Cormier, 2002).

As these youth are taking on adult roles, it is
important to understand adult learning concepts. Adult
education is "a process whereby persons whose major social
roles are characteristic of adult status undertake
systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose
of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values or
skills" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 9). Since at-risk
youth are in transition to adulthood, major adult learning
concepts that can be applied to them are andragogy, self-
directed learning, perspective transformation, real-life
learning, learning-how-to-learn, and empowerment.

<div align="center">Learner-Centered Concepts</div>

Andragogy

In 1968, Malcolm Knowles proposed "a new label and new
technology" of adult learning to distinguish it from pre-
adult schooling (p. 351). The European concept of andragogy,

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which he defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn," was contrasted with pedagogy, the art and science of helping children learn (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). Andragogy became a rallying point for those trying to define the field of adult education as separate from other areas of education.

The five assumptions underlying andragogy describe the adult learner as someone who (1) has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning, (2) has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning, (3) has learning needs closely related to changing social roles, (4) is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge, and (5) is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors. From these assumptions, Knowles (1980) proposed a program planning model for designing, implementing, and evaluating educational experiences with adults. For example, with regard to the first assumption that as adults mature, they become more independent and self-directing, Knowles suggested that the classroom climate should be one of "adultness," both physically and psychologically. In an "adult" classroom, adults "feel accepted, respected, and supported". Further more, there exists "a spirit of mutuality between teachers and students as joint inquirers"

(p. 47). Moreover, adults can manage other aspects of their lives, they are capable of directing, or at least assisting in planning, their own learning.

The validity of andragogy as a theory of adult learning was the topic of many writings, debates and discussions in the 1970s and early 1980s. At first the main point of contention was whether andragogy could be considered a "theory" of adult learning. Davenport and Davenport (1985), in their chronicle of the debate, note that andragogy has been classified as a theory of adult education, theory of adult learning, theory of technology of adult learning, method of adult education, technique of adult education, and a set of assumptions (p. 157). Hartree (1984) questioned whether there was a theory at all, suggesting that perhaps these were just principles of good practice, or descriptions of "what the adult learner should be like" (p. 205). Knowles (1989) himself came to agree that andragogy is less a theory of adult learning than "a model of assumptions about learning or a conceptual framework that serves as a basis for an emergent theory" (p. 112).

The second area of debate, is the extent to which the assumptions are typical of adult learners only. Some adults are highly dependent on a teacher for structure, while some youth in transition to adulthood are independent,

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self-directed learners. The same is true for motivation;

adults may be externally motivated to learn, as in attending

training sessions to keep their job, while youth in

transition to adulthood may be motivated by curiosity or the

internal pleasure of learning. Even the most obvious

assumption that adults have more and deeper life experiences

may or may not be the determining factor in a learning

situation. Certain life experiences can act as barriers to

learning (Merriam, Mott, & Lee, 1996). Furthermore, children

in certain situations may have a range of experiences

qualitatively richer than some adults (Hanson, 1996).

These assumptions are not necessarily true of all

adults. This led Knowles to revised his thinking as to

whether andragogy was just for adults and pedagogy just for

children. Between 1970 and 1980 Knowles moved from an

andragogy versus pedagogy position to more of a continuum

ranging from teacher-directed to student-directed learning.

He acknowledged that both approaches are appropriate with

children and adults, depending on the situation. For

example, an adult who knows little or nothing about a topic

will be more dependent on the teacher for direction. On the

other hand, children who are naturally curious and who are

"very self-directing in their learning outside of school,

could also be more self-directed in school" (Knowles, 1984,

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p. 13). This acknowledgment by Knowles resulted in andragogy being defined more by the learning situation than by the learner.

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning is a process commonly associated with the field of Adult Education. Anything worth knowing is worth discovering for yourself (Goodman, 1964). The notion that adults assume control of their learning became a major topic of concern in the field of Adult Education in the 1970's and 1980s. The emphasis on self-directed learning can be traced primarily to Allen Tough's work with adult learning projects. While unidentified for centuries, self-directed learning has only become formally recognized and studied during the last several decades (Knowles, 1990). The field of Adult Education and adult educators have become increasingly interested in self-directed learning during the last 20 years (Long, 1992).

The self-directed process occurs when individuals take the initiative in assessing their learning needs, formulate learning objectives, ascertain resources for learning, adopt appropriate learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). The assumption of self-directed learning addresses many learning opportunities in adult education. Some may be fairly simple such as learning

a new dance while others are very detailed such as learning how to engineer and mix an audio theater production. These experiences may develop within various settings. The results of research associated with self-directed learning reveals that 90% of adults participate in at least one self-directed learning project annually and that 70% of adult learning is self-directed in nature (Tough, 1978).

Knowles characterizes two concepts of self-directed learning (Brookfield, 1986; Candy, 1991). First, self-directed learning is self-teaching in which learners have empowered themselves to become familiar with every mechanical aspect and the strategies of their learning processes. Secondly, self-directed learning is personal freedom or "taking control of the goals and purposes of learning and assuming ownership of learning" (Knowles, 1998, p. 135).

Actually, self-directed learning is personal autonomy in which learners begin "taking control of the goals and purposes of learning" (Knowles et al., 1998, p. 135). It is self-initiated. Although motivation or stimulus may come from outside sources, "our keen sense of discovery, of reaching out, of grasping and comprehending, comes from within" (p. 5).

Perspective Transformation

Transformational learning is the process whereby adult learners critically examine their beliefs, assumptions, and values in light of acquiring new knowledge. Because of this, learners begin a process of personal and social change called "reframing" in perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1990).

Mezirow's work in perspective transformation has also been applied as a lens through which to view literacy learning experiences (Mezirow, 1990, 1996). Transformation theory emphasizes that people make intentional movement in adulthood to resolve contradictions by transforming meaning schemes and perspectives through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991).

Real-Life Learning

"We challenge the unknown by making associations with what we know" (Mezirow, 1991). Much of the disappointment with today's present educational system is the result of academic environments that are impersonal, detached, and unrelated to student interests, experiences, and needs (Moustakas, 1973). Real-life learning is "learning that is relevant to the living task of the individual in contrast to those tasks considered more appropriate to formal education" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 3).

Sternberg (1990) defines several characteristics of real-life learning. Individuals frequently are not prepared through formal education to learn from everyday life experience. Real-life learning involves recognizing and defining the problem, questioning beliefs, and obtaining feedback. In real-life situations, the learner must have the ability to identify and determine a difficult situation and to specify how to solve the problem. In contrast to structured problems such as those found in academia, real-life problems are unstructured and aimless. Real-life problems may also require more than one appropriate answer whereas test questions in formal learning situations usually have one correct answer.

Learning-How-to-Learn

Learning-how-to-learn is another concept difficult to define with accuracy (Smith, 1976, p. 4). Learning-how-to-learn may mean different things to different people. However, in the last three decades, the seminal research on learning-how-to-learn was compiled by Robert M. Smith. He developed a concept and curriculum of training exercises established on the premise that it is "as meaningful to teach adults how to learn as it is to specify particular curricular domains for learning" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 64). In his early work, Smith (1976) introduced a working

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definition of learning-how-to-learn as "a matter of the adult's having (or acquiring) the knowledge and skill necessary to function effectively in the various learning situations in which one finds himself" (p. 5). In later work, Smith (1982) defined learning-how-to-learn as "possessing, or acquiring, the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in whatever learning situation one encounters" (p. 19).

Empowerment

Although the term empowerment has become popular across disciplines and organizations and in policy discourse, it escapes easy definition. It is given drastically different meanings from Marxist radical activism to conservative capitalist "trickle down" economic programs (Holmes & Saleebey, 1993; Rappaport, 1984; Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998; Zippay, 1995).

For adult education, empowerment involves a personal sense of self-efficacy and competence. It establishes a sense of responsibility to change self and social conditions based on critical consciousness of conditions that are oppressive (Freire, 1973; Gutierrez, 1990; Kieffer, 1984; Lee, 1994; Rappaport, 1984; Robbins et al., 1998; Solomon, 1976; Staples, 1990). It provides skills to affect the behavior of others and to work in solidarity with others to

obtain needed resources. It fosters planning and the implementation of social action efforts to remove power blocks and create liberating conditions. Empowerment occurs "when learners free themselves of oppression by demystifying knowledge and by critically redefining social reality in their own terms....Regardless of how it is defined, empowerment involves using learning from the social environment to understand and deal with the political realities of one's social and economic situation" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 21).

Empowerment for many people has come in the form of hope shared through music, food, laughter, and friendship. One place that has contributed to the empowerment of poor people, communities, and civic leaders is the Highlander Research and Education Center (Reyes & Gozemba, 2002). Highlander which was originally known as Highlander Folk School was created in 1932 by Myles Horton and Don West in Grundy County, Tennessee. Lillian Johnson, a Tennessee educator and suffragist, donated her farm outside of the town of Monteagle where the founders established what was then known as the Highlander Folk School. It provided a glimmer of hope for people disempowered by the forces of capitalism and economic globalization. In 1932, Highlander gathered workers, grassroots leaders, community organizers,

educators, and researchers to address the most pressing

social, environmental and economic problems facing the

people of the South.

> The power of the Highlander experience is the strength
> that grows within the soul of people, working together,
> as they analyze and confirm their own experiences and
> draw upon their understanding to contribute to
> fundamental change. (Statement Highlander's Mission,
> 1989)

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research departs from traditional

methods because its purpose is to apply knowledge in a

particular situation. Participatory action research,

(Merriam & Simpson, 1984) is a term used for interactive

approaches to research that aim to solve specific and

practical problems that present themselves in any social

setting. Participatory research is a self-conscious way of

empowering people to take effective action toward improving

conditions in their lives (Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, &

Jackson, 1993, p. 1). Participatory research is a means of

putting research capabilities in the hands of deprived and

disenfranchised people so that they can transform their

lives for themselves (p. 1). Participatory research is made

up of ordinary people that have formed a partnership with

researchers to solve problems, creating an educational

transformative experience (p. 1). Participatory research is

characterized by people personally analyzing the problems

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that affect them (Cain, 1976). Participatory research combines community participation in decision making with methods of social investigation to involve the people in the research process so that it can serve the needs of the individuals rather than those of the policy makers who would prefer to value profits over people (Hall, 1977).

A Pocket Full of Hope® is part of a line of participatory research that uses the arts to help participants understand and critically reflect on their world. In A Pocket Full of Hope® music, drama and dance, which are pleasurable and non-threatening, are used by participants to relive their experience of hopelessness so they can talk about it. In addition, to developing the ability to imagine situations which do not exist is critical for understanding in reading, geography, history, and many other subjects.

Theater for years has been used as a tool for consciousness raising, problem solving, and social change. For example, Guerrilla Theater, Paulo Freire's Popular Theater, and the Theater of the Oppressed demonstrated that theater was one of the most effective tools to influence social change (Oliver, 1997). Many educators were aware of these varying types of social action theater, but few had used them for educational purposes.

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In 1973 the Family Life Division of New York Medical
College was the first group to develop and use what was
called a full literacy theater process. In this process
teenagers from local high schools gather together to present
scenes from their real world (Oliver, 1997). The teens were
all nonprofessional actors who explored issues presented by
the audience. Drugs, alcohol, health, and development issues
were just a few of the topics discussed. Afterwards, the
actors would stay in character while they dialogued with
audience.

Literacy Theater is a perfect participatory
research instructional technique that has shown itself to
be a dynamic training tool for adult education (Oliver,
1997). In Literacy Theater the participants identify their
needs and concerns, base scenario on them and dialogue with
the characters and audience defining options, roles and
responsibilities. Participants explore the androgogical
content of adult education, thus understanding how they
learn with respect to their individual differences.
Facilitators in Literacy Theater become aware of a variety
of teaching methods, including providing for a positive
learning environment, offering opportunities for success,
providing awareness of student progress and maintain
appropriate student-teacher interactions (Oliver, 1997, p.

5). Literacy Theater has been used in many ways. For example, in Montana the technique was used to address issues of social action related to the Native American community with the group called the Montana Social Action Troupe (Oliver, 1997)

Literacy Theater provides an alternative model that encourages the learning process through nonlinear, holistic and intuitive strategies (Oliver, 1997, p. 5) The approach is one that stimulates the nonverbal and emotional side of the brain, the right hemisphere (Lewis, 1986). Most adult educators have training in college systems requiring a predominance of left-brain skills. However the adults they work with in literacy programs are often most comfortable using their right brain (Oliver, 1997, p. 5).

Literacy theater training is wonderful for the kinesthetic learners. During training workshops their enthusiasm for the process is infectious. The scenario process addresses the learning styles of both the listener and the speaking. It takes into account the intelligence of the linguist, the logical, the kinesthetic, and the interpersonal as defined by Gardner (Oliver, 1997). It is learning without lectures, blackboards, experts, flip charts, pencils, or workbooks.

All of these learner-centered approaches fit into the

realm of individual differences. When allowing for individual differences in lifelong learning, it is paramount that consideration be given to learning styles and learning strategies. The rudimentary practice of learning can be the critical exercise of applying lifelong experience. As strong learning strategies are applied and prove to be successful, a positive and rewarding academic experience can contribute to the continuation of lifelong learning. The concepts of learning styles and learning strategies should be immersed in the teaching environment, curriculum, and goals of every educational institution. Professional development of educators, directed toward learning strategies, may prove to provide the motivation for successful completion of educational goals by every learner.

<u>Problem Statement</u>

All persons who either work with or live with youth have become increasingly aware of the potential that exists for the development of at-risk behaviors (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000). Youth are at-risk because of their life situations, but they have special experiences and responsibilities that they are undertaking that are adult like. For example, many at-risk youth are single parents. Between 1990 and 1996, the percentage of all teenage mothers who were unmarried increased 12%. Between 1960 and 1996, the percentage

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increased more than 400%. Between 1990 and 1998, the percentage of families that are headed by a single parent increased 13%. Between 1960 and 1998, the percentage of single-parent families more than tripled (Bennett, 1999).

There are many youth in the American society at-risk who are going through all kinds of problems, and things are getting worse. These young people who are going through this transition in life are as if they are trapped in this moving vessel and cannot get out. The school system is failing them, that is why they are at-risk. However, there is an element of hope in the concepts of learner centered principles.

One program that is working with at-risk youth in order to help them successfully make the transition from adolescence to adulthood is A Pocket Full Of Hope®. This program is using learner-centered principles drawn from the adult education literature in its work with at-risk youth. However, it is not known how these concepts apply to these youth in transition. If this is not found out, these youth could be lost. In order to apply these learner-centered concepts more effectively and give insight to other programs that might want to use them, more needs to be known about how these principles apply to this age group. Moreover, since the learner-centered approach focuses on the

individual the area of learning strategies is of primary

interest because it addresses individual differences.

<center>The Purpose</center>

The purpose of this study was to describe the learning

strategies of youth in transition to adulthood in the urban

life skills program of A Pocket Full of Hope®. The learning

strategies of the youth in transition to adulthood in A

Pocket Full of Hope® were identified with Assessing the

Learning Strategies of AdultS (ATLAS) and were compared with

those of the general adult population. ATLAS has been

developed for measuring learning strategies in real-life

situations (Conti & Kolody, 1999). In addition, the

participants were interviewed individually and in groups

about how their life experiences relate to their approach to

learning.

<center>Research Questions</center>

A line of inquiry related to learning strategy

preferences has developed at Oklahoma State University. One

of the first studies to describe how the various ATLAS

learning strategy groups applied learning strategies in

their daily lives was conducted by James (2000). Her study

identified and described the learning strategy preferences

of high school noncompleters who had returned to educational

setting in addition to describing their perceptions of

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teacher actions that helped and hindered the learner in the learning process. Other studies further explored this line of inquiry and used a similar design (e.g., Turman, 2001). This study is patterned after the study by James (2000) but was conducted with youth in transition to adulthood in order to determine if these characteristics relate to learning strategies applied to this group. ATLAS was used in this study because it was believed that the seemingly simplistic design of ATLAS could overcome test trepidation of students who may previously have had negative experiences with educational assessments.

The research questions which were addressed in this study are:

1. What are the learning strategies for youth in transition to adulthood in the urban life-skills program of A Pocket Full of Hope®?

2. How does the frequency distribution on ATLAS for the youth in transition to adulthood compare to the frequency of the adults used to create ATLAS?

3. How does each learning strategy group perceive its approach to learning?

4. What things do teachers do to help and hinder each learning strategy group.

Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. Demographic data was collected, and ATLAS was used to assess the individual learning strategies. The learning strategy

preference of the students was constructed based on a frequency distribution of the scores on ATLAS. In addition, chi square was used to compare the A Pocket Full Of Hope® ' youth in transition scores to the norms for ATLAS.

Qualitative data was collected from individual interviews and focus groups to explore how the life experiences of the youth in transition relate to their approach to learning. The responses were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) to identify patterns in the responses for each of the three learning strategy groups.

About the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Merriam, 1988). Therefore, an awareness of the relationship of the researcher to the study is important. Lester Shaw is the founder of A Pocket Full Of Hope® and the researcher for this study. He is also the Executive Director and Program Coordinator and oversees all components of A Pocket Full Of Hope®. He has designed and implemented programs that combine youth development with learning strategy preference identification in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding. Targeting children ages 7-19 and their families, the programs in A Pocket Full Of Hope® assist young people in exploring the world on their

own terms while developing internal strength mechanisms to help them deal with adverse environmental factors such as gangs, drugs, violence, and boredom. Using music, theatre and dance, Shaw has made knowledge about healthy choices, social skills and self-esteem accessible to help youth develop character and leadership. He holds an Oklahoma teacher certification with 22 years of teaching experience. He has conducted and managed similar drama therapy-based programs and is a certified case manager and chemical dependency consultant. For 5 years he was an employee of Family & Children's Services in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He worked as a Family Relations Specialist where he facilitated daily youth enrichment groups and conducted management training programs. He organized workshops and seminars. He recruited and supervised professional and support staff. He coordinated alternative education and life-skills awareness activities for youth exposed to risky behaviors and for the families living in the Tulsa housing complexes. Shaw launched a comprehensive vocational assessment and career development program to help single parents prepare for career opportunities. Other areas of expertise included parent skills training, computer literacy tutor, and crisis interventionist.

In addition to working as a Family Relations

Specialist, Shaw worked for 2 years as a Chemical Dependency
Technician and Outreach Coordinator for Metropolitan Tulsa
Substance Abuse and counseling Services in Tulsa, Oklahoma.
He assisted clients through stabilization and detoxification
in a 30-bed impatient facility. He conducted client intakes,
assessments, discharge, planning, and individual counseling.
He served as the primary interventionist for substance abuse
related issues and crisis intervention at 13 public housing
sites in Tulsa. He provided outreach and conducted drug
education groups daily among low-income and at-risk
individuals and their families. He arranged alternative
activities on and off the public housing site to promote
healthy living.

Shaw has been an educator for over 22 years teaching
pre-school to adult age students. He has organized special
interest groups to develop a new curriculum that would
address the learning disparities of the lower achieving
students. He is a supporter of the teacher-centered learning
environment and an advocate for youth in transition to
adulthood.

Shaw has developed an extensive network among social
service providers and educators, which promotes wide
acceptance and utilization of A Pocket Full of Hope®
programs. He has a bachelors degree in Music Education from

Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina, and a master's

degree in Human Relations with an emphasis in counseling.

His awards include first place for his singing performance

at the Apollo Theater in New York City.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Youth at Risk

The word risk first appeared in printed English in the mid-1600s and define as exposure to danger, hazard, mischance, or peril (Johnson, 1994). The applied discipline of education adopted the concept of risk specifically in terms of students at-risk (Pigford, 1992; Slavin, Karweit, & Madden 1989). As communities and schools become more diverse, educators are recognizing that some student are far more likely than other students to experience difficulty in school and in life (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989).

The dialogue on risk as it applies to education includes the concepts of risk outcomes and risk factors (Johnson, 1998). Risk outcomes are specific negative situations in school and in life such as, adolescent pregnancy, school failure, early school withdrawal or noncompletion, suicide, incarceration, and adult dependency (James, 2000; Johnson, 1997;). The concern however is not that at-risk students are not only failing to learn but that they will transition into adulthood "illiterate, dependent upon drugs and alcohol, unemployed or underemployed, as a teenage parent, dependent on welfare, or adjudicated by the criminal justice system" (Barr & Parrett, 1995, p. 3). The

ultimate risk that youth in transition to adulthood will

encounter is to become "disconnected from the functions of

society, from economic productivity, and as citizens in a

democracy" (Johnson, 1997, p. 35).

There are a wide range of risk factors that affect

student, family, school, community, and societal influences

that predispose students to experience risk outcomes

(Johnson, 1994). These student-based risk factors include

cognitive and behavioral obstacles such as language

differences, school absenteeism, and substance abuse (Abi-

Nader, 1991; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Johnson, 1998;

Ruff, 1993). Family-based risk factors involve a

multiplicity of parent and sibling characteristics including

substance abuse, criminal activity, violence, and inadequate

parenting skills (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Johnson, 1994, 1995,

1996; Richard, Casanova, Placier, & Guilfoyle, 1989).

School-based risk factors include curricular rigidity,

limited school resources, and lack of appropriate programs

(Diem, 1992; Hensen, 1995; Irby Davis & Haney, 1991;

Johnson, 1998; Knapp, Turnbull, & Shields, 1990; Pigford,

1992; Taylor & Reeves, 1993). Community-based risk factors

typically reflect poverty, crime, gang involvement, and lack

of community resources (Dryfoos, 1991; Garbarino, Dubrow,

Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992; Johnson, 1997; Wang & Reynolds,

1995; Yin, Valdez, Mata, & Kaplan, 1996). Society risk factors involve public attitudes and social policies that negatively impact students, particularly those of ethnic minority and low socioeconomic status (Diaz-Rico, 1993; Golden, 1992). Social economic disadvantage is associated with a variety of co-factors such as poor living conditions, overcrowding, or lack of material resources that pose risks for adaptive development (Ackerman, 1999; Conger, 1993; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Such student, family, school, community, and society risk factors, coupled with varying degrees of intensity, render youth at risk for a negative school and life experiences (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989; Johnson, 1997; Slavin, 1989).

Historically, at-risk students were primarily those whose appearance, language, culture, values, communities, and family structures did not match those of the dominant White culture that schools were designed to serve and support. These students, who are primarily minorities, the poor, and immigrants, were considered culturally or educationally disadvantaged or deprived. As it became obvious that large numbers of these students were not achieving at minimally acceptable levels, "it seemed natural and certainly easy to define the problem as arising from deficiencies in the students themselves" (Goodlad & Keating,

1990).

Nonetheless, the term "at-risk" has become controversial and somewhat of a cliche in resent years. In some circles "educationally disadvantaged" is being used to reflect a less derogatory image (Natriello, 1990). At-risk has been applied to a wide range of youth including juvenile offenders, school dropouts, drug abusers, teenage mothers, premature infants, and adolescents with personality disorders (Tidwell & Garrett, 1994). The term "at-risk" youth and adolescence are also used somewhat interchangeably. It seems that to be at-risk is to be between the ages of 13 and 18 (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000). However, at-risk can include all youth regardless of age because they have the potential to develop at-risk behaviors. All young people may move in and out of at-riskness depending on personal, social, educational, and family dynamics (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000). Early adversity may be overcome by improved circumstances but may, nevertheless, leave the individual potentially more vulnerable to any disadvantage experienced at a later stage (Cicchetti & Tucker, 1994).

While the issue with at-risk youth is frequently portrayed as a dropping out issue, leaving school prior to graduation is only a symptom. For example, there is evidence

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that in many schools a "push-out" syndrome exists (Fine, 1986). This "push-out syndrome has been documented to reveal how some schools passively allow students to drop out by withholding any effort to retain them or even to find out what their problems are. Furthermore, it is very easy to confuse "stopping out" (leaving school for another activity) with "dropping out."

Outdated philosophies in education often fail to keep pace with the changing demands of today's diverse student body. A report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) revealed that an increasing number of students are recognized as being at-risk of failing school (Kaufman, McMillen & Badby, 1992). In this study, 12.5% of persons ages 16 through 24 are high school dropouts. While many of the individuals cited in the report are younger students at-risk for strictly academic reasons, many more are at risk because of demographic, socioeconomic, institutional and family-related problems.

The measure of dealing adequately with the needs of at-risk youth should probably not be the number of dropouts but instead should be the kinds of instruction and amounts of learning that take place in the school (Ward, 1986). For example, at-risk youth are served by individualist programs rather than through a comprehensive effort on the part of

the school to address individual differences. The curriculum, even in successful programs, tends to be limited and to route students into fairly narrow channels (Druian & Butler, 2001).

When youth first start school, they are expected to adapt quickly to their new environment (Pianta & Walsh, 1996; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995; Walker, McConnell, & Clarke, 1985). They are expected to learn to follow rules, listen to their teachers, and work independently. They are also expected to cooperate with their classmates, achieve at the same pace as their peers, and establish positive relationships with their teachers and other students (Walker, Irvin, Noell, & Singer, 1992). Youth who are able to develop these important skills are more likely to be accepted by their teachers and peers and to do well in school. Unfortunately, many youth do not form satisfactory interpersonal relationships with their teachers and classmates and do not acquire academic skills commensurate with the level of their peers. This places them at risk for a host of negative outcomes, including school failure, peer rejection, absence of close friendships, and school dropout (Hinshaw, 1992; Lyon, 1996; Parker & Asher, 1987; Walker et al., 1995).

Schools have not adapted curriculums that address the

individual and special circumstances of a diverse student population. Students who have certain kinds of conditions such as living with one parent, being a member of a minority group, and have limited English proficiency are also defined as at risk because students in these categories are statistically more likely to be among the lowest achievement groups or drop out of school altogether.

At-risk youth have been identified as youth who are more prone to drop out of high school and therefore may contribute to severe negative economic consequences. The National Center for Education Statistics (1997) reports that (a) young women who drop out of high school are more likely to become pregnant at young ages and are more likely to be single parents, (b) high school dropouts are more likely to receive public assistance than graduates who did not go on to college, and © dropouts comprise a disproportionate percentage of the nation's prison and death row inmates (p. 1). Oklahoma ranks 24th nationally in number of dropouts (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Oklahoma reports that 23% of the 15- to 19-year old females in the state are mothers without high school diplomas (Office of Accountability, 1999, p. v), and Oklahoma has "near-the-top divorce and incarceration rates" (Oklahoma Department of Education, 1999).

Whites comprise over half of the dropout population;

Blacks, make up close to one-fifth; and Hispanics constitute

almost one-third (National Center for Education Statistics,

1997). At-risk students from low socio-economic households

are 2.4 times more likely to drop out of school than

students from middle-income families and are 10.5 times more

likely than are students from high income families (National

Center for Education Statistics, 1994). The number of

Whites and Blacks dropping out has declined during the last

decade. The percentage of Hispanics dropping out has not

declined; it remains higher than that of either Whites or

Blacks. Males are slightly more likely to drop out than

females. (National Center For Education Statistics, 1992,

1993, 1994, 1997, 1999).

The Oklahoma Department of Education (1999) is

addressing students at risk of dropping out through a

developing system of alternative education. By January

1999, this system had served 13,336 students; an average

12.5% of those students were considered to be "recovered

dropouts" or at-risk students who stayed in school until

high school completion. The State of Oklahoma considers the

positive financial impact of the 1,640 students who

graduated from high school in 1998 because of the

alternative education system to be $132,840,000. This

figure consists of income and other taxes graduates will pay

in their lives as well as unemployment compensation,

welfare, and other government services that will not be

needed by these graduates.

However, at the time at-risk youth drop out of school,

most believe they will return to formal education (American

Council on Education, 1999; Farrell, 1990; Fine, 1991).

Against the odds, some youth in transition to adulthood

characterized by risk factors actually succeed in school and

in life (Garmezy, 1991; Johnson, 1997; Reed, McMillan, &

McBee, 1995). Those risk factors in most cases suggest

vulnerability rather than a certainty that youth will

experience risk outcomes (Ruff, 1993).

<u>Life-Skills Training Program</u>

Life-skills training programs emphasize the acquisition

of generic social and cognitive skills (Capuzzi & Gross,

2000). The theoretical foundation of life-skills training

according to Bandura (1977) and the problem behavior theory

of Jessor and Jessor (1977) suggest that children and

adolescents are not blamed for causing their problems, but

they are viewed as capable of learning new ways to behave

that reduce the likelihood of future problem.

Life skills can be taught by counselors, mental health

care professionals, educators, mentors, and program

facilitators (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000). Procedures for teaching life-skills are comparable to those used to teach any other skill. Overall tasks are broken down into smaller stages or component parts and taught systematically, moving from simple to more complex skills. Each life-skill session follows a five step model: (a) instruction (teach); (b) modeling (show); © role-play (practice); (d) feedback (reinforcement); and homework (apply)(Capuzzi & Gross, 2000). Within this general framework, steps may be modified in accord with the needs of the classroom or group (p. 155).

Three broad skill categories are usually included in basic life-skills programs. They are:

- Interpersonal skills, including assertiveness and refusal skills
- Cognitive change strategies, including problem solving, decision making, self-control and self-managing skills, and cognitive-behavioral restructuring, approaches; and
- Anxiety coping approaches, including relaxation, imagery training, and exercise. (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000)

Learning effective social skills is the core of life-skills training because it improves and increases the positive feedback and reinforcement that is received from others (Lewinsohn, Biglan, & Zeiss, 1976). Life-skills training focuses on the improvement of interpersonal style and on the development of skills, such as peer etiquette and group entry (Frankel, Cantwell, & Myatt, 1996). Modeling,

feedback, role-playing, coaching, situation journals, and homework practice are all utilized to help augment social skills and minimize the frustration caused by an inability to elicit positive consequences (Frankel, 1996). Life-skills can also be achieved through leadership training programs. For example, participants provided with leadership opportunities exercise decision making skills and learn the importance of self-control (What Schools Can, 1992). Overall, life-skills provide an emphasis on proactive prevention efforts, so that as time passes, individuals, families, schools, social services organizations, and communities can lessen the amount of time and energy directed toward remediation and containment of impairment and dysfunction.

<div align="center">Self-Esteem</div>

Self-esteem refers to subjective evaluations of worth. Self-esteem is expressed in feelings of power or helpless- ness, which is called efficacy, or in beliefs about personal control (Frey & Carlock, 1984). Self-esteem is the value that each person assigns to self at any given time (Satir, 1972).

Two other terms that are often used interchangeable with self-esteem are self-concept and self-assurance. Self-concept refers to the perception individuals have about

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their personal attributes and the roles they fulfill (Beane & Lipka, 1980). Self-concept also refers to the valuative assessment of those descriptions. For example, individuals may have an academic self-concept, a social self-concept, or a physical appearance self-concept. Elliot (1988) maintained that anyone with low self-esteem has an unstable self-concept.

The term self-assurance pertains to the degree to which people are comfortable with their self-concept (Frey & Carlock, 1984). Self-esteem is learned in the family from nonverbal behavior and remarks parents make in interaction with children (Satir, 1972). Certain methods of discipline can affect self-esteem in young children as they learn to feel guilt and shame. The timing of puberty influences how one views oneself and others. Among seventh and eight grades, girls who are more physically mature are generally less satisfied with their appearance and weight than are their less mature classmates. On the other hand, the opposite is true for young males. Those that are more physically mature are more satisfied with their weight and their appearance. On the other hand, even adults self-esteem can be influenced by comments of employers, co-workers, and family members.

Cypert (1994) believed the mind generally will come to

accept what it has been depiction to if the message is repeated often enough. It do not matter if the statements are true or if they are positive or negative; if the words are repeated often enough, eventually the mind will accept it as true. For example, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, who is a charismatic preacher, politician, talk show host, and founder and head of Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity), often exhorts crowds of supporters as he chant over and over the words: "I am somebody" (Cypert, 1994). Jackson's self-talk or autosuggestion approach encourages supporters to counter negative feelings with positive statements.

The method of empowerment implemented by Jackson is believed essential to help reverse the deep-rooted low self-concept and self-hatred that is perpetuated throughout the African-American community. Edna O. Meyers (1966) discusses the need for African American youth to have a sense of self-esteem as well as a positive acceptance of his or her racial or ethic origin, in order to have some level of achievement. She believed that there is a correlation between self-esteem and racial attitudes. Her study explored the extent of co-relationship between positive self-concepts and positive attitudes towards the African American. Some African American children in her study had low self-concept

but had a positive attitude toward African Americans and others had a high self-concept but had a negative attitude toward their race.

However, most discussions of Black People and of self-esteem unusually start by identifying racism as the sole culprit (Hooks, 2003, p. 21). When studying the psycho-social development of African-Americans, it becomes apparent that the foundation of the shaky self-esteem that assaults the sensibilities is rooted in the experience of traumatic violence (p. 21). Whether it is the emotional violence caused by the pain of abandonment or the oppressive violence that is a consequence of domination such as racism, sexism, or class elitism, it is the normalization of violence in the lives of Black People that create the foundation for ongoing trauma re-enactment (p. 21). The notion that African-Americans have heroically and magically triumphed over generations of genocidal assaults are erroneous. Meanwhile, everyday racism continues to prevail despite all the evidence that suggest otherwise (p. 22). On all levels, the soul and the psyches of many African-Americans, minorities, and people living in poverty are troubled and as a result a low self-concept is shaped (p. 24). On the other hand, in some cases it is easier for African Americans to call attention to the way racism had been a factor in their self-

doubt than it is for them to look at other issues in family life that might have affected their self-concept and self-esteem.

Minority-group children are usually isolated and segregated from the more privilege members of society. They learn that inferiority is the status to which they have been assigned. They react with deep feelings of inadequacy and resentment and with a sense of personal humiliation. Almost nowhere in society do these children find their own dignity as human beings respected or protected (Clark, 1963). As a result, many of them become confused about their own personal worth. These conflicts and confusions often lead to self-doubts and ultimately feelings of self-hatred (Clark, 1963). Nonetheless, social support helps to restore a sense of personal dignity and build positive self-esteem (Clark, 1963).

Social support, however, should be consistent with the learner-centered approached to intervention. Many institutions providing social support still function under old methodologies, making it difficult to identify individual learning differences of the youth in transition. Many agencies develop policy when they react to new legislation that effect children and their families (Morrison, 1990). However, sometimes social policy result

when people, agencies, and government decide to do nothing expressing a "hands off policy" (p. 28). This type of policy led to over 10% of White adolescents, 15% of African-American adolescents, and 35% of Hispanic adolescents to drop out of school (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1995). These percentages are also a result of schools not having alternative strategies in place to accommodate those students who could be deemed high-risk.

Indicators of Low Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem in high-risk youth has been identified as the bases for adolescent drop outs (Nunn & Parish, 1992). By the time they drop out, many adolescents have lost all confidence in their ability to succeed in school (Nunn & Parish, 1992). Perceptions and evaluation of an individual's success and failure are based upon personal beliefs and self-development (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000). In this process, an individual forms internal and external beliefs about personal control and personal effectiveness or self-efficacy. For example, a person's belief about outcomes is referred as locus of control. Locus of control the conviction that success or failure at a task is internally determined by one's own action or ability or that the outcome is due to external influences such as luck, fate, or chance (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000). Personal effectiveness or

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self-efficacy has four essential elements: awareness of required behavior to bring about success, expectation that this behavior will be successful, belief that there is a relationship between behavior and outcome, and that this behavior will have an impact, and belief that the outcome will provide something significant (Benoit & Mitchell 1987).

Evidence supports the fact that an individual with low self-esteem does most likely believe in luck (external control) rather than ability (internal control) to achieve success (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000). Because self-esteem judges whether such an individual can in fact succeed at a given task, the lack of belief in self makes it likely that someone with low self-esteem will exhibit feelings of helplessness or powerlessness or, in other words, low levels of self-efficacy. In this case, a possible defense might be to deny that the outcome of the behavior has any value and to withdraw or drop out (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000).

Individuals with low self-esteem often find it necessary to develop defenses because they hurt. To avoid this hurt, there is a tendency either to shun experiences that people believe will bring additional pain or to change these experiences in some way (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000). These individual's might also appear hostile, critical, or suspicious of others, may lack identification with others,

may retreat into an "I don't care" stance, or may simply resist trying. It is too much of a risk for someone with feelings of poor self-worth to be exposed to additional hurt or situations in which failure is expected (Kaplan, 1975).

Persons with low self-esteem may be distractible, timid, shy, withdrawn, inhibited, anxious, and less academically able (Domino & Blumberg, 1987) and have a narrow range of interest. They are more likely to daydream and want to find situations where they have little or no supervision and where there are minimal amounts of competition. From their perspective, if there is no supervision, then no one can confirm their failure.

Individuals with low self-esteem have few coping strategies. They often feel a lack of control over life situations. They do not feel connected and have few if any expectations of future success. Those who have low self-esteem are generally dissatisfied with themselves and their lives and have low self-respect. As a result, dropping out is a defensive way of demonstrating some personal power (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000). Many individuals who are in doubt about their worth are sad, lethargic, tense, anxious, and angry, causing severe emotional distress.

Gender Role Self-Esteem in At-Risk Youth

Society imposes strong gender-based role behaviors that

continue their impact on self-esteem long after adolescence

(Burnett, Anderson, & Heppner, 1995). For example, in

America, masculinity is defined as having high levels of

traditional masculine behaviors such as competitiveness,

decisiveness, and independence while feminine

characteristics are more defined as nurturing and

relationship focused behaviors. However, in some at-risk

youth, masculinity is generally not characterized in

socially acceptable ways. For instance, aggressiveness and

rebelliousness might substitute for independence and

competitiveness. There is some evidence that the

socialization process for men is even more stringent than it

is for women and that boys and men experience greater

ridicule for straying from traditional roles than do girls

and women (Enns, 1992). There is the possibility that

absence of masculine skills in boys, and to some extent in

girls, has the potential to contribute to low self-esteem.

Self-image can be formed by self-talk (Tice, 1995).

Self-image is the subconscious opinion of an individual

based upon countless beliefs and attitudes recorded in the

mind (p. 98). The key to releasing wonderful potential and

achieving personal goals is based on how one processes the

thoughts that enter the mind that constitutes ones self-

talk. Greatness comes from affirming the success that have

been accomplished in the past, building on that success, thus eliminating destructive sarcasm, belittling, teasing, demeaning, and fault-finding (p. 98). Also, how one communicates with the people around them (p. 98). When individuals think better about themselves, it triggers images that are pleasant and worth keeping.

In the adult learning process, it is important to be cognizance of the learning model increasingly known as andragogy. Andragogy is the art and science of helping adults learn; it stands in contrast to pedagogy which is the practice of teaching children (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). The term was proposed by Malcolm Knowles, who is also known as the father of andragogy, although Alexander Kapp, a German grammar school teacher, first used the term (Knowles, 1998, p. 59).

The androgogical model was primary built on four basic assumptions of adult learners (Knowles, 1980). As people develop, their (a) self-actualization moves from dependence to self-direction, (b) experiences become an arsenal to access during learning, © learning preparation adjusts to the formative tasks of social functions, and (d) knowledge transformation becomes immediate because the adults orientation shifts from subject-focused to performance-focused (pp. 43-44). Knowles' concept of andragogy is the

cornerstone of thinking in the area of adult learning during
the last decade (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Andragogy is "a
term that 'belongs' to adult education" (Merriam & Brockett,
1996, p. 135).

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning is a process commonly associated
with the field of Adult Education. Anything worth knowing is
worth discover for yourself (Goodman, 1964). The notion that
adults assume control of their learning became a major topic
of concern in the field of Adult Education in the 1970's and
1980s. The emphasis on self-directed learning can be traced
primarily to Allen Tough's work with adult learning
projects. While unidentified for centuries, self-directed
learning has only become formally recognized and studied
during the last several decades (Knowles, 1990). The field
of Adult Education and adult educators have become
increasingly interested in self-directed learning during the
last 20 years (Long, 1992).

The self-directed process occurs when individuals take
the initiative in assessing their learning needs,
formulating learning objectives, ascertaining resources for
learning, adopt appropriate learning strategies, and
evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). The
assumption of self-directed learning addresses many learning

opportunities in adult education. Some may be fairly simple such as learning a new dance while others are very detailed such as learning how to engineer and mix an audio theater production. These experiences may consist of several participants and may develop within various settings. The results of research associated with self-directed learning reveals that 90% of adults participate in at least one self-directed learning project annually and that 70% of adult learning is self-directed in nature (Tough, 1978).

Knowles characterizes two concepts of self-directed learning (Brookfield, 1986; Candy, 1991). First, self-directed learning is self-teaching in which learners have empowered themselves to become familiar with every mechanical aspect and the strategies of their learning processes. Secondly, self-directed learning is personal freedom or "taking control of the goals and purposes of learning and assuming ownership of learning" (Knowles, 1998, p. 135).

Actually, self-directed learning is personal autonomy in which learners begin "taking control of the goals and purposes of learning" (Knowles et al., 1998, p. 135). It is self-initiated. Although motivation or stimulus may come from outside sources, our keen sense of discovery, of reaching out, of grasping and comprehending, comes from

within (p. 5).

<u>Perspective Transformation</u>

Transformational learning is the process whereby adult learners critically examine their beliefs, assumptions, and values in light of acquiring new knowledge. Because of this learners begin a process of personal and social change called "reframing" in perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1990). The theory of transformative learning was developed by Jack Mezirow and has evolved into a comprehensive and complex description of how learners construe, validate, and reformulate the meaning of their experience (Cranton, 1994, P. 22). Centrality of experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse are three common themes in Mezirow's theory (Taylor, 1998), which is based on psychoanalytic theory (Boyd & Myers, 1988) and critical social theory (Scott, 1997). Transformative learning occurs when individuals change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds. Mezirow's theory describes a learning process that is primarily rational, analytical, and cognitive with an inherent logic (Grabov, 1997, pp. 90-91).

Mezirow's work in perspective transformation has been applied as a lens through which to view literacy learning

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experiences (Mezirow, 1990, 1996). Transformation theory emphasizes that people make intentional movement in adulthood to resolve contradictions by transforming meaning schemes and perspectives through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991).

Transformative learning develops autonomous thinking. (Mezirow 1997, p. 5) A defining condition of being human is that one must understand the meaning of experience. For some, any uncritically learned explanation by an authority figure will do. But in contemporary societies one must learn to make their own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others. Facilitating such understandings is the fundamental goal of adult education.

Freire (1970) and Mezirow (1991) endeavored to create social change for oppressed populations through education (Courtney, Merriam, & Reeves, 1998; Sokol & Cranton, 1998). Freire described the "banking" model of education as the traditional educational approach. The goal of this approach is to assist learners in gaining knowledge, and it views teachers as experts who exclusively possess knowledge. Students are viewed as passive objects, empty receptacles that teachers fill with knowledge. The transfer of knowledge usually occurs in a lethargic exchange with little

discussion. Freire believed that "banking" education

contributed to maintaining oppressed conditions, because the

approach is both paternalistic and individualistic in

nature. Banking education is individualistic in nature

because it seldom recognizes students' uniqueness in terms

of their personal characteristics and context of living.

Freire and Mezirow believed that new educational theories

such as transformative learning, which promoted increased

self-awareness and freedom from constraints, were necessary

to help create social equity for the oppressed and for real

learning to occur.

Transformative learning is understood as a three step

process. During the initial step, learners become critically

aware of how and why their assumptions have come to

constrain the way they perceive, understand, and feel about

their world. During the second step, a revision of belief

systems occurs as learners change structures of habitual

expectation to make possible a more inclusive,

discriminating, and integrative perspective. During the

third step, learners adopt behaviors more consistent with

their renewed perspective (Taylor, 1997). Transformative

learning can be fostered by including (a) teachers who are

empathetic, caring, authentic, and sincere and who

demonstrate a high degree of integrity; (b) learning

conditions that promote a sense of safety, openness, and trust; and © instructional methods that support a learner-centered approach that promotes student autonomy, participation, reflection, and collaboration (Robertson, 1996).

For youth in transition to adulthood in A Pocket Full Of Hope®, transformative learning fosters an empowered sense of self. It increases self-confidence in new roles and relationships, while establishing fundamental changes in the way participants see themselves. It provides youth with functional strategies and resources for taking action and gaining control over their lives, asserting compassion and a new connectedness with others (Courtney et al., 1998; Taylor, 1997). On the other hand, learners may have some difficulty in accepting and acting upon this new degree of clarity because it conflicts with an established meaning perspective or because of self-deception, lack of knowledge of how to act upon the new perspective, or situational factors that preclude action (Mezirow, 1991, p. 202).

Research show that every youth in transition to adulthood does not see themselves transformed as a self-directed learner, therefore the responsibility of the educator is to help the learners look critically at their beliefs and behaviors (Mezirow, 1991, p. 197). Mezirow

(1995) assigns adult educators a crucial role in perspective transformation. "Every adult educator has a central responsibility for fostering critical reflection and transformative learning" (p. 124). Adult educators must respond to initial learner interests and self-defined needs "with the intent to move the learner to an awareness of the 'reasons' for these needs" (p. 124). Adult educators must also assist learners in understanding how their meaning perspectives may limit the way they define and attempt to satisfy their needs.

Learning For Transition to Adulthood

Real-Life Learning

"We challenge the unknown by making associations with what we know" (Mezirow, 1991). Much of the disappointment with today's present educational system is the result of academic environments that are impersonal, detached, and unrelated to student interests, experiences, and needs (Moustakas, 1973). On the other hand, real-life learning is learning that is "relevant to the living tasks of the individual in contrast to those tasks considered more appropriate to formal education" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 3).

Sternberg (1990) defines several characteristics of real-life learning. Individuals frequently are not prepared

through formal education to learn from everyday life
experience (Sternberg, 1990). Real-life learning involves
recognizing and defining the problem, questioning beliefs,
and obtaining feedback. In real-life situations, the learner
must have the ability to identify and determine a difficult
situation and specifies how to solve the problem. In
contrast to structured problems such as those found in
academia, real-life problems are unstructured and aimless.
Real-life problems may also require more than one
appropriate answer whereas test questions in formal learning
situations usually have one correct answer.

Other differences between real-life learning and
learning in formal settings include the availability of
problem-solving information. In real life, learners must
recognize a problem exists and must define the problem as
opposed to formal education where the problems are defined
by instructors (Sternberg, 1990, p. 35). Learners are rarely
challenged to disprove their beliefs in academic settings.
In everyday life, learners need to have the ability to
understand the views that are shared by other people.
Learners receive distinct and immediate feedback in academic
settings while feedback in real-life may occur untimely and
often may be undesirable. A pivotal aspect of learning to
learn in real-life situations is learning "how to function

with incomplete or unclear feedback" (Sternberg, 1990, p. 40)

The final difference between real-life learning and learning in formal settings is individual versus group problem solving. In academic environments, individual solutions to problems are encouraged. In real-life situations, problem solving is usually arrived at through group work and decision processes. (Sternberg, 1990, p. 40) For example, at A Pocket Full Of Hope®, youth at-risk are able to come together in a safe non-judgmental environment to talk about their problems. If all youth have the potential to develop at-risk behavior, preventative steps can be taken to see that the young person does not reach at-risk potential (Capuzzi & Gross, 2000)

<u>Learning-How-to-Learn</u>

Learning how to learn is another concept difficult to define with accuracy (Smith, 1976, p. 4). Learning how to learn may mean different things to different people. However, in the last three decades, the seminal conceptualization of learning how to learn was conducted by Robert M. Smith. He developed a concept and curriculum of training exercises established on the premise that it is "as meaningful to teach adults how to learn as it is to specify particular curricular domains for learning" (Brookfield,

1986, p. 64). In his early work, Smith (1976) introduces a working definition of learning how to learn as "a matter of the adult's having (or acquiring) the knowledge and skill' necessary to function effectively in the various learning situations in which one finds himself" (p. 5). In later work, Smith (1982) defined learning how to learn as "possessing, or acquiring, the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in whatever learning situation one encounters" (p. 19).

Adult education is a process (Smith, 1976, p. 6). The learner must be involved in every phase of the process. Crucial to this process is the development of each learners' understanding and capability for effective self-monitoring and active reflection (Smith, 1991, p. 11). Engaging the learner in this process consist of three subprocesses of the participation in planning, facilitating, and evaluating learning activities (Smith, 1976, p. 6). Each subprocess assumes that the learner is involved to the highest extent possible (p. 6).

The first subprocess of learning how to learn is planning. It establishes how adult learners ascertain their needs and set goals as they select resources and strategies. The second subprocess is conducting. This is where they negotiate selected practices and resources as they learn to

give and receive responses. The third subprocess is evaluating. This is how well adult learners gauge the magnitude to which and how efficiently their goals are met. Learners must be equipped with these subprocesses to obtain the knowledge and skills to proceed with follow-up activities. Adult learners possess and practice these skills through the learning how to learn process.

Empowerment

Although the term empowerment has become popular across disciplines and organizations and in policy discourse, it escapes easy definition. It is given drastically different meanings from Marxist radical activism to conservative capitalist "trickle down" economic programs (Holmes & Saleebey, 1993; Rappaport, 1984; Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998; Zippay, 1995).

For adult education, empowerment involves a personal sense of self-efficacy and competence. It establishes a sense of responsibility to change self and social conditions based on critical consciousness of conditions that are oppressive (Freire, 1973; Gutierrez, 1990; Kieffer, 1984; Lee, 1994; Rappaport, 1984; Robbins et al., 1998; Solomon, 1976; Staples, 1990). It provides skills to affect the behavior of others and to work in solidarity with others to obtain needed resources. It fosters planning and the

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implementation of social action efforts to remove power

blocks and create liberating conditions. Empowerment occurs

> When learners free themselves of oppression by
> demystifying knowledge and by critically
> redefining social reality in their own
> terms....Regardless of how it is defined,
> empowerment involves using learning from the
> social environment to understand and deal with the
> political realities of one's social and economic
> situation. (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 21)

In the 1950's, Rosa Parks attended a workshop on civil

disobedience at the integrated Highlander Folk School in

Monteagle, Tennessee; this school was an incubator for Civil

Rights activism (Kulman & Enrich, 2001). Its founder, Myles

Horton, worked with poor people in the South to bring

people, ideas, and resources together to fight for social,

political, and economic equality (Kulman & Enrich, 2001).

Highlander has been a major influence in the education and

empowerment of the poor and disadvantaged to alter their

plight in the Civil Rights Movement, in the Labor Movement,

on environmental issues, and for local poverty concerns

(Conti & Fellenz, 1986).

The fundamental premise of Highlander is that people

have the potential within themselves to solve their

problems. "Highlander is an idea and a process" (Horton,

1990 p.38). Rosa Parks, Septima Clark, Dr. Martin Luther

King Jr., and many others before and after them, attended

Highlander and realized that sharing their problems with

others is part of the process, that problems can be solved collectively, and that individual problems are not solved until the common problem is resolved for everyone. The Highlander approach emphasizes trust, democracy, and human dignity (Conti & Fellenz, 1986).

Individual Differences

There has been great concern in education during the first four decades for individual differences. The bedrock work surrounding this concept is related to David Kolb's work on learning styles. Kolb (1984) defines learning styles as basic and generalized dimensions of individuality in learning. The Learning Style Inventory was designed to assess the organization of a person's knowledge at the level of learning. A learning style is an internal cognitive process, which reflects how a person perceives and processes information (Kolb, 1984). Kolb pioneered this theory in working with adults.

Learning styles describe a person's typical mode of thinking, processing, or remembering. Learning styles refer to a pattern in the way in which each individual collects, organizes, and transforms information (Kolb, 1993). Kolb (1984) proposed a theory of experiential learning that involves four principal stages: Concrete Experiences (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization

(AC), and Active Experimentation (AE). These stages form the
foundation Kolb used to develop a learning styles model. The
CE/AC and AE/RO dimensions are polar opposites as far as
learning styles are concerned, and Kolb (1984) postulates
four types of learners based on these: Divergers,
Assimilators, Convergers, and Accommodators. The Diverger
learns intuitively through reflection. The Assimilator
learns by analyzing and reflecting. The Converger learns by
thinking and doing. The Accommodator learns by doing what is
intuitively felt as right. Kolb has identified trends
between academic success and learning style (Kolb, 1993).

The research and study of learning styles have been a
interest area in the field of education. There has been a
new focus within learning styles, and that focus is toward
learning strategies. Learning strategy research in adult
education, began with the use Of the Self-Knowledge
Inventory of Lifelong Learning Strategies (SKILLS). SKILLS
identify five identify five areas of learning that are used
in real-life learning: metacognition, metamotivation,
memory, critical thinking, and resource management (Conti &
Fellenz, 1991). Learning strategies can be defined as
"behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages in during
learning" (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986, p. 315). McKeachie and
Weinstein began delving into the teaching-learning

transaction and questioning the strategies people were using to learn effectively. Their focus was on students who were entering college. With much effort and research, McKeachie and Weinstein defined learning strategies as study skills.

In the last 30 to 40 years, educators have proposed that teaching would be more effective if instructor members took in consideration the differences in students' learning styles. A number of different conceptions of learning styles have been proposed, each with some plausibility. Nonetheless, as in most things, there are potential undesirable side effects from the use of learning style concepts. Probably the most serious is that styles are often taken to be fixed, inherited characteristics that limit students' ability to learn in ways that do not fit their styles (McKeachie, 1995).

The important thing to remember related to "learning styles" is that these preferences and habits of learning have been learned and that everyone is capable of going beyond the particular "style" preferred at the time (McKeachie, 1995). Regardless of their learning "styles," students can learn strategies that enable them to be effective when taught by methods that are not compatible with their preferred "style." To assume that one must teach to a particular learning style misses the fact that a given

student may be best taught by one method early in learning and by another after the student has gained some competence (Mckeachie, 1995).

Learning styles do not make nearly as much difference in learning as the student's prior knowledge, intelligence, and motivation (McKeachie, 1995). All of these characteristics are learnable. McKeachie's research and teaching has focused on teaching students how to overcome the diversity in instruction by further developing their strategic skills information (Kolb, 1984).

McKeachie's research group developed the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich, et al., 1991), which assesses such things as the degree to which students try to relate ideas in a subject to what they already know and the methods they use for organizing course materials. McKeachie suggests strategies for learning can be taught but that style cannot be taught. To acquire and integrate most cognitive processing skills including learning strategies, problem solving, reasoning, decision making, and critical thinking, students need guided practice and feedback (Anderson 1985).

Learning styles are characteristics and traits for how people process information and are developed early in one's life. Strategies are different; they are options that can

be taught. Broadly defined, learning strategies are behaviors or thoughts that facilitate learning (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). These strategies range from simple study skills, such as underlining a main idea, to complex thought processes, such as using analogies to relate prior knowledge to new information (Weinstein et al., 1988).

In response to the importance placed on the teaching and implementation of learning strategies, a need to assess these skills arose. The scales that emerged differed in respect to their focus; such efforts included the Learning Process Questionnaire (Biggs, 1987), the Learning and Behavior Scale (Scott, McDermott, Green, & Francis, 1988), the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich, et. Al 1995), and the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (Everson, 2000). Weinstein looked at learning strategies and study skills and created an instrument called the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory, a test designed to measure college students' learning and study strategies through self report. Learning styles research has been an important area in the broad discipline of education. However, today there is a new focus within individual differences (Fellenz & Conti, 1989). The new focus is toward learning strategies. Learning strategies are often confused with learning styles. Learning

styles are stable cognitive, affective, and physiological traits that can indicate learning environment perception, interaction, and response. Learning styles are fairly consistent and stable. These traits are not only a component of the individual's genetic constituency but are probably the manifestation of all the positive and negative experiences that have ever impacted the learner (Fellenz & Conti, 1989). Learning strategies are the techniques and skills that an individual elects to use in order to accomplish a specific learning task (p. 7). Research has found that learners are clustered into groups according to their learning strategy preferences (Conti & Kolody, 1998)

Learning strategy research in the field of adult education began with Self-Knowledge Inventory of Lifelong Learning Strategies (SKILLS) (Conti & Kolody, 2004). SKILLS is based on five areas of learning that are used in real-life learning: metacognition, metamotivation, memory, critical thinking, and resource management (Conti & Fellenz, 1991). Research with SKILLS led to the development of Assessing the Learning Strategies of AdultS (ATLAS). This line of inquiry has revealed that three distinct learning strategy preference groups exist based on these five areas of learning (Conti & Kolody, 1998, 1999).

Metamotivation

"Metacognition is defined as the knowledge and control over one's thinking and learning" (Brown, 1985). Metacognition involves thinking about one's own thinking (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 9) and requires the learner to explore, evaluate, and manage learning activities (Conti & Kolody, 1999). Metacognition may be defined as "one's knowledge concerning one's cognitive processes and products or anything related to them (Flavell, 1976, p. 232).

Three learning strategies of metacognition are Planning, Monitoring, and Adjusting. Planning involves how the learner approaches a learning task. "The basis for such planning is an awareness of one's most effective learning characteristics, insight into the learning task, and an understanding of the planning process" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 9). An example of planning would be in preparing an analysis and concentrating on the intent. "Monitoring is the learner's way of evaluating progress and encouraging deeper processing" (p. 9). By self-testing and seeking feedback, the learners can monitor their progress. "Effective learning calls for such modification or change in order to fine-tune or occasionally revise learning situations" (p. 9). By identifying the effective learning adaptations, the appropriate learning strategies can be incorporated into the

learning environment.

Adjusting allows the learner to modify the learning
process based upon the desired outcome and the learner's
evaluation of the process. An adjustment may be a
modification of one's approach to a learning task.
Adjustments may also be made to timing or resources.

Metamotivation is "one's knowing and understanding how
or why one is motivated to participate in or remain in a
learning activity" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 4). It is "the
awareness of and influence over factors that energize and
direct one's own learning" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 12).
"Motivation results from people's attempts to achieve and
maintain order in their lives" (Conti & Fellenz, 1991, p.
13).

Attention, Reward/Enjoyment, and Confidence are the
learning strategies involved in metamotivation. "Attention
is the focusing of an individual's learning abilities on
material to be learned" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 15). In
learning, many areas may be addressed at one time with
little focus on one main area. "Yet, attention is essential
to learning-at least to deliberate, planned learning" (p.
15). Attention also includes the establishment of a definite
time and place to study. Reward or Enjoyment "is
anticipating or recognizing the value of one's self or

learning specific material, having fun, or experiencing

satisfaction with the learning activity" (Fellenz & Conti,

1989, p. 16). Confidence is the "Belief that one can

complete the learning task successfully is an important

factor in motivation to learn" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p.

16).

Memory

Memory is "the capacity of humans to retain

information, to recall it when needed and recognize its

familiarity when they later see it or hear it again"

(Wingfield & Byrnes, 1981, p. 4). Strategies associated with

memory include the use of Organization, External Aids, and

Memory (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 6). Organization refers to

how learners restructure information (Seamon cited in Paul &

Fellenz, 1993). Restructuring strategies enable the learner

to structure information so it can be stored, retained, or

retrieved. Chunking is an Organization strategy. Chunking

is organizing information into sets to reduce the number of

categories to be remembered (p. 23). Utilizing External

Aids entails "the learner in controlling the environment in

some manner to enhance recall" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 7).

Use of External Aids strategies enable learners to use the

environment to assist with memory. "External memory

techniques rely on the interaction of the mental processes

of the individual and the manipulation of the environment to insure recall" (Paul & Fellenz, 1993, p. 23). These external aides includes items such as to-do lists, notebooks, small recording devices, and sticky notes (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 7).

Memory "involves using the . . . processes, structures, and strategies of long-term memory to enable individuals to access their vast knowledge system in order to plan, carry out, and evaluate learning" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 24). "Learning strategies improving the manner in which past memories are applied could be quite useful to adults" (p. 25). The past memories for the lifelong learner play an important role in recollecting previous learning strategies that have already proven to be successful.

Critical Thinking

"Critical thinking is a reflective thinking process utilizing higher order thinking skills in order to improve learning" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 7). This strategy includes Testing Assumptions, Generating Alternatives, and Conditional Acceptance. Testing Assumptions involves allowing "respondents to examine the accuracy or the acceptance uncritically given to an assumption, while others prompt them to identify relationships, spot inconsistencies, or question value sets" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 32).

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Generating Alternatives involves "exploring alternatives when engaged in critical thinking or problem solving" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 8). Conditional Acceptance includes "advocating reflective skepticism to avoid absolutes or over simplifications" (p. 8). Critical thinking engages the learning process and motivates the learner to ask questions, seek answers, and monitor the results in order to present a critique of the process.

Resource Management

Learning strategies allow the educator to be proactive with the learner. Utilization of learning strategies in order to lead the learner to seek many and varied resources provides success in the learning process. The "management of these resources is an important aspect in finding solutions to real-life, everyday problems" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, pp. 4-5).

The Identification of Resources, Critical Use of Resources, and Use of Human Resources are three learning strategies that come under the heading of resource (Fellenz & Conti, 1993). These strategies include utilization of the library, newspapers, magazines, books, electronic resources, and interviewing of other people. Critical Use of Resources "involves critical reflection about the material and selection of the most appropriate resource rather than

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simply those that are readily available (Fellenz & Conti, 1993). Use of Human Resources refers to engaging in "dialogue that involves listening to people with different opinions or insights into issues as well as the use of discussion to think through or study problems" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 37). "For some the support received is a critical part of the adult learning process" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9).

Further research of learning strategies has led to the identification of three groups of learning preferences with international validation. The ATLAS (Assessing the Learning Strategies of AdultS) stems from the SKILLS instrument. "The ATLAS instrument was based on the research findings of the Self-Knowledge Inventory of Lifelong Learning Strategies (SKILLS) and carries with it the validity of the SKILLS instrument" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 42).

Research related to learning strategies indicates that three distinct groups of learning strategy preferences exist among learners (Conti & Kolody, 1998). These groups have been named Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers, and the distribution among the three groups is relatively equal (p. 111). One's learning strategy preference has not been found to be associated in any way with demographic variables such as gender or race (Conti, Kolody, & Schneider, 1997, p.

71; Ghost Bear, 2001; Hinds, 2001; Lively, 2001; Willyard, 2000), and the distribution and characteristics of the groups are the same for international students as they are for students from North America (Armstrong, 2001; Pinkins, 2001; Shumaker, 2001). Moreover, a knowledge of one's learning strategy preference by the learner and the teacher can lead to improved academic gain in the classroom (Munday, D., 2002; Munday, W., 2002).

ATLAS "arose out of a need for a tool that was easy to administer, that could be completed rapidly, and that could be used immediately by both facilitators and learners" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 16). Three groups of learners were identified through qualitative and quantitative research methods which included cluster analysis, discriminant analysis, and analysis of variance conducted with the 15 learning strategies in SKILLS and the cluster groupings identified in the SKILLS studies (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9).

The groups are referred to as Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers (Conti & Kolody, 1999). Navigators are "focused learners who chart a course for learning and follow it" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9). They are high achievers who tend to concentrate on external learning processes. These learners rely on strategies such as

Planning, Attention, Identification and Use of Resources, and Testing Assumptions. Navigators work well under organized deadlines, clear-cut goals, and definite clearly-communicated expectations (p. 9).

Critical Thinking is the learning strategy most frequently associated with Problem Solvers. Like the Navigators, these learners look externally at available resources that will best assist their learning procedures. Problem Solvers "rely on a reflective thinking process which utilizes higher order thinking skills" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 11). They frequently test assumptions, generate alternatives, and use conditional acceptance strategies. Problem Solvers are handy at adjusting their learning processes and resources to fit their learning needs (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12).

Internally motivated, Engagers must be certain that a learning activity will be meaningful to them before they become involved (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14). They are "passionate learners who love to learn, learn with feeling, and learn best when they are actively engaged in a meaningful manner" (p. 13). Engagers consider their efforts "as an extension of themselves and are motivated by feelings of satisfaction and pride" (p. 15). They tend to focus on the process of learning rather than the content of material

being learned (Ghost Bear, 2001). Understanding learning

strategies is of ongoing interest to adult educators (Conti

& Kolody, 1999). Learning strategies are also described as

ways in which learners and their resources may be arranged

during learning situations (Smith, 1982, p. 113). While

learning styles are cognitive traits, learning strategies

are the techniques used to accomplish a specific learning

task (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p.7). Learning strategies can

also be described as a way in which learners arrange their

resources during learning situations (Smith, 1982, p. 113).

While learning styles are manipulated by the intrinsic ways

of information processing, learning strategies deal with the

methods learners use to acquire information in different

learning situations (Conti & Kolody, 1995). Rather than

being intrinsic ways of learning, learning strategies

include more choices on the part of the learner. Learning

strategies becomes the particular behavior that the learner

chooses to use when attempting a learning task (Fellenz &

Conti, 1989).

A variety of adult education settings from several

categories were used in these studies. "These studies

included college students (Bighorn, 1997; Conti & Kolody,

1995; Hill, 1992; Gallagher, 1998; Kolody, 1997; Strakal,

1995; Ungricht, 1997), nursing student (Lockwood, 1997),

business and non-profit leaders (Conti, Kolody, & Schneider, 1997; Courtnage, 1998; Gehring, 1997; Moretti, 1994), military personnel (Korinek, 1997; Yabui, 1993), public school administrators (McKenna, 1991), senior citizens (Quarles, 1998), and learning disabled students (Hays, 1995)" (James, 2000, pp. 66-67). Various cluster analyses, discriminate analysis, and analysis of variance were used in many of these studies to determine groups of learners based on the 15 learning strategies identified in the SKILLS instrument. SKILLS provided the data set that was used to create Assessing The Learning Strategies of AdultS (ATLAS) for identifying groups of learners based on learning strategies (Conti & Kolody, 1999). ATLAS places the learner in one of three learning strategy preference groups: Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers.

Adult education has been criticized for not developing "systematic lines of inquiry with one study building on another" (Merriam, 1987, p. 188). However, learning strategy research "is one line of adult learning inquiry in which one study has continued to lead to other studies" (James, 2000, p. 55). The ATLAS instrument has been used in various types of research. James (2000) used ATLAS to study students in the Adult Basic Education program (ABE). The study found that 52.9% of the participants identified

themselves in the ATLAS category of Engagers; 29.8% were

Navigators; and 17.3% were Problem Solvers. It was

discovered that there was a pivotal difference in the

findings observed in this study when compared with the

database used to develop ATLAS in which participants were

almost equally divided in the three learning strategy

preference categories.

When asked how they describe their approach to

learning, Navigators indicated that they help themselves by

managing their time, setting goals, and staying on task.

They prefer to gather enough information to complete the

project. Problem Solvers indicated that they enjoyed hands-

on projects and do not like to be interrupted during

projects. Engagers indicated that they need to have a goal,

cannot have distractions, and need to have resources readily

available. Overall, James (2000) study found that a

disproportionally large number of Engagers are enrolled in

the ABE programs.

Ghost Bear (2001) administered the ATLAS instrument to

describe the learning strategies of participants in the eBay

auction process on the Internet. This study described the

learning strategies that adults use in learning to engage in

the eBay auction process. The study used a descriptive

design along with the information and data gathering

advantages of the Internet to collect data about how adults

learning using the Internet. The study involved a

representative sample of 380 eBay users which was identified

by electronically downloading the e-mail addresses of

participants in completed auctions. Ghost Bear (2001) found

that a disproportionally large number of Problem Solvers use

ebay.

Major companies corporations are using the Internet and

other online networks to help dismantle the barriers that

hold back those who want to buy, sell, and trade on an

international scale. Girdner (2004) described the learning

patterns of SeniorNet members and how they have become

computer literate. Relevant to the study are strategies that

the seniors are using and the barriers they face while

attaining new computer skills. Girdner found that a

disproportionally large number of Problem Solvers are

SeniorNet members. The study also destroyed many myths about

seniors and computers.

Learning strategies are also described as ways in which

learners and their resources may be arranged during learning

situations (Smith, 1982, p. 113). Willyard (2000) used the

ATLAS instrument to described the learning strategies of

both first-generation college students and non-first-

generation college students at Tulsa Community College (TCC)

with particular emphasis on students that are of first-generation status. As in the ABE program (James, 2000), the study found that a disproportionally large number of Engagers are enrolled in the community college program.

Other studies have found a fairly equal distribution of learning strategies similar to the norm for ATLAS. For example, Turman (2002) used ATLAS to describe the learning strategies that students in Southern Nazarene University's graduate business program use in attending the program. He found that the distribution of learning strategies in the program at a university is similar to that in the general population.

Likewise, a distribution of learning strategies similar to that in the general population was found by Hinds (2002). This study described the learning strategies of African Americans in the community of Enid Oklahoma to determine if they differed from the expected norms for the general population. These are just some of the various types of research utilizing the ATLAS instrument.

Thus, although "ones learning strategy preference has not been found to be associated in any way with demographic variables such as gender or race...and the distribution and characteristics of the group are the same for international students as they are for students from North America" (Conti

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& Kolody, 2004, p. 185), learning strategy preferences have been found to be associated with the type of organization. Organizations such as literacy programs and community colleges that put a strong emphasis in their public image on relationships attract a disproportionately large number of Engagers. Learning situations that support generating alternatives such as the use of the Internet or community policing (Birzer, 2000) attract a disproportionately large number of Problem Solvers. No studies have yet found a disproportionately large number of Navigators. However, programs or organizations that are generalist in nature and represent natural organization in a society such as churches and universities attract a fairly even distribution of learning strategies similar to the norm for ATLAS.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study utilized a descriptive design to identify

the learning strategies preferences of the youth in

transition to adulthood in A Pocket Full of Hope®. A

descriptive design is a process that involves collecting

data in order to test hypotheses or to answer questions

concerning the current status of the subject of the study. A

descriptive design determines and reports the way thing are

(Gay, 1992, p. 217). "A common type of descriptive research

involves assessing attitudes or opinions toward individuals,

organizations, events, or procedures" (p. 13), and

characteristically descriptive data is "collected through a

questionnaire survey, an interview, or observation" (p. 13).

Typical descriptive studies are concerned with the

assessment of attitudes, opinions, demographic information,

conditions, and procedures (p. 218).

This study investigated the learning strategy

preferences of youth in transition to adulthood in the urban

life skills program of A Pocket Full Of Hope®. Both

qualitative and quantitative data were collected to describe

these learning strategies. Assessing the Learning Strategies

of AdultS (ATLAS) was also used to gather quantitative data,

and individual interviews and focus groups were used to collect qualitative data. Participants were asked to complete the ATLAS and were asked to voluntarily participate in personal interviews. ATLAS was selected because it can be easily administered and has been proven to be a reliable and valid instrument when utilized to measure the learning strategy preferences of adults in real-life learning situations (Conti & Kolody, 1998, p. 16). The ATLAS results were compared to the expected distribution based on the instrument's norms. Interview data was analyzed and categorized by means of the constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, pp. 68-70). This method was formulated by Glasser and Strauss and involved comparing experiences from the various interviews in order to form categories (Merriam, 1998, p. 159).

<center>A Pocket Full Of Hope®</center>

Fundamental change is exactly what the youth in transition to adulthood experience in A Pocket Full Of Hope®, a program for at-risk youth that was founded on the principles of learner centered concepts. In this program, at-risk youth are given the opportunity to empower themselves. Drawing heavily on the model of Highlander, the environment of A Pocket Full of Hope® is non-threatening, participatory, and inclusive. It allows people who are poor

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and disadvantaged to share their ideas, talents, and resources. Like Highlander, A Pocket Full of Hope® has created little islands of decency, a place where people can be human (Horton, 1990).

Even the curriculum development at A Pocket Full Of Hope® has followed that of the Highlander model where the goal is "first to enliven then to enlighten" (p.38). At A Pocket Full of Hope®, music, drama, and dance are used to enliven. Group singing, dancing, and role playing serve as a unifying tool as well as a means of communication. Singing, dancing, and acting out the realities and commonalities of their life situations serve the important psychological functions for members of creating a casual and cooperative atmosphere and of developing a spirit of invincibility.

A Pocket Full Of Hope® is a non-profit 501©(3) community-based, life skills development organization that is committed to providing positive life alternatives to at-risk youth. A Pocket Full Of Hope® offers youth a sense of belonging and a positive creative outlet for change in a safe non-threatening environment. A Pocket Full Of Hope® works collaboratively within the community to educate and inform the public regarding issues associated with high-risk youth. This organization is dedicated to helping youth transition from a negative peer culture to a positive peer

culture. The organization's programs teach character

development, good citizenship, teamwork, and life-skills

training through an association with volunteers and staff

who believe in its goals.

A Pocket Full of Hope® targets concerns of today's

youth. Such concerns include negative behavior, negative

environmental factors, low self-esteem, substance abuse, and

violence. These behaviors can lead to dropping out of

school, juvenile delinquency, and destructive peer-group

choices. A Pocket Full of Hope® provides a program of

short-term and intensive intervention sessions which utilize

music, drama, and dance therapy techniques. Additionally, A

Pocket Full of Hope® offer participants the opportunity to

continue their involvement once they graduate from the

initial program.

A Pocket Full of Hope® was established in May of 2000

by Lester Shaw. Its program combines youth development with

delinquency prevention in an atmosphere of acceptance and

understanding. The programs of A Pocket Full of Hope® assist

young people and their families in exploring the world on

their own terms as they develop internal strength mechanisms

to help them deal with adverse environmental factors. A

Pocket Full of Hope® offers youth access to knowledge about

healthy choices that reinforce social skills and self-esteem

and help them develop character and leadership skills. Thus, the organization helps to restore well being to the lives of troubled young people who are at risk of developing destructive behavior patterns and eventually dropping out of school.

Involvement

There are several levels of involvement in A Pocket Full of Hope®. The first level on the journey with A Pocket Full of Hope® is participation in the UpBeat After School Theatre program. Within the broad parameters of a fine arts program and through the utilization of drama therapy techniques, youth are encouraged to examine social issues relevant to their lives. The program provides a safe, structured environment. By implementing proven techniques such as role-playing, visualization, modeling, and improvisation, youth are provided an avenue through which to work out their conflicts. Youth involved with UpBeat After School Theatre show an increase in school attendance and are more willing and able to accept responsibility for their actions. Through planned success, youth experience an increase in self-confidence, the development of a positive self-image, and an improved self-esteem. Youth learn anger management, modification of negative attitudes, problem solving capabilities, and self-control. As a result, social

skills are improved and many youth assume leadership roles within the group.

The UpBeat After School Theatre program is held once a week for 12 weeks. Participants are involved in writing scripts, composing music, making costumes and props, and building sets. UpBeat participants perform for their family, friends, and the public the play they have worked on for the 12 weeks of the program. To bolster the participant's nutritional needs, participants enjoy a meal after each meeting before they return to their homes.

A Pocket Full of Hope® continues to search for new solutions to redress old problems. A play was written to highlight the real-life issues that the members are confronted with titled "Life is a Struggle". In this play, youth in transition to adulthood are faced with real-life challenges such as neglect, drug use, gang involvement, negative influences, low self-esteem, relationships, dropping out of school, and the consequences of bad choices. Youth deal with real-life issues everyday; however, those issues are often overlooked as experiences of learning thus leaving youth disempowered and without affirmation. Original music was written for the play for scene changes and special effects. Dance choreography highlighted scenes of celebration and expressions of freedom.

The play provided a framework for youth to understand the importance of developing a healthier sense of self-worth and self-esteem as it relates to empowerment. Participants were able to recognize the negative pressures that seek to prevent achievement. They also learned how to take personal responsibility for discovering and maximizing their purpose in life. Participants were able to integrate self-esteem builders into their daily life as a means of developing their full potential. The experiential play provided the youth in transition to adulthood an opportunity to gain insight into their individual power to make a positive difference within their sphere of influence.

A Pocket Full Of Hope® entered the script "Life is a Struggle," in the Douglas Turner Ward/Alice Childress Script Writing Award contest. The Gwendolyn Brooks Center for Black Literature and Creative Writing at Chicago State University in Chicago, Illinois sponsors the annual writers conference in honor of Gwendolyn Brooks, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet. The script received first place. The award was accepted on behalf of the youth in A Pocket Full Of Hope®. The greatest significance of receiving such a prestigious award is that it allowed the youth of A Pocket Full Of Hope® to share in the experience of global acceptance.

In addition to therapeutic arts activities, members

participate in discussions on relevant topics such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy, violence, and avoidance of gang involvement. While A Pocket Full Of Hope® recognizes that troubled youth in danger of juvenile delinquency can be found throughout Tulsa, it specifically targets minority youth in the north and west side of Tulsa. These are the areas of the city where poverty is most pervasive and juvenile crime the most prevalent. A Pocket Full Of Hope® accepts referrals from school counselors, probation officers, family service counselors, parents, clergyman, civic organizations, social workers, and UpBeat members.

A Pocket Full of Hope® realizes the necessity of continued involvement. Therefore after completing the Up-Beat After School Theatre program, members can continue their involvement through participation as a Pocket Player. Youth involved as Pocket Players participate more as peer mentors to help new UpBeat participants feel accepted, respected, and supported. Peer Mentors are responsible for offering advice, answering questions, and providing information on opportunities to help the new upBeat members become acclimated and integrated into a learner centered environment. Pocket Players play an integral role, assisting the facilitators and leadership teams in communicating with all UpBeat members to help them transition to more extensive

art experiences with less apprehension. Examples of various

Pocket Player mentoring activities include exploring

traditional theatre, directing, art design, music,

choreography and technical training in lights, sound, video,

audio, and set building. Additionally pocket players help

with studio recording, live stage band performances, and

event planning. A typical Pocket Player will spend 10-12

hours a month with new UpBeat members on mentorship related

activities.

<u>Service Learning</u>

In this meaningful place, the youth also learn to see

themselves as participants in this society. They are able to

put their knowledge and ideas into practice by helping to

solve real community problems alongside other community

members. Service-learning is a concept that combines service

objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the

activity change both the recipient and the provider of the

service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks

with structured opportunities that link the task to

self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and

comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content

(Fiske, 2001). According to the (National Service Learning

Cooperative Clearinghouse, 1994) service learning:

1.   Links to academic content and standards
2.   Involves young people in helping to determine

and meet real, defined community needs

3. Is reciprocal in nature, benefitting both the community and the service providers by combining a service experience with a learning experience

4. Can be used in any subject area so long as it is appropriate to learning goal

5. Works at all ages, even among young children

As part of the service-learning component, all youth are encouraged to perform community service by performing for such groups as youth services, nursing homes, schools, and hospitals. Service learning is a win-win proposition for communities and young people. When young people serve, they can help solve problems that face their communities like, drug abuse, neglect, hunger, homelessness, and teenage pregnancy. They can also grow on a personal, social and intellectual level. By serving something greater than themselves, these young people are learning to view their rich community as a resource while helping to meet vital community needs and becoming responsible and engaged citizens. Thus, they are learning to be active citizens not just spectators.

Population

The population for a study is the group of interest to the researcher and is the group to which the researcher would like the results of the study to be generalizable. The target population has at least one characteristic that differentiates it from other groups" (Gay, 1992, p. 124).

The population for this study was all 13 to 18 year old

youth in transition of A Pocket Full Of Hope®.

A sample is a group within the population that is

representative of the overall population. Stratified

sampling is the "process of selecting a sample in such a way

that identified subgroups in the population are represented

in the sample in the same proportion that they exist in the

population" (p. 126). ATLAS was administered to the entire

population. All of the youth in transition between 13 and 18

were given ATLAS. However, for the interviews and focus

groups, a stratified sample was used based on learning

strategies. Two focus groups were held with each of the

three learning strategy preference groups. Interviews were

held with at least five participants in each of these

learning strategy preference groups. Thus, while all members

of A Pocket Full Of Hope® completed ATLAS, separate focus

group and interviews were conducted for Navigators, Problems

Solvers, and Engagers.

There were 161 youth that participated in the study.

There were 89 males and 72 females (see Table 1). The age

range of the participants were from 11 to 23 years old with

88.05% 12 to 16 year old. Approximately one-forth (25.79%)

of the total group were 13 years old. The 14-year old made

up the second largest group (17.61%). Four groups each

Table 1: Profile of Participants by Gender, Age, Race, and
          College Plans

Variable	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	89	55.28
Female	72	44.72
Total	161	100.00
Age		
11	2	1.26
12	18	11.32
13	41	25.79
14	28	17.61
15	15	9.43
16	22	13.84
17	16	10.06
18	8	5.03
19	5	3.14
20	2	1.26
21	1	0.63
23	1	0.63
Total	159	100.00
No Response	2	---
Race		
African American	110	69.18
White	28	17.61
Hispanic	8	5.03
Native American	8	5.03
Asian	5	3.14
Total	159	100.00
No Response	2	---
College Plans		
Going to College	143	97.28
Not Going to College	4	2.72
Total	147	100.00
No Response	2	---

represented about one tenth of the sample: 16-year old

(13.84%), 12-year olds (11.32%), 17 year olds (10.06%), and

15-year olds (9.43%).

The participants were predominantly African Americans (69.18%). Other groups included White (17.61%), Hispanics (5.03%), Native Americans (5.03%), and Asian American (3.14%). This is not representative of the over all population of Oklahoma however it is reflective of the neighborhoods that the youth come from. Oklahoma has a population of 3,460,097 with the following racial breakdown. White--76.2%, Native American--7.9%, African American--7.6%, Hispanic--5.2% Asian--1.4% (United States Census, 2001). The total population for Tulsa County 564,079 people is similar to that of the state: White (75.0%) , and African American (10.9%). However in North Tulsa, the total population is predominantly African American 13,902 (80%) while the White population is 2,920 just slightly over (20%).

In America, a major way of social mobility is education. A Pocket Full Of Hope® stress the role of education for empowering Youth that are in Transition to Adulthood. Therefore, the participants were asked about their intention about attending college. A sizable majority (97.28%), of the participants indicated they plan to go to college. The result of this trend reflects the growing number of participants in A Pocket Full Of Hope® that are being empowered to look beyond their present impoverished

existence to gain the confidence to plan for a better life. This is an enormous transformation given the high drop out rate in the area of North Tulsa where the study was conducted.

<p align="center">ATLAS</p>

Assessing the Learning Strategies of AdultS (ATLAS) is an easy instrument to administer and is designed to distinguish learning strategy profiles (Conti & Kolody, 1999). The instrument can be administered promptly and completed in the relatively short period of time of approximately 2 minutes. The ATLAS instrument utilizes a flow-chart design consisting of color coded booklet with pages on one-half sheets of standard sized 8.5"x 11" paper in a bound format. Each page has explicit instructions to assist the respondent in completing the process. By following the flow chart for their answers, respondents are quickly identified as being in one of three groups of learners: Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. Each group processes unique and distinct learning strategy characteristics.

ATLAS is a valid and reliable instrument for measuring learning strategies. "The most simplistic definition of validity is that it is the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure" (Gay, 1992, p. 155). The

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validity of an instrument is established if it measures what it is designed to measure (Gay, 1987, p. 553). There are several types of validity; however, in educational research, the three most commonly recognized types are construct, content, and criterion-related validity.

Construct validity is the degree to which a test measures an intended hypothetical construct. "A construct is a nonobservable trait, such as intelligence, which explains behavior. You cannot see a construct; you can only observe its effect" (Gay, 1992, p. 157). Construct validity for ATLAS was established by synthesizing the results of the numerous research studies using the Self-Knowledge Inventory of Lifelong Learning Strategies (SKILLS) instrument and consolidating these results (Conti & Kolody, 1999). Cluster analysis was used with this data to identify the three learning strategy groups of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers (p. 18).

Content validity "is the degree to which a test measures an intended content area" (Gay, 1992, p. 156) and "refers to the sampling adequacy of the content of the instrument" (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 458). The ATLAS instrument was derived from SKILLS, and the "content validity for ATLAS is concerned with the degree to which the items are representative of learning strategy characteristics of the

three groups identified in the SKILLS research" (Conti &

Kolody, 1999, p. 18). The differences between each group

were determined by using a sequence of discriminant

analyses. This statistical procedure revealed that the

"major process that separated the groups related to how each

group sought to accomplish the learning task" (p. 18). It

was observed that the "Navigators and Problem Solvers

initiate a learning task by looking externally to themselves

at the utilization of resources that will help them

accomplish the learning" (p. 18). However, Engagers "involve

themselves in the reflective process of determining

internally that they will enjoy the learning task enough to

finish it" (p. 18).

Criterion-related validity is "validity which is

determined by relating performance on a test to performance

on another criterion" (Gay, 1987, p. 543). It examines how

well the measuring instrument correlates with measures of

performance (Kerlinger, 1986, p. 419). Criterion-related

validity was established by asking respondents to compare

their ATLAS results to the real-life criterion of how

accurate this description was of how they actually learn.

At least 90% of those taking ATLAS confirmed that it

accurately described them (Ghost Bear, 2001). Their

quantitative data has been supported by qualitative data.

This quantitative data has been supported by qualitative data. In interviews, almost all participants confirmed that the characteristics of the learning strategy category identified by ATLAS accurately applied to them (James, 2000; Lively, 2001; Willyard, 2000; Munday, 2002; Massy, 2003).

Reliability is "the accuracy or precision of a measuring instrument" (Kerlinger, 1986, p. 405). The reliability of the instrument is determined by its ability to produce the same or significantly similar results when utilized to measure the same variables. Reliability is "the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it measures....Reliability is expressed numerically, usually as a coefficient; a high coefficient indicates high reliability" (p. 162). "In test-retest examinations covering periods of time from one-week to three-weeks, ATLAS has a reliability of .87" (Ghost Bear, 2001, p. 82).

Procedures

Research answers usually will come from the comparison of the data collected. The data are relatively meaningless without such a comparison. Data alone cannot provide answers to research questions (Merriam & Simpson, 1984, p. 126). Constant comparative method of analyzing data is the process of comparing new data with old data. The general ideal behind the use of the constant comparative method can

also be used for generating theory in quantitative research

(Glaser & Strauss, 1999). There are four stages that

categorizes the constant comparative method.

1. comparing incidents applicable to each
    category,
2. integrating categories and their properties,
3. delimiting the theory,
4. writing the theory.

ATLAS was used to determine learning strategy

preferences. Interview questions were designed for the three

ATLAS characteristic grouping: Navigator, Problem Solver,

and Engager. The data for the study was collected from the

urban life skills program of A Pocket Full Of Hope®. A

Pocket Full of Hope® groups meet three times a week at four

Tulsa Schools. ATLAS was introduced to the youth in

attendance by the researcher. A discussion followed to

explain the procedures for administering the instrument.

Participants were asked to read the instrument and to follow

the instructions. The researcher assisted and addressed all

questions at this point. Respondents recorded their ATLAS

grouping on a data sheet, and these were collected. The data

sheet contained spaces for the student's name, learning

strategy information, demographic data, and plans related to

attending college.

Once the data was collected, it was divided into the

three learning strategy preference groups for analyzing and

categorizing. Interviews and focus groups were scheduled based on the results of the collected data.

Individual Interviews

In this study 37 individual interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted on site at A Pocket Full Of Hope® meetings with participants who randomly volunteered to be interviewed after their learning strategy preference had been identified with ATLAS. There were 9 Navigators, 10 Problem Solvers, and 18 Engagers. "A typical interview is a one-on-one session in which the researcher asks a series of open-ended, probing questions. In addition to serving triangulation objectives, interviews have a unique purpose, namely to acquire data no obtainable in any other way" (Gay, 1996, p. 223).

Individual interviews were conducted with the youth in transition in A Pocket Full Of Hope®. Questions focused on individual learning strategy preferences. The participants were asked the following questions:

1. Did you find ATLAS to be an accurate assessment of your learning strategy preferences?

2. What influenced your choice?

3. Discuss teaching methods that positively or negatively impacted your learning?

Focus Groups

Focus groups were also conducted. Focus groups are used

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to discuss and identify important issues from the perspective of the participants. Focus groups most often "have 6 to 10 participants per group" (Morgan, 1997, p. 34)'. In this study, six focus groups were held with a total of 47 participants. The groups sizes were as follows: Navigators-- 5 and 6, Problem Solvers-7 and 10, and Engagers--9 and 10.

Participants in each focus group were asked two types of questions. Some were general in nature, and some were specific to a particular learning strategy group; these questions were based on the format used by James (2000).

Qualitative researchers in education ask participants what they are experiencing, how they interpret these experiences, and how they structure their world (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 30). In order to discover the perceptions of the youth in A Pocket Full Of Hope®, general questions were asked about topics that applied to all learners. However, since each learning strategy group approaches learning tasks differently, specific questions were asked of each learning strategy group. These questions were tailored to the learning strategy characteristics of each group. The following are general questions that were asked of all groups.

1. Tell me about a recent learning project in which you were involved.

2. How do you go about learning a specific task?

3.   What kinds of things do teachers do in a
     learning situation that you like and that
     really help you learn?

4.   What kinds of things do teachers do in a
     learning situation that you do not like and
     that really do not help you learn?

5.   What kinds of things do you do to help
     yourself in a learning situation?

6.   What kinds of things have you done that has
     hindered you in a learning situation?

7.   What are other barriers to learning that you
     have encountered?

8.   What do you think either you or the teacher
     can do about these barriers? (James, 2000, p.
     97)

Navigators are learners who rely heavily on planning
their moto is "plan to work and work the plan" (Conti &
Kolody, 2004). Therefore, they were also asked the
following additional questions.

1.   How do you use organization in a learning project?

2.   How do you check your progress in a learning
     project? (James, 2000, pp. 96-97)

Engagers involve other people in learning activities
and want assurance that the learning activity is worthwhile.
Therefore, they were asked the following additional
questions.

1.   What process do you go through in determining if a
     learning project is worth doing?
2.   What types of activities do you
     like to use in a learning project? (James, 2000, p.
     97)

Problem Solvers rely on critical thinking and generating alternatives. Therefore, they were asked the following additional questions.

1. How do you plan for a learning project?
2. How do you identify resources for a learning project? (James, 2000, p. 97)

The constant comparative method provides an ongoing means of comparing data to and against other data to provide additional insights on research findings (Merriam, 1988), and it was used in this study. Once the data was collected, it was placed into categories. Then the new information was collected and compared with the old data. This process constantly compares the new data with the existing data which helps to formulate categories.

Data from the focus groups were gathered first. After each focus group meeting, the tapes were reviewed and the major quotes, which had the potential of answering research questions, were transcribed into an Excel worksheet. Through this constant comparative method, a list of potential categories was generated. This process was continued with the interviews. After all of the focus group meetings and interviews were completed, the data were categorized using key words and then was sorted by key words to make key word categories. A frequency distribution was run for the key words, and a cross-tabulation was completed for the key

words categorized by learning strategies.

After the coding process was completed, the qualitative data were printed by the categories formed by the key words. Each quote was linked to the participant's demographic and learning strategy information. Each category of data was analyzed separately. Themes were identified within each category, and exemplary quotes were selected to describe these themes. After this analysis process, the categories were arranged to form the sections of this report.

After the researcher had completed this initial analysis, the results were subjected to a peer group review. Peer debriefing is the process of using peers who have no contractual interest in the study in an extensive discussion to review the findings and conclusions related to the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 237). The peer group consisted on six Adult Education specialists: the advisor for the study, two professionals with doctorates in Adult Education, and three professionals who are in the research stage of their doctoral program in Adult Education. All have experience in teaching and in working with youth in at-risk situations. The peer group reviewed the categories formed by the researcher and samples of the data to support these categories. The peer group members not only supported the categories formed by the researcher but also provided

additional insights related to the interpretation and

meaning of the data. They also discussed conclusions that

could be drawn from the data.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Learning Strategy Results

All 161 youth completed ATLAS. Chi square was used to examine the difference between the observed ATLAS scores and the expected ATLAS scores based on the norm groups for creating ATLAS (see Table 2). The frequency observed in this study was found to be systematically different from the frequency expected based on the database to which it was compared. It was logical to expect the results to show 36.5% Navigators, 31.8% Engagers, and 31.7% Problem Solvers among this group of participants (Conti & Kolody, 1999a). ATLAS results indicated that 45% of the participants were Engagers, 35.38% were Navigators, and 20.63% were Problem Solvers.

Table 2: Distribution of Learning Strategy Groups

Group	Percent	Observed	Expected	Difference
Navigator	34.38	55	58.4	-3.4
Problem Solver	20.63	33	50.7	-17.72
Engager	45.00	72	50.9	21.12
Total	100.00	160		
χ^2 = 22.6, $\underline{df}$ = 2, $\underline{p}$ = .001				

After the participants were given ATLAS, they were randomly asked to volunteer to participate in either focus groups or interviews for their respective learning strategy. The following are the collective individual interview and

focus group discussion responses of the representatives of
the three learning strategy preference groups which describe
each group's approach to learning.

<u>Navigators</u>

Each of the three learning strategy preference groups
has distinct characteristics. These have been define for
adult learners in the process of creating ATLAS and been
further described in numerous research studies using ATLAS
(James, 2000; Ghost Bear, 2002). Navigators generally are
focused, results-oriented, high achievers who like logical
connections, planning, and organizing (Conti & Kolody,
2004). These learners initiate a learning activity by
looking externally at the utilization of resources that will
help them accomplish the learning task and by immediately
beginning to narrow and focus these resources (p. 185). They
rely heavily on planning their learning, and their motto is"
Plan the work; work the plan" (Ghost Bear, 2001; Willyard,
2000). They are constantly striving for improvement, and
consequently everything in the learning environment relates
to achieving efficiency and effectiveness.

Navigators have a demand for order and structure, are
logic oriented, are objective, and are perfectionists (Conti
& Kolody, 2004, p. 185). In learning situations, they like
structure and are highly organized, want schedules and

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deadlines, desire clear learning objectives and expectations, and like summaries and recaps at the end and advanced organizers at the beginning of the learning activity. They use many organizational tools such as colored markers, staples, and binders. They expect and appreciate prompt feedback and will often clarify the details of a learning task several times. Navigators are results oriented and seek logical connections. For them, emotions are not a consideration in learning, and liking the teacher and subject are not important. Consequently, they tend not to like group work because they hate slackers and feel that they can often do the work more efficiently by themselves. Navigators put much internal pressure on themselves by seeking perfection, are hyper-critical of errors they make, and often need a period of time to deal effectively with criticisms of their work. Typically, a Navigator comment about time management was as follows: "When I start something, I like to stay with it until I finish. Otherwise it may have something left out of it" (14-year-old Black male).

The comment of youth-in-transition who were identified with ATLAS were consistent with the comments of adults who were navigators. When Navigators talked about setting goals and staying on task, they indicated a desire to always know

the expected outcome. If they were talking about a school

assignment, they indicated a need to have a clear

understanding of exactly what the teacher expected of them.

Navigators indicated that they had trouble staying focused

when they were not given adequate information to complete a

project. Characteristic of a Navigator were comments about

goal setting and staying on task. For example, "When a

teacher gives me work, I know right then what I want to do"

(16 year-old Black female). Once they know what they are

going to do and what the expected outcome is, Navigators

indicated a need to identify the necessary resources. They

wanted to know before they started a project that they had

everything necessary to complete the project. A standard

Navigator comment about gathering enough information was, as

follow: "I like to sort everything out first. For example,

for a science project I have to know the measurements,

inches then I would lay everything out in front of me on a

table so I she can see it" (14-year-old Black female).

Problem Solvers

Problem Solvers reply on critical thinking skills. This

is a reflective thinking process which uses higher order

thinking skills (Brookfield, 1987). Like Navigators, Problem

Solvers initiate a learning activity by looking externally

at available resources; however, instead of narrowing the

options available, they immediately begin to generate

alternatives based on these resources (Conti & Kolody, 2004,

p. 186). Problem Solvers are storytellers who elaborate

extensively on stories about their experiences (Ghost Bear,

2001) because these provide concrete examples for learning.

Because they are constantly seeking alternatives, most of

their learning activities relate to generating alternatives

(Conti & Kolody, 2004, p. 186). Because they are open minded

to so many learning possibilities, they often have

difficulty making decisions. Consequently, they do not do

well on multiple-choice tests because these limit divergent

thinking, and Problem Solvers procrastinate because it

allows thinking to continue. Once they are interrupted in

the learning process, they have difficulty in starting

again. While Navigators see it as a failure, Problems

Solvers view trial-and-error as a process for generating

more alternatives. Because they are curious, inventive, and

intuitive, learning is an adventure for Problem Solvers and

is one that they prefer to do in their own way without

rigidity or didactic orders. Of the three learning strategy

preference groups, the Problem Solvers are the most

comfortable dealing with abstract ideas, and they often

think in terms of symbols. Problem Solvers are very

confident of their own abilities and will often ask

questions in class just to help others understand better even if they do not want to know the answer. Problem Solvers are very descriptive and detailed in their answers and insist on using may examples to explain an idea. As a result, they are storytellers who enjoy the process of telling the story more than worrying about its completion. The motto for Problems Solvers is "Ask them what time it is, and they will build you a clock" (Ghost Bear, 2001).

Like the Navigators, the youth-in-transition who were identified with ATLAS as Problem Solvers were similar to adult Problem Solvers. Problem Solvers indicated a desire to do things for themselves. For example, when discussing their preferred way to learn something new, Problem Solvers said that they wanted a quiet atmosphere in which to complete a learning project. They commented that loud noises or people talking to or around them were distractions that caused them to lose focus. They also indicated difficulty returning to a project after an interruption:"I hate to be interrupted. Once I am interrupted it is hard for me to get back into focus" (13 year-old Black female Problem Solver). Problem Solvers in this study indicated that they liked hands-on activities. Typical comments from Problem Solvers include:

> I like hands-on projects. (17 year-old Black male)

I liked to do stuff with my hands, computer and other projects (15 year-old White female)

Sometimes I lose focus and need a little busy work(16 year-old Black male)
As long as I work with my hands I won't get sleepy (15 year-old Black female

I do everything with my hands, I even talk with my hands (17 year-old Black male)

Even when I read, I used my finger to follow the words in the book (13 year-old Black male)

Problem Solvers want a quiet atmosphere in which to complete a learning project (James, 2000). They commented that loud noises or people talking to or around them were distractions that caused them to lose focus. Problem Solvers indicated a desire to do things for themselves (James, 2000). They also indicated difficulty returning to a project after an interruption. A typical Problem Solver comment about interruptions was as follow: "I hate to be interrupted because it take me so long to get started in the first place and just when I get started here come somebody messin wit me and it's hard to get back into it" (13-year-old Black female).

Questions from Problem Solvers did not always relate directly to the topic under discussion. During the interviews, Problem Solvers usually wanted an illustration to questions that were asked and afterwards would follow up with a series of questions of their own. However, it seemed

at times as though the question itself and not necessarily

the answer sparked other questions for the Problem Solvers.

Typical series of questions from a 14-year-old Black female

Problem Solver: "Are we going to be on TV? Can you give me

an example? Can I ask the next question?"

<u>Engagers</u>

Engagers are passionate learners who love to learn,

learn with feeling, and learn best when they are actively

engaged in a meaningful manner with the learning task

(Conti & Kolody, 2004, p. 186); "the key to learning is

engagement--a relationship between the learner, the task or

subject matter, the environment, and the teacher" (Kidd,

1973, p. 266). While the Navigators and Problems Solvers use

the cognitive process of identifying resources to start a

learning task, Engagers initiate a learning activity from

the affective domain; that is, before they will begin a

learning task, they involve themselves in the reflective

process of determining internally that they will enjoy the

learning task enough that it is worth doing (Conti &

Kolody, 2004, pp. 186-187). The motto for learning for

Engagers is that "It is FUN!!" For Engagers, everything in

the learning process relates to building relationships with

others. Feelings are the key for the Engagers, and this is

reflected in the use of emotional words and terms with

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feeling such as love and fun. Learning has an aura of excitement for Engagers, and they fully immerse themselves in the learning once they engage in it. They seek and find joy in the learning process and delight in new accomplishments. However, they can get bored quickly. To avoid this, the teacher needs to have them actively engaged in the learning and must remember that Engagers are more interested in the process of learning and the relationships that are build during this process than they are in the academic outcomes of the learning. Unlike Problem Solvers, Engagers are not interested in developing new or abstract ways of doing things; instead, they will often take the path of least resistance to get to a final result or they will utilize shortcuts created by others because these things allow more time and energy for concentrating on the dynamics of the learning process. Engagers are excellent networkers who love group work. They tend to develop an emotional affinity with the teacher and have a hard time separating themselves from their work. Because the central feature of learning for Engagers is building relationships, they rely heavily on human resources.

Like the other learning strategy preference group, the comments of youth-in-transition who were identified as engagers on ATLAS were similar to that of adult Engagers.

Some Engagers expressed interest in school activities that relate to being around groups of people. Some examples given were assemblies and field trips. The Engagers in this study often indicated that they did not waste their time and energy on projects that they did not see as useful to them in some way that they held back from starting something that they did not believe they had enough time or resources to complete. Repeated Engager comments about wasting time were:

> It has to be worth my while (15 year-old Black male)
>
> I have to be able to relate to what ever it is I'm suppose to do (16 year old Black-female)
>
> If it looks too hard, I won't even start (14 year-old Black male)
>
> If I think I'm going to be good at it and it's going to be fun, I will do it, (13 year-old Black female)
>
> I don't see why we have to take German or Latin in school. We are not gonna use it no way. (17 year-old Black-male)
>
> I like to watch people and their mistakes to see how they do it before I try (13 year-old Black female)

Engagers were apt to avoid starting something that they did not believe they had adequate time or resources to complete. Existing research indicated that Engagers did not like to waste their time on projects that were not enjoyable, interesting, or in some way necessary to them personally (James, 2000). Engagers evaluate the potential

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outcome to determine if the learning experience is worth the

effort required (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14). Engagers

pursue learning activities that result in self-development,

personal change, and growth (p. 14). They also indicated

that if they had too many projects from which to choose,

they had difficulty starting any of the projects. Typical

Engager comments of youth-in-transition concerning the

completing of a learning project were:

> Why start something if you can't finish it?
> (13-year-old Black female)

> Having more than one project to do is just too much
> for me. (18-year-old Black female)

> I do not like reading books that are too long and
> wordy, more pictures the better. (16-year-old Black
> male)

> If I get to stress out in class, I will stop working
> and start talking to my friends. (17-Year- old Black
> male)

> Sometimes I just get lazy. (13-year-old White female)

Engagers indicated that they need to have a goal to

work toward and that there must be nothing to distract them

from that goal. They indicated that until a learning

project became a goal and time was allocated to complete it,

they allowed distractions to keep them from accomplishing a

project (James, 2000). A study by (James, 2000), indicated

that a common distraction for Engagers is the interaction

with other people. Other research suggest that "the key to

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learning is engagement, a relationship between the learner,

the task or matter, the environment and the teacher"(Kidd,

1973, P. 266). Comments of goal setting usually shared by

Engager were:

>When I'm given an assignment, I look at the answer and
>try to figure out how they got the answer. (12 year-
>old Black female)
>
>I like to look at it carefully till I understand
>it before I go to the next one. (13 year-old
>Black male)
>
>Once I get started on something, I don't like to play
>around. (15 year-old Black female)
>
>I usually try to get my work done early so I can have
>time to play around. (16 year-old-Black male
>
>If I don't already know it I will ask somebody.
>Then when they tell me the answer, I will
>memorize it and say it over and over and over.
>Then before I go to sleep I will write it
>down.(14 year-old white female)

Positive Teacher Actions and Attributes

The willingness of teachers to understand and consider

the different learners in their classroom and to adapt their

teaching techniques in order to complement these learners is

paramount to the education and success of the learner. The

youth were asked to comment on their teachers, the classroom

environment, and what strategies are best to meet their

learning expectations.

Navigators

Navigators prefer a structured learning environment

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with clear objectives, expectations, schedules, and deadlines (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 11). The youth-in-transition who are Navigators in this study indicated that teachers who have been the most helpful to them (a) repeated things until students understood, (b) were organized, © did not waste student's time, (d) did not require group work, and (e) enjoyed teaching. Navigators were the only participants in this study who indicated what they believe are necessary components of a good school (James 2000). They considered that good schools have sufficient equipment, are organized, and eliminate distractions as much as possible.

Navigators stressed that helpful teachers repeat instructions and expectations until all students have a clear understanding of what is required (James, 2000). They indicated a belief that helpful teachers continued to answer learners questions without appearing impatient and without embarrassing the learner. However, these Navigators also indicated that they were only interested in the teacher providing answers to their questions. They become impatient when other students continue to use class time to ask questions after the Navigators were ready to begin a project. The following is a common Navigator comment about teachers that Navigators considered to be helpful. "They

[teachers] really show us how to do the work and don't get mad if I ask questions when I'm trying to understand better what I'm supposed to do" (17-year-old Hispanic male).

Navigators indicated that it is helpful to them when teachers are organized. Organization in both the teaching format and the overall classroom atmosphere seemed to be equally important. The terms "organization" and "structure" were used interchangeably. For example, having structure to one Navigator meant being organized to another. A typical Navigator youth-in-transition comment was, "I like when the teacher talks and explains things to us, and lets us know what's going to happen next. We have assigned seats too" (14-year-old Black female).

Navigators preferred teachers that they believed did not waste a learner's time by asking them to participate in things that the learner believed delayed the completion of an activity. Navigators find it to be helpful when teachers allowed them to work at their own pace and to leave when they had completed the activities. While working at their own pace Navigators have more control and autonomy. A typical Navigator comment was, "They let me go at my own pace but are there when I need help" (16-year-old White female).

Navigators also indicated a preference for working

with teachers who enjoyed teaching and working with students. They indicated a belief that when teachers like what they do, they make learning more fun. For example, they mentioned helpful teachers who made games out of learning.

Problem Solvers

Problem Solvers prefer open-ended questions, examples, and problem-solving activities rather than multiple-choice exams (Conti & Kolody, 1999, pp. 12-13). Problem Solvers in this study indicated that teachers that they had found to be helpful (a) offered personal attention and (b) provided alternative learning formats, options, and illustrations.

Problem Solvers indicated that helpful teachers were those who allowed time with students either before or after class to provide additional assistance or further explanation for individual learners. They described helpful teachers as providing encouragement as well as individual attention. A common Problem Solver comment was, "My teacher took time out with me to help me in areas that I was having problems with," (16-year-old Black female).

Problem Solvers also described helpful teachers as those who provided alternatives and options. Problem Solvers were most comfortable in classes where alternatives

were either presented by the teacher or learners were
encouraged to propose alternatives. One Problem Solver
commented that helpful teachers will "illustrate, write down
examples of how a problem is done, hand out books or leaflet
on a subject, or show a film about a subject" (15-year-old
Black female).

Engagers

Engagers tend to like the interaction of group work and
are more interested in what is to be learned than on formal
evaluation (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13). Once involved,
Engagers take learning personally. Their self-worth can be
validated or easily damaged by others (p. 15). Responses of
Engagers in this study regarding what constitutes a helpful
teacher for them fall into five basic categories. Engagers
describe helpful teachers as those that (a) cared about the
success and well being of the individual students, (b) were
friendly and respectful to students, © were fair to all
students, (d) explained things repeatedly or in alternative
formats until the student had a good understanding, and (e)
showed that they enjoyed working with students.

"Engagers also desire the development of a personal
relationship with their instructor" (Willyard, 2001, p. 79).
For Engagers, helpful teachers must show that they care
about the individual students. Engagers described good

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teachers as friendly and respectful of students (James, 2000, p. 115). It was important for Engagers to have teachers who offered encouragement, who were approachable, and who followed up to determine how a student was doing. Typical of Engager comments was that "good teachers will give us practice and then show us step by step how to do it" (17-year-old Black male). "Good teachers are not selfish, I got mine you--get yours kind of attitude, they are there for the students and they encourage me to do my best" (17-year-old Black female).

Engagers described good teachers as friendly and respectful of students. Engagers considered friendly teachers to be those who smiled and greeted them and who talked to them about things other than assignments. Respectful teachers did not raise their voices or talk down to students. Engagers discussed helpful teachers as showing that they cared about the individual students (James, 2000, p. 115). Engagers also considered it helpful when teachers assisted learners with looking toward the future and helping make plans. Comments from Engagers included:

> She [teacher] was interested in what she was
> doing and talked to us on our level.
> (18-year-old Black male)

> They were friendly and pleasant and enjoyed
> what they were doing. It made me like it too.
> (15 year-old white female)

They tell me how smart I am and I can be anything I want to if I put my mind to it. (16 year-old Black male)

Engagers considered fairness to be an important attribute for helpful teachers. Fairness was a serious subject for Engagers that almost always brought even the most hesitant participants into the discussion. Fairness involved teachers allowing equal opportunities for all students to succeed and not prejudging a student based on records or opinions of others. Fairness also included ensuring that even the least successful students were treated with respect by everyone in the class. Comments characteristic of Engager on the subject of fairness were:

The good teachers didn't have favorites. They treated all of us like we were special. (13-year-old Black female)

My teachers listened to everyone, and they wouldn't let other kids make fun of us in class. (17-year-old Black female)

My teacher would give us snacks after each class even when we didn't do good. (13 year-old Black female)

My teacher always gives me more time to finish my work without embarrassing me. (16 year-old Native-American male)

My teacher shows me how to do my work, she just don't give it to me and say do it. (12 year-old Black male)

Engagers also described helpful teachers as those who were willing to explain things multiple times and in a variety of ways until students understood what they needed

to know or to do. Engagers tended to use more emotionally-laden words in their descriptions of positive attitudes than the people in the other two ATLAS groups (Ghost Bear, 2001). Engagers indicated that it was helpful for them when teachers talked about why a project or assignment was important and provided detailed examples, descriptions, and demonstrations. Engager comments included:

> Good teachers explain things more than once.
> They give more time on projects. (13-year-old
> Black male)

> I like younger teachers; they understand us
> better. They don't go strictly by the book but
> go with the flow. (17-year-old Black male)

> I like older teachers. They're calm and nicer.
> (14-year-old Black female)

> I love my first hour teacher because he is cool, when
> it's time to change classes I get depressed, I wish I
> can stay in his class all day. (16 year-old Black
> female)

Engagers indicated that they found teachers who seemed to like teaching to be the most helpful. Engagers indicated that they were most successful in classes taught by teachers who somehow expressed that they enjoyed working with students. "I always had a teacher who took time to work with me no matter how difficult I became"(17-year-old Black male).

Negative Teacher Actions and Attributes

Navigators

Navigators do not like big changes, do not like teachers to waste their time, and do not like to work in groups (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 11). The Navigators in this study expressed frustration with classroom confusion or lack of structure, as well as with teachers and learners that Navigators thought were not prepared for class. The following comments exemplify the feelings expressed by Navigators about things teachers have done that hindered their learning success.

> They just give us the book and expect us to understand it without showing us how to do it. (14-year-old Black male)

> Teachers just give you stuff and don't even explain it. (13-year-old Black female)

> They weren't well organized. (14-year-old Black female)

> Teachers gives us homework without instructions. (17 year-old white female)

> My teacher spends too much time explaining, talking about the same thing over and over by the time we get started it's time to go. (15 year-old Black male)

Problem Solvers

Problem Solvers do not like long lectures straight from the book (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12). Problem Solvers indicated that they were more successful with teachers who allowed interaction and an exchange of ideas. Problem

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Solvers indicated that they found it helpful when teachers

allowed time in class to discuss different ways to approach

projects or assignments (Conti & Kolody, 1999). The

following comments are indicative of the feelings expressed

by Problem Solvers in this study about teacher actions that

hindered learner success:

> They [teachers] will tell you something real
> lightly and you might not hear them and if you
> ask them to repeat it they will get mad.
> (13-year-old Black female)

> Explain it once and expect you to get it the
> first time around. (16-year-old Black male)

> They [teachers] will talk about a subject or
> review it early in the day then come back and
> give us a quiz on it. That is not enough time.
> (15-year-old Black female)

Problem Solvers also expressed how anger toward

teachers hindered them from learning. They believed some

white teachers were out of touch with Black students. A

17-year-old Black male comments: "My teacher is racist, she

will only talk to the white students in class and will not

pay the Black students any attention no matter how hard we

try".

Engagers

The discussions of what teachers do to hinder Engager's

success generally grew from the discussions of how teachers

can assist in successful learning experiences. When the

discussion changed from what teachers do that helps learners

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to what teachers have done that hindered students' success,
the participants became more passionate when discussing the
negative aspects of their learning process. For example,
voices were raised, participants rose from their seats when
relaying examples, facial expressions changed to anger, arms
were waved and they began to speak without fear of
retribution. However, in most focus group situations that
involved younger participants, the words "keep you from
doing or get in your way" was used instead of the word
"hinder", because of their limited vocabulary.

Engager comments concerning things teachers do to
hinder learning were typically relationship focused.
Engagers learn best when actively engaged in something in
which they are interested or in which they can find meaning
(Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13). Engagers look for connections
between the teacher and themselves. Most of the Engagers
interviewed shared similar comments related to people, for
example: "I can tell if a teacher likes me or not and if
they don't, I won't do the work" (15-year-old Black female).
Other comments from Engagers reflect their anger for the
unfair treatment received from teachers. These comments
were:

    Teachers just give you stuff and don't even explain it.
    (13-year-old Black female)

    They just give us the book and expect us to understand

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it without showing us how to do it. (14-year-old Black female)

They will talk about it or review it early in the day then come back and give us a quiz on it. (13-year-old Black female)

I don't like mean teachers and a lot of unnecessary work. (14 year-old Black female)

My teacher called me stupid in front of my friends. (14 year-old Black male)

Teachers don't understand that I am grown just like they are, I have a baby and stuff to do that they don't even know about, yet they want to talk to me like I am a kid. (17 year-old Black female)

All my teacher does is scream at the class, telling us to sit down be quiet and shut up. (13 year-old Black male)

Additional Observations and Experiences

A Pocket Full of Hope® is design to help Youth in Transition to Adulthood develop life-skills through music, theatre, and dance. By exploring how these youth approach learning will empower them to believe and gain the confidence to achieve in other areas of their life. The interviews and focus groups were administered before each group meeting at A Pocket Full of Hope®. The atmosphere was kept informal and hosted in the tradition of an adult learning environment, which included music, food, and short icebreaker activities before the meeting began. The researcher explained to the participants that ATLAS is an instrument that is designed to help one identify their own

individual learning difference as they approach a learning project. During the focus groups each student was asked to stand and look at the person on each side of them and describe the appearance of that person. Their descriptions ranged from short to tall and from pretty to plain. The researcher pointed out that learning is just as diverse as the appearance of another person. This descriptive paradigm always seems to capture the participants attention and barriers of any test trepidation previously built are vastly diminished.

During the interviews the participants initially appeared nervous at times. However during the focus groups they appeared more relaxed and at times a little playful. The participants enjoyed talking about their teachers when it became time to discuss the negative influence they had on them. Most looked at this as an opportunity to vent and get back at the teacher whom some had revealed had not validated them at one time or another. On the other hand, those participants who expressed the positive experiences of their teachers seem to take pleasure in the exchange, calling them by name and choosing their favorites.

After the students were given the ATLAS instrument, they became engaged and appeared to interact with each other more. The attitudes of the participants appeared to be

consistent with the normed study. The Navigators, Problem

Solvers, and Engagers felt strongly that ATLAS was an

accurate description for them. After discussing the

findings, the researcher divided the participants into their

learning strategy preference groups to allow them to discuss

what similarities or differences they shared. The researcher

observed that Navigators and Problem Solvers wanted detailed

explanations of the projects instructions. Engagers seem to

be more into each other than the group discussion project

and did not ask for any explanations. Once the Navigators

were clear on the project, they immediately became anxious

to start working. Problem Solvers appeared puzzled not

knowing where to begin. One Navigator indicated a lack of

patience with what he perceived as the Engagers lack of

focus and wasting of his time by requiring additional time

to hear the instructions. The Engagers appeared insulted by

the remarks and became angry and defensive. The researcher

intervened and reminded them of the projects' purpose which

was to identify ones own individual differences while

respecting the differences of others. However the

confrontation was short lived and the discussion among the

three groups continued. The focus groups ended with a short

break prior to A Pocket Full Of Hope® UpBeat meeting.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Youth at Risk

No significant learning occurs without a
significant relationship. (Comer, 1995, p. 126)

Students who have certain kinds of conditions such as

living with one parent, being a member of a minority group,

or having limited English proficiency are defined as at risk

because, statistically, students in these categories are

more likely to be among the lowest achievement groups or

drop out of school altogether. Schools have not adapted

curriculums that address the individual and special

circumstances of this diverse learning student population.

At-risk youth have been identified as youth at-risk

of not learning. They are more prone to drop out of high

school and therefore may contribute to severe negative

economic consequences. For example, at-risk youth are prone

to drug use, teenage pregnancy and fatherhood, unemployable

skills, gang affiliation, delinquency, incarceration, and

poverty.

Understanding your learning strategies may offer

opportunities for educators to develop tools and techniques

that can be useful to the youth in transition to adulthood

population. Research studies have been undertaken to

identify learning strategy usage patterns of adults. By

researching different learning theories and various types of learners, the impact of learning strategies on various groups provides information to be utilized in the present educational environment. Learning strategies provide important techniques that enhance the learning environment for the adult learner. It allows the educator to be proactive with the students.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe the learning strategies of youth in transition to adulthood in the urban life skills program of A Pocket Full of Hope®. The learning strategies of A Pocket Full of Hope® youth in transition to adulthood were identified with Assessing the Learning Strategies of AdultS (ATLAS) and were compared with those of the general adult population.

This study utilized a descriptive design to investigate the learning strategy preferences of youth in transition to adulthood in the urban life skills program of A Pocket Full Of Hope®. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to describe these learning strategies. ATLAS was administered to 161 members of A Pocket Full Of Hope® who were between the ages of 13 and 17. Qualitative data were collected through individual interviews and focus groups. The distribution were Navigators 34.38, Problem Solvers 20.63 Engager 45%. In the norm study the percentages

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came out approximately one-third Navigators, one-third

Problem Solvers, and one-third Engagers.

<p style="text-align: center;">Summary of Findings</p>

ATLAS places respondents in one of three learning

strategy preference groups. The distribution of learning

strategy preferences for the participants was Engagers-45%,

Navigators-34.38%, and Problem Solvers-20.63%. This

distribution is significantly differently from the norm

which has a fairly even distribution of the three groups.

However, the comments of youth in transition about

learning strategy preferences were very similar to comments

by adults. In reply to what teacher actions they find

helpful, the comments by each learning strategy preference

group for the youth in transition were similar to the adult

learners. Navigators stressed that the most helpful teachers

were organized and provided structure. Just like the adult

learners, these young Navigators preferred efficiency in the

learning situation. They preferred teachers that did not

waste their time by asking them to participate in things

that the learner believed delayed the completion of an

activity. Problem Solvers indicated that helpful teachers

jump started them when they got in a slump. They would take

time to help students generate new alternatives in areas

that were troubling. Helpful teachers wrote down examples of

<p style="text-align: center;">134</p>

how problems are done, used illustrations, or showed films

about a subject. Like adult Engagers, the youth in

transition who were Engagers highly valued personal

relationships in a learning situation. Engagers described

helpful teachers as those who demonstrated that they cared

about students on a personal level and how they learned.

Conclusions

Youth in transition to adulthood have the
learning strategy preferences
characteristics of adult learners.

Because youth in transition to adulthood
are mandated to attend school, they are
not able to enjoy all of the benefits of
the voluntary nature of adult learning.

Teachers can jump start students in the
learning process if they are aware of the
learner's individual learning strategy.

Youth in transition to adulthood have the learning

strategy preference characteristics of adult learners. When

asked to describe their approach to learning, the youth in

transition to adulthood Navigators are generally focused,

results-oriented, high achievers who like logical

connections, planning, and organizing just like adults. In

their comments, the youth in transition sound remarkably

similar to adults. For example, in relationship to how they

prefer to first gather enough information before they start

a project, a 14-year-old Black female said:

I like to sort everything out first. For

example, for a science project I have to know
the measurements, inches. Then I would lay
everything out in front of me on a table so I
she can see it.

Likewise, a 49-year old female Navigator and a 67-year-old

male used a similar structure for planning their strategy

for bidding on items in an ebay on-line auction:

I used the various steps of the decision
making process: Identify, Analyze,
Decide, and Execute. I just used the same
processes I used with any other decision
in life. (51-year-old male Navigator).
(Ghost Bear, 2001 pp. 111-112)

I'm just starting. "Strategy" implies a
predictable opponent; I think the other
bidders are unknowable and unpredictable.
So the best "strategy" is just to know
what you want to spend and get it into
the system as a bid.(67-year-old male).
(Ghost Bear, 2001, p. 373)

The youth in A Pocket Full of Hope® were similar to those

out of the school system. For example, in using resources an

18-year-old Black female at A Pocket Full of Hope® said:

I have to check out whatever resources I need to do a
learning project before I can get into it.

In a similar fashion, an 18-year old Black female said:

I have to check out whatever resources I need to enable
myself to do a learning project before I can get into
it. (James, 2000 p. 111)

Youth in transition to adulthood Problem Solvers

indicated that they like hands-on projects and do not like

to be interrupted during a task once they have started it

which is comparable to adult learners. In their comments,

the youth in transition to adulthood Problem Solvers and

adult Problem Solver sound astoundingly similar. For

example, high school noncompleters (James, 2000), eBay users

(Ghost Bear, 2001), and SeniorNet users (Girdner, 2004)

showed similarities in how both adult and youth in

transition Problem Solvers indicated that they like hands-on

projects and do not like to be interrupted during a task.

> I hate to be interrupted. Once I am interrupted it is
> hard for me to get back into focus. (13 year-old Black
> female Problem Solver)

> I like a hands-on project. I don't want to watch
> someone else do something. I want to get my hands on
> it. (19-year-old White male Problem Solver) (James,
> 2000, p. 112)

> A lifelong reader. I own a library spread over a number
> of topics, I still buy books on the net. I also use the
> Copernicus search engine, one of the best. (74-year-
> old female Problem Solver) (Girdner, 2004, p. 163)

> I spend a great deal of time reading. I learn much
> that way, and additionally to websites that feature
> "how to" articles. One can't be afraid to speak up on
> the Internet and the results will be amazing. (77-
> year-old male Problem Solver) (Girdner, 2004, p. 146)

Youth in transition Engagers are passionate learners

who love to learn with feeling, must be engaged in a

meaningful manner, desire a relationship between the task,

the environment, and the teacher, and want resources to be

readily available. These characteristic are just like the

adult learners. For example, a 16-year old Black female

Engager in this study said, "I have to be able to relate to

what ever it is I'm suppose to do" (16 year old Black-female

Engager). Likewise, adult Engagers in noncompleters study

(James, 2000), eBay study (Ghost Bear, 2001), and SeniorNet

study (Girdner, 2004) show how Engagers are passionate

learners who love to learn with feeling and who feel that

projects must be fun before they will engage in it.

> I used to work for this old carpenter. He told me that
> I was the kind of guy who needed to be able to see what
> work I had done, that was the satisfaction that I got
> from it. That I would do something and then back off
> and look at it. I didn't know that about me, but it's
> true (50-year-old White male). (James, 2000, p. 111)

> I enjoy the Computer Questions and help, and even when
> I don't need any instructions, I can learn from others.
> (77-year-old female Engager). (Girdner, 2004, p. 145)

> eBay is a riot! I work with computers all the time
> anyway, but eBay has made me much more comfortable with
> on-line shopping in general. (42-year-old female
> Engager) (Ghost Bear, 2001, p. 231)

> I like to keep up with items using "My eBay". I watch
> as the end of the auction nears by pressing the refresh
> button on the computer while on the "My eBay" page. If
> it is an item I am not particularly in love with but
> would like to have, I put in what I am willing to pay
> the day before it closes and look at it the day after
> it closes. (45-year-old female Engager) (Ghost Bear,
> 2001, p. 369).

Because youth in transition to adulthood are mandated

to attend school, the voluntary nature of adult learning is

violated for them. "Adults are motivated to learn as they

experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy"

(Knowles, 1990, p. 31). Brookfield (1986) has enunciated six

principles which he uses to describe the guidelines for

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adult teaching and learning. They are those of voluntary participation, mutual respect, collaborative spirit, action and reflection, critical reflection, and self-direction (pp. 9-20).

Adult learning is usually motivated by the need to acquire a new skill or make a decision. When adults perceive a need to learn something, they are generally capable of working very hard. Since most adult learning is voluntary, adults also have the prerogative of dropping out of programs that do not meet their needs.

Adults are often considered as time-conscious learners. Adults have many roles such as spouse, parent, employee, and community member in addition to that of learner. Therefore, most want to meet their educational goals as directly, quickly, and efficiently as possible. However, what is important may vary among adults.

Adults engage in educational programs for a variety of reasons. Most are job-related reasons, but others take nonoccupational courses for personal or social reasons (Hill, 1987). Because adults know what goals are important to them, they tend to do best in educational experiences that provide what they value. Adults wish to be treated as such.

By adulthood, individuals have developed an independent

view of self, and most adults want to be treated as
responsible individuals with the capacity to determine
things for themselves. Adult learning situations should be
designed to allow adults to retain as much autonomy as
possible. Because some adults have experienced only
structured and teacher-centered learning environments, they
may need assistance in accepting responsibility for their
own learning.

On the other hand, youth in transition to adulthood are
mandated to attend school. This is a sharp contradiction to
the voluntary nature of adult learning. Nevertheless, youth
in transition to adulthood typically have responsibilities
that are adult-like. Consequently, they often view
themselves as adults. For these youth, it is as if they are
trapped in a moving vessel and cannot get out. Youth that
are in transition to adulthood are facing some troubling
issues such as dropping out of school, drugs, violence,
sexual activity, contemporary music, gender confusion, gang
participation, and risky behavior. They are avidly taking
their own pulses sorting out the tangible and intangible
factors that influence their directions. The transition of
youth to adulthood is difficult even in the best of times,
but these are the worst of times for significant numbers of
American youth. They are struggling from having adult-like

responsibilities at home to being treated like children in school. When youth in transition to adulthood are in school, most are exposed to a teacher-centered approach which treats them like children, and this can cause a conflict in their own perception of self (Knowles, 1975). This conflict is compounded with the frustrations and demands placed upon them by parents, schools, teachers, and their social environment making it difficult to focus on learning. Traditional educational environments can be oppressive for the least social and academic achievers (James, 2000). Unlike adults, youth in transition to adulthood do not have the option to leave a learning activity once they see that it is not going to benefit them. By law, youth must attend school or be in jeopardy of truancy which could lead to harsh disciplinary action by the school district or can result in jail time.

Also contrary to the voluntary nature of adult learning is the pedagogical model. In this model, teachers assume responsibility for making decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, and when it will be learned (Knowles, 1980). Teachers direct learning while students are passive recipients. Youth are required to adjust to an established curriculum based on the teachers experience and knowledge. The pedagogical model often times inhibits the

learner from making a contribution to the learning process. As a result, many learners leave school having lost interest in learning. Even good-intentioned educators can suppress naturally inquisitive instincts of the students by controlling the learning environment. When this happens, some youth in transition to adulthood view learning as a chore and a burden.

It is important for teachers to know that they can jump start the learning process for students by utilizing a knowledge of learning strategies. For Navigators, "everything in the learning environment relates to achieving efficiency and effectiveness" (Conti & Kolody, 2004, p. 185). Therefore, teachers can get them started in the learning process simply by being organized, giving clear directions, making sure that they know what is wanted from them, and then getting out of their way.

For Problem Solvers who are constantly seeking alternatives (Conti & Kolody, 2004, p. 186), a good teacher will not only let the students explore but will help them get started back again when they get lost or stuck. Problem Solvers indicated that the most helpful teachers offered personal attention and provided alternative formats, options, and illustrations. Therefore, a teacher can jump start the learning for Problem Solvers by making sure that

they have a grasp of the learning task early in the learning process so that they can immediately accelerate down the path of generating alternatives.

"Because the central feature of learning for Engagers is building relationships" (Conti & Kolody, 2004, p. 187), Engagers viewed good teachers as those who are friendly, respectful, and understanding to students and who show that they enjoy teaching. Once involved, Engagers take learning personally. Their self-worth can be validated or easily damaged. Since the messenger is important to Engagers, teachers can jump start Engagers by being excited about the learning process, by being personable, by caring about the students, and by engaging them in a meaningful manner. If the Engagers feels a personal relationship with the teacher and likes the teacher, who is a pleasant person to be around, then Engagers will substitute their need for internal motivation to initiate the learning activity with this external stimulus by the teacher.

Recommendations

Youth in Transition to Adulthood

Youth in transition to adulthood need to understand how school or learning is relevant to their personal goals and how they go about the learning process. This can be achieved by clearly identifying their learning goals. This can help

learners to overcome distractions in order to stay focused on learning projects.

Learners should pursue an understanding of all learning strategies and techniques. An awareness of learning strategies can improve the learning process (Munday, D., 2002; Munday, W., 2002). This knowledge can also help learners be more tolerant of different learning strategy preferences of other individuals. Engagers can form study groups to utilize their strengths and assist in ensuring their success in learning activities.

Traditional educational environments can be oppressive for the marginal social and academic achievers. While the traditional teacher-centered classroom is well suited for the learning needs of Navigators, it is often frustrating for Engagers. Indeed, many Engagers seem to be seeking alternative educational situations. Nearly half of all of the participants of A Pocket Full Of Hope® are Engagers. Ongoing research has found an identical percentage of Engagers in career technical programs in Oklahoma (Ausburn, L. J., 2004a, 2004b, in press); these are students who tend to be alienated in the traditional system and are seeking an alternative that is more personal and student-centered. Likewise, research has found a disproportionally large number of Engagers in programs and organizations such as

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literacy program (James, 2000), community colleges
(Willyard, 2002), or special colleges (Massey, 2002) that
have an image and promote a message of being people-friendly
organizations.

By taking a proactive stance, these learners can change
the system so that it works for everyone. Learners become
empowered when they become aware of the forces controlling
them and that their empowerment can lead to action which may
be applicable for nonsuccessful learners in traditional
education (Freire, 1970). Therefore, youth in transition to
adulthood must assume responsibility for their own education
and become part of a learning community. With an awareness
of learning strategies and familiarity with learning
strategy methods and techniques, youth in transition to
adulthood could become self-directed and more empowered to
help themselves.

Knowles (1975) described self-directed learning as "a
process in which individuals take the initiative, with or
without the help of others"(p. 18). There are other labels
found in the literature that describe this process. They are
self-planned learning, inquiry method, independent learning,
self-education, self-instruction, self-teaching, Self-study,
and autonomous learning (p. 18).

Teachers

A great deal of research has been done to understand learning strategy concepts. This understanding can offer struggling learners and educators a way to make a difference in the educational success of youth in transition to adulthood. The progress being made in the development of learning strategy concepts and techniques offers a ray of hope so that more students can learn techniques for succeeding in their educational and noneducational endeavors. Advocates for learners who are unsuccessful in traditional education might consider utilizing the learner-centered concepts and techniques used by A Pocket Full Of Hope® to heighten awareness of struggling students and to assist them in identifying problems and solutions. When introducing this learner-centered education model, one must keep in mind that it involves the learner. In this approach, administrators are responsible for developing, maintaining, and enhancing a learning environment that promotes effective learning. Teachers need to be knowledgeable about the learning strategies of their students and about how learning occurs best for each one. The classroom is an environment that encourages

learners to develop to their full potential.

Highlander is a great example of a learner-
centered program model. It has been adopted by A Pocket
Full of Hope® because of the non-threatening,
participatory, and inclusive concept design. Highlander
was created in 1932 by Myles Horton and Don West in
Grundy County, Tennessee, to educate rural and
industrial leaders for a new social order. They adopted
the name from the mountain people of Appalachia (Adams,
1975). Supported by John Dewey's philosophy that "civil
and political democracy were meaningless without
equivalent economic and industrial democracy" (p. 13),
Horton cultivated the school to be a haven where
"people could make decisions on things that mattered"
(Horton, 1990a, p. 58). The school was established on
the principle that individuals were empowered through
working in harmony to fulfill common needs (Adams,
1975, pp. 15-16). Highlander's initial purpose was to
educate people "for a revolution that would basically
alter economic and political power relationships to the
advantage of the poor and powerless" (p. 205), which in
short could "assist in creating leadership for
democracy" (Highlander Executive Council, 1950). The
birth of Highlander Folk school exemplified "an adult

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education program that promised both to benefit the people of southern Appalachia and to transform the social, economic, and political order" (Glen, 1996, p. 24).

People associated with Highlander have impacted many social issues since 1932. In the 1930s and 1940s, Highlander focused on organizing labor unions especially in the textile and mining industries. During this time, the school gained a reputation as one of few schools in the South that were committed to organized labor and economic justice causes (Glen, 1996, p. 55). The Civil Rights Movement was the focus of Highlander's work in the 1950s and 1960s. The school was a leader in the war to end racism and gender discrimination in the South. In the wake of Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954 and in a time when many African American women were domestic employees in White households, the people of Highlander struck out against racial segregation and gender bias. Black and White people of both genders learned side by side in the Citizenship Schools and other important Highlander contributions. Such leaders as Martin Luther King, Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, Andrew Young, and Septima Clark worked, learned, became empowered, and

were impacted at Highlander (Adams, 1975; Horton, 1990a; Glen, 1996).

Today, the Highlander Education and Research Center maintains an idea and a place "where strategies for progressive change can be developed" (Glen, 1996, p. 282). Highlander gathered workers, grassroots leaders, community organizers, educators, and researchers to address the most pressing social, environmental, and economic problems facing the people of the South. The fundamental premise of Highlander is that people have the potential within themselves to solve their problems. This learner-centered approach allows people who are poor and disadvantage to share their ideas, talents, and resources.

Using the Highlander model, A Pocket Full Of Hope® serves to help empower youth in transition to adulthood to take charge of their lives. For example, it uses the Highlander model to focus on defining problems and discussing positive and negative experiences which provide valuable insight for learners and facilitators. Instruction in learning strategy concepts and techniques include development programs for those working with youth in transition to adulthood. Instruction in learning strategy concepts and

techniques are offered to all students. When students enroll in the urban life-skills development program of A Pocket Full Of Hope®, they are given ATLAS and an explanation of their learning strategy groups.

Youth in transition to adulthood are given the opportunity to empower themselves by sharing their ideas, talents, and resources. At A Pocket Full of Hope®, music, drama, and dance are used to help participants feel more comfortable with each other while breaking down barriers. Group singing, dancing, and role playing serve as a unifying tool as well as a means of communication. Singing, dancing, and acting out the realities and commonalities of their life situations serve the important psychological functions for members of creating a casual and cooperative atmosphere and of developing a sense of empowerment. A Pocket Full Of Hope® is a safe place where participants feel encouraged to be themselves.

Myles Horton's philosophies are echoed in the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire's practice of adult learning was developed in the 1960s and 1970s through revolutionary struggles in Brazil and Chile. Through his efforts to obliterate illiteracy, Freire (1970) fought to help poor and oppressed people

overcome their sense of powerlessness and to function on their own behalf. People victimized by the censorship of illiteracy learned more effectively when the words and phrases mastered were charged with political importance. Freire believed that adult learning succeeded best in oppressive circumstances when it was a consciously political act in which the learners used their experiences to reflect and take social action. He believed that education not only empowered learners individually but served to change all peoples' social structures. From this viewpoint, adult learning "attempts to provide space for learners who have been marginalized or silenced by the power structures within which they live" (Amstutz, 1999, p. 21).

The term "pedagogy of the oppressed" was created by Paulo Freire (1970) who described it as "a pedagogy which must be forged with not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity" (p. 30). Pedagogy of the oppressed has two distinct stages. In the first stage, oppressed people recognize and expose the world of oppression and "through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation" (p. 36). Secondly, the

transformed reality of oppression changes from
belonging just to the oppressed people to belonging to
all people through the process of lasting liberation'
(p. 36). Action that confronts the dominant culture is
a common denominator in both stages of the pedagogy of
the oppressed.

Freire concluded that education is never neutral.
It either serves to oppress or to liberate, but it is
never impartial or uninvolved. Education must be
founded on the ethical and political principles that
empower learners to control their own lives and
histories (Freire, 1994, p. 128). In A Pocket Full Of
Hope®, youth in transition to adulthood are given the
opportunity to empower themselves. These youth are part
of a learner-centered environment where programs have
been tailored to fit their individual learning needs.
Participants are free to take ownership of the program
without the fear of being ridiculed or judged
negatively by their peers. Gaining early success within
the program helps youth in transition to adulthood
become motivated to start improvements in other areas
of their life.

The programs of A Pocket Full of Hope® assist
youth in transition to adulthood and their families in

exploring the world on their own terms as they develop

the internal strength mechanisms to help them deal with

adverse environmental factors. A Pocket Full of Hope®

offers youth access to knowledge about healthy choices

that reinforce social skills and self-esteem and helps

them develop character and leadership skills. Thus, it

helps to restore well being to the lives of troubled

young people who are at risk of developing destructive

behavior paradigms and eventually dropping out of

school.

Creating learner-centered programs for youth in

transition to adulthood has given A Pocket Full Of

Hope® a mechanism for working with youth that would not

have been available in a teacher-centered environment.

With the learner-centered approach, teachers or

facilitators are familiar with content knowledge but

have design flexibility for learners to construct their

learning. The learner's individual needs and

characteristics take precedence over knowledge of facts

and skills. The emphasis is on showing the learners how

to learn for understanding and critical thinking, thus

helping them build their own interpretations.

Facilitators at A Pocket Full Of Hope® practice this

model. They provide learners with a variety of

instructional methods and techniques to help them

construct their learning and to develop strategies for

applying knowledge and theory. The focus of this

learner-centered model is on metacognition, which is

understanding how individual students learn.

However, students do not learn at the same pace.

Some learn quickly and easily while others need more

time. The teacher-centered approach places total

control for learning in the hands of the teacher. The

teachers use their expertise in cognitive content

knowledge to help learners make connections. The effort

to get to know the learner and how they process

information is secondary. This one size fit all

teacher-centered instructional model often results in

youth in transition to adulthood being ill prepared for

life outside the learning environment. Sternberg (1988)

views "the intelligent person as someone who can use

his or her mind to the fullest advantage in all the

various transactions of everyday life, and is not

limited only to test results or classroom performance"

(p. 3).

In the teacher-centered environment, youth are

stripped of their identity and their passion to learn

is suppressed. The students see the classroom

experience as uncool and uninteresting. Thinking is basically the responsibility of the teacher. Students remain passive learners and are required to memorize and recite the information that is given to them. If this were a theatrical play or a movie, the teacher-centered instructional model would cast the teacher as the star or the main character while casting the students as extras or props. There is enormous amount of pressure placed on youth in transition to adulthood to measure up to so many unrealistic learning expectations that many students are now viewing teacher-centered environments as overwhelming and impossible.

Furthermore, the teacher-centered instructional model can be difficult for the least academic achiever. More appealing though is the attraction that comes with being accepted in the sub-culture created by the students outside of the learning environment. The sub-culture created within the school environment maintains a sophisticated level of hierarchy. For example, youth in transition to adulthood often gravitate to other youth because of sports, special relationships, race, gang affiliation, music interest, or substance abuse. Students therefore will seek to form peer alliances

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hoping to increase their chance to attain a certain level of success, to build self-esteem, or to maintain their reputation and popularity. These students gravitate to each other because of similar non-academic interest. This sub-cultural affiliation provides a predictable familiarity to counterbalance a rigid teacher-centered environment that is increasingly pushing them out whether this approach is intended to feed the students desperate desire for status or to provide instant gratification is questionable. However, the non-academic sub-cultural is spontaneous for students as they look for diversions to digress from an oppressive teacher-centered learning environment. Nonetheless the risk of dropping out of school for these youth in transition to adulthood increases dramatically. Dr. James Comer (1996) acknowledged that educators must understand that all students are at-risk of not learning today. It is well documented that there is an increase of homes led by single mothers. Also, there is an increase of two parents working outside the home. For children to develop, healthy and well-functioning adults must be available and attentive to them at all times. Furthermore, teachers, facilitators, and administrators need to realize that youth in

transition to adulthood could have responsibilities that are adult like. Therefore, teachers reliance on the teacher-centered pedagogical learning model should be unlearned. The pedagogical teacher-centered model does not allow students to be self-directed. It restricts the learners from taking responsibility for their own learning. When students are not allowed to take part in their own learning, they become disengaged, or helpless, relying not on their own initiatives to learn but on that of others.

Moreover, "whether viewed scientifically or artistically, learning is a process grounded in the individual's perceptions of place" (Kittredge, 1998, p. 12). All students are not going to grasp this new found knowledge of learner-centered concepts. Therefore teachers need help to develop skills to look for learners to jump start when they get lost or stuck. The responsibility of the facilitator is to help students develop confidence and competence as self-directed learners. In a learning environment, the teacher is considered the messenger. The Engagers meanwhile focuses on the messenger first and then on the message. The Navigators could care less about the messenger while staying focused on the message.

Learning strategy research has evolved from adult education, adult learning, learning how to learn, and identification of learning strategy preference categories (James, 2000). However, teachers may lack access to the services of researchers or designers and as a result be forced to rely on their own expertise in planning instruction for learners (Ausburn & Ausburn, 1977, p. 278). Therefore, teachers need information they can use that can maximize learning experiences for students in the classroom. Instructors are encouraged to capitalize on learner strengths or help learner develop a range of learning capabilities (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998, p. 154). This can be accomplished by instructors of youth that are in transition to adulthood becoming knowledgeable of the concept of learning strategy preferences. This includes both learning about the concept and identifying their learning strategy preferences. This knowledge "can be beneficial to the selection of appropriate methods and discussion, and reflective thought about the learner" (Conti & Kolody, 1998, p. 137). This could make them more learner centered and help them understand that youth in transition to adulthood students are not all the same that they learn differently.

High schools can no longer function as the
pervasive or exclusive environment for the transition
of youth to adulthood. As Malcolm Knowles (1970)
proposed, "teachers should be more student-centered and
curriculum be more real-life based" (p. 49). The
secondary school environment is usually part of a
system designed with limited learner flexibility and
autonomy. Students in these teacher-centered
environments have little knowledge of self-directed
concepts and are ill prepared about what to do after
completing high school. They are passive learners with
little or no real-life learning experience (Sternberg,
1990). These students can find it hard to make choices
due to limited opportunities to practice these real-
life learning skills. When instructors are able to
accommodate differences in individual abilities,
styles, and preferences, then it is expected that
learning outcomes will improve (Jonassen & Grabowski,
1993). Thus, all participants can come to an
understanding of their roles and the changing nature of
their roles as high school departure gets closer.

Real-life learning is the ability to learn on a
recurring basis in every-day, real-world circumstances
(Ghost Bear, 2001, p. 39). This learning occurs from

the learner's real-life conditions and requires a

comprehension of such "personal factors as the

learner's background, language, and culture as well as

social factors such as poverty and discrimination"

(Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 25).

Therefore, it is all the more reason that learner-

centered environments like A Pocket Full Of Hope® be

created. Within such organizations, youth in transition

to adulthood become empowered through programs

developed especially for them in the final years of

secondary school. This introduces high school students

to a wide variety of options enabling them to move

beyond the classroom into real-life situations in the

neighborhood and the community to complete their

education.

Learner-centered environments such as A Pocket

Full Of Hope® provide learners with an understanding of

their own learning requirements. Brown (1985) defined

the knowledge and control one has over one's thinking

and learning as metacognition (Counter & Fellenz, 1993,

p. 10). Metacognition is a conscious, reflective

endeavor requiring the learner to analyze, assess, and

manage learning activities. It is important that youth

in transition to adulthood have some control over their

learning processes and become "aware of oneself as a

learner" (Smith, 1982, p. 57).

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APPENDIX

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 11/20/2004

Date: Friday, November 21, 2003   IRB Application No   ED0451

Proposal Title: Learning Strategies of Youth in Transition to Adulthood in the Urban Life-Skills Program of
a Pocket Full of Hope

Principal
Investigator(s):

Lester H. Shaw   Gary J Conti
2238 N. Yorktown Ave.   206 Willard
Tulsa, OK 74110   Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Expedited (Spec Pop)

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of
the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of
individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be
conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol
   must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar
   year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are
   unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the
IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact me in 415 Whitehurst (phone:
405-744-5700, colson@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

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