

# An Exploration of the Deterrents to Adult Basic Education Among Blue Collar Workers

James D. Burnham

Holmes Community College Ridgeland Campus

United States

Michael K. Ponton

Texas A&M University-Commerce

United States

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## Abstract

This phenomenological study explored how blue collar workers employed in a north Mississippi manufacturing facility described their reasons for not participating in adult basic education (ABE) when nonparticipation would result in termination. The structure of the ABE classes was designed to reduce the costs and time constraints to participation. A group of 8 respondents constituted the sample from a population of 23 nonparticipating workers and maximal variation sampling was used to increase gender, race, and age diversity within the sample. Three major themes emerged as deterrents to participation: (a) Test of Adult Basic Education and ABE classes were not perceived as relevant, (b) fear of embarrassment, and (c) low self-efficacy (i.e., a self-perceived lack of capability to perform successfully). However, lack of relevancy and fear of embarrassment were found to be used as reasons for nonparticipation when low self-efficacy in learning new material, reading, and math problem solving were present.

**Keywords:** adult basic education, self-efficacy, deterrents, blue collar.

## 1. Introduction

The 21st century places increasing demands on Americans that must be met in order for them to be successful in an increasingly complex society (McNeil, 1997). In fact, technological change is occurring so rapidly that entire industries are created and lost within a single decade. Tobias (1998) stated that the rate of change and the short term demands placed on world labor markets has increased the pressure on adults to continue their education and training. Therefore, increasing the educational level of individuals in the United States, particularly those with less than a high school diploma, is crucial if all members of society are to be active participants. It is critical that adults have the ability to comprehend new data as a result of the rapid growth of society, social dynamism, and technological knowledge (Beder, 1989), which requires a lifetime of learning.

Adult education is an important part of lifelong learning (McNeil, 1997) but defining adult education is no simple task. Kim and Creighton (2000) classified adult education into six programmatic types for the 1999 National Household Education Survey: adult basic education (ABE), apprenticeship, credentialing, English as a Second Language, personal development, and work related. Of the six types, English as a Second Language and ABE are primarily concerned with basic literacy education that provides individuals with the basic skills to function in American society.

Patricia McNeil, former U.S. Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education, stated that more than 40% of the people with the lowest literacy skills live in poverty (McNeil, 1997). Of this group, 67% were not high school graduates and 25% were immigrants. The 2000 Census for the United States indicated that 13.8 million people, or 7.5% of the population 25 years and older, had less than a 9th grade education, and Mississippi, the state in which the presented study was conducted, had 169,000 or 9.6% of that age group population with less than a 9th grade education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). Although a sizable number of individuals are in need of ABE, only 2% of the adult population participated in ABE/GED courses (Kim & Creighton, 2000).

Interest in adult education participation continues (Taylor, 2001) and understanding why adults do not participate is essential (Cross, 1981). Researchers stated that a lack of time (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985; Johnstone & Rivera, 1965) and costs (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985; Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984) act as barriers to participation. However, Thomas (1996) asserted that lack of educational value was the reason that adults did not participate in education rather than the lack of time and high costs.

Other researchers suggested that sociopsychological factors influence nonparticipation. Bandura (1986) stated that intention plays a prominent role in the self-regulation of behavior whereas Becker and Gibson (1998) and Yang, Blunt, and Butler (1994) asserted that attitude plays a significant role in the establishment of intention and affects participation in education (cf. Blunt & Yang, 2002; Hayes & Darkenwald, 1990). In addition, self-efficacy (i.e., self-perception of the personal capability to perform successfully; Bandura, 1997), shame (Lindsay-Hartz, Rivera, & Mascolo, 1995), and embarrassment (Miller, 1995) may play roles in activity participation, but very little is known about their effects on adult education

nonparticipation. Still other researchers (Cutz & Chandler, 1999; Fingeret, 1983; Quigley, 1990; Tobias, 1998) stated that culture acts to inhibit participation in education activities for some groups. The research indicates that nonparticipation is multidimensional and that an increased understanding is still needed.

Sparks (1998) disputed earlier research (Beder, 1990; Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984) that suggests once barriers such as lack of time, cost, and location are removed people will attend traditional programs. According to Sparks, the notion of individual choice fails to consider structural factors that prevent participation whereas Tett (as cited in Bond, 1999) stated that lack of time and costs are commonly cited barriers but may be used to camouflage more complex reasons. More research is needed on the rationale and reasons for nonparticipation in adult education and specifically ABE. Clearly, it is incumbent on the educational system to identify adults with less than a high school education who do not participate in ABE and to understand from the nonparticipant perspective why they do not participate. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to identify nonparticipants for study.

### *1.1 Statement of Purpose*

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to garner an understanding as to what inhibited full-time employed blue collar workers from participating in ABE classes at a manufacturing site in north Mississippi. Nonparticipation will be generally defined as not taking the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to determine a basic education skill level that would have allowed individuals to move their employment to a modern facility or to attend ABE classes to improve deficient skills. The costs of the classes were covered by the employer and classes were taught at the worksite immediately prior to or after regular work hours to increase convenience. In addition, the employees were to be paid their regular wages for up to 24 hours of class time after which the costs of the classes were still covered but wages were not paid. A lack of participation was to result in employment termination in approximately 2-3 years and, in fact, did occur. The primary question this study sought to address was: How do blue collar workers describe their reasons for not participating in ABE when it is a job requirement and when nonparticipation will result in termination of employment?

## **2. Method**

This study used a phenomenological approach to gain understanding from the nonparticipant's perspective as to why they did not participate in TABE testing and ABE classes. Study respondents were selected using purposive sampling. Respondents were interviewed by the first author and each received \$10 for participating in the study; interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### *2.1 Setting*

The study respondents were blue collar workers who were employed full-time at a manufacturing facility in north Mississippi, were not eligible for retirement, and elected not to participate in an educational opportunity (i.e., TABE and ABE classes). The manufacturing facility where the study respondents were employed was selected by corporate management for a two-stage modernization process. Employees had the opportunity to transfer into the

Stage 1 facility as opportunities occurred (and into the Stage 2 facility once completed) if they met the educational requirements. The original equipment supplier for the Stage 1 modernization indicated that employees needed a high school degree to operate the new equipment due to its technological level; however, an agreement between the union and facility set the initial minimum educational grade level at 7.9. The home and adjacent counties to the facility had a combined unemployment rate of 4.5% among individuals 25 years of age and older, but 11.8% of this group had less than a 9th grade education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b).

The TABE was administered by a local community college to any employee who wished to move to the modernized facility in order to determine his or her current grade level; Ehringhaus (1991) found that teachers who administered the TABE perceived the test as effective for the initial grade placement of adult students. In addition to taking the TABE, all current employees were informed that without having a documented appropriate grade level of education, they would not retain employment once the old facility was closed.

The employees were informed on numerous occasions that they should take the test for grade placement and that anyone not reaching the appropriate level (i.e., grade 7.9) would have the opportunity to attend ABE classes. The costs of the test and classes were covered by the manufacturing facility, and employees attending classes were paid their hourly wage rate up to the first 24 hours of class time. Whereas some employees were expected to need less than 24 hours of instruction, others could continue to take classes after 24 hours of actual class time but not receive their hourly wage. Since the facility was one of the higher wage-paying facilities in the area, employment was considered desirable.

Many employees took the test, reached the 7.9 grade level, and subsequently began to work in the Stage 1 facility as opportunities to transfer occurred. Employees who did not meet the required 7.9 grade level began taking the ABE classes that were offered at the beginning and end of the work shift. The classes were scheduled in this manner to reduce travel and time constraints on the employees and a local community college was responsible for providing the training. In spite of the opportunity to take the test and subsequent classes, 24% of the employees (25 individuals) did not take the test; a number of these individuals were known to have low literacy skills by the first author (an employee of this facility at that time). Two of the employees were told that they did not have to take the test since they were employed within the maintenance department. The remaining 23 employees (22% of the workforce) refused to participate even though loss of employment would ensue at some point. Purposive sampling was used to select the target population for this study. Many members of the target population were directly under the first author's supervision during the previous 20 years whereas others were coworkers. Due to a postponement of the Stage 2 modernization process, some of the targeted participants, including the first author, were no longer employed at the facility (the second author was never an employee and did not conduct any interviews).

A sample of 8 respondents (i.e., nonparticipants to testing and classes) was selected using maximal variation sampling to increase gender, race, and age diversity within the sample. Each respondent was drawing an unemployment wage at the time of the interview and expected to draw the benefit until it was no longer available. All interviews were intentionally

completed prior to the expiration of the unemployment wages so that the effect on the respondents' perspectives about employment would be minimized. Each respondent selected his or her home for the location of the interview and also specified the time that the interview would be held.

### *2.1 Researcher*

The primary researcher in this study was the first author who was employed for 26 years at the facility and worked with the study respondents. He was the departmental supervisor in which Jethro, Car, and Pick Axe worked and had frequent contact with these respondents (see Table 1 for pseudonyms). Previously, he had worked as a supervisor in the department with John and Poncho and had been John's direct supervisor 18 years ago. The first author had weekly personal contact with the respondents in addition to professional contact, and the relationship between the first author and the respondents was such that each felt free to share their opinions and thoughts with the other. This freedom to share carried over to the interviews where each respondent appeared to be comfortable providing responses and descriptions.

### *2.2 Procedures*

A semistructured format was used for the interviews and respondents selected a pseudonym for identification. Demographic information was recorded on a written survey form and consisted of the following: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) ethnicity, (d) highest attained education level, (e) marital status, (f) number of children, (g) age of children, (h) organizations with which the participant identified, and (i) parents highest level of education. The open-ended interview questions were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim with notes taken during the interviews as needed to record nonverbal data. Seven predetermined interview questions were asked (subsections in the next section), and the first author believed that his prior work relationship with the respondents was advantageous in putting them at ease during the interviews.

Effect sizes were reported to help provide a richer, thicker description of the underlying data (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2003). By utilizing effect sizes, the frequency (numerical count of themes) and intensity (number of sentences per theme) were able to be reported. In addition, the adjusted effect size suggested by Onwuegbuzie (as cited in Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2003) that measures the frequency and intensity of themes was reported by dividing the frequency of the emergent themes by the number of sentences analyzed for that theme to help minimize data bias.

In addition to the initial interview questions, some of the respondents were asked to clarify responses in follow-up questions. The follow-up information was omitted from the effect size information presented in order to minimize any bias caused by an increased focus on select questions. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours in length.

## **3. Findings**

### *3.1 Demographics*

The average respondent age was 50.8 years. Two of the respondents were above 58 years of

age, but each of these respondents was at least 1.5 years from retirement eligibility. The remaining respondents were under the age of 55 (see Table 1). The lone female respondent (Poochie) was the only respondent with any college experience. Six of the respondents were Black; two were White. The average length of service per respondent was 24.5 years and 7 of the 8 employees were considered to be excellent workers at the facility based upon personal knowledge of the first author.

The average level of education of the respondents' parents was 8.2 years. The average level of education attained by the respondents' mothers was 9.6 years (missing fields omitted) with three completing high school or college. The fathers of the respondents had an average of 7.0 years of education and none had completed 12 years of school. The ages of their children ranged from 17 to 42 years.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Respondent	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Years Employed	Number of Children	Years of Education		
						Participant	Mother	Father
Car	50	M	B	17	3	8	12	-
Jethro	47	M	W	27	1	12	12	7
John	54	M	B	33	3	12	4	4
Mike	59	M	B	30	3	12	8	8
Pick Axe	53	M	B	30	4	12	7	8
Poncho	61	M	W	32	3	8	7	11
Poochie	51	F	B	22	2	16	16	3
Ronnie	31	M	B	5	3	12	-	8

*Note.* Gender, M = Male and F = Female; Ethnicity, B = Black and W = White. A dash (-) under years of education indicates the respondent did not know the years of education attained, only that high school was not completed.

*3.2 Question 1: Some people would say that having an education is not important for getting and keeping a job. What would you say to someone who wanted to work in a job similar to yours about the basic reading, writing, and math education that is needed?*

The dominant theme for this question was that education was very important for the job with 7 of 8 respondents clearly stating the importance of education. This question accounted for 9.5% of the total interview sentence responses with the importance of education accounting

for 14.9% of the sentences for this question. Four of the respondents stated that an education was important for operating computers, and these sentences were included in theme construction. Several respondents offered other insights.

John, Poncho, and Car stated that a high school diploma was necessary for performing the job. However, Car also said, “all the younger generation needs to get an education” indicating the possibility that he believes formal education is for children whereas Mike indicated that the education should be relevant for the job being performed. On the other hand, Jethro stated that having an education helped on the job, but he did not believe that it was essential to job performance. He believed that a person could learn everything that was needed “on their own” without having to participate in formal education. Question responses illustrate the views and perceptions of the respondents.

John gave the following insights. “You would need it. You would need a good education.” When asked to describe the amount of education he believed would be needed he stated, “Well, at least they need, they need a high school education.” When asked if there was any other education that might be needed he stated, “Get all the education you can because these computers and things are taking over now.”

*3.3 Question 2: The factory where we worked offered a test (TABE) to find out if employees could move to the new facility or needed to take classes. Describe in your own words what you think the other workers who did not take the TABE thought about the test.*

As the respondents answered the question, it became clear that the responses were their own feelings and opinions. This question had the highest number of sentence responses per question accounting for 23.2% of the pre-follow-up sentences; the two oldest respondents provided the most responses accounting for 49.1% of the sentences. Two dominant themes emerged from this question: 5 of 8 respondents believed that the test and training were irrelevant for the new job whereas 2 believed that the TABE was designed to selectively reduce the workforce with a third asserting workforce reduction in follow-up questioning. Interestingly, 2 of the 3 respondents who believed that the TABE was for workforce reduction were the least educated respondents. The responses to the question were varied and respondents exhibited strong opinions concerning the test.

Poochie believed that the test was used to get rid of certain employees because the jobs in the new facility according to her were the same as in the old facility. She stated the following: “I don’t think it really had a whole lot to do with what your performance on the, on the new job you were going to have to be trained regardless. Ah, they got the job in the old plant basically doing some of the same things that didn’t have to have the test for. Ah, basically, I think the test was designed to minimize some people.”

*3.4 Question 3: Some people would say that the people who did not take the TABE just did not want to try to help themselves. What would you say to them?*

Responses from Question 3 accounted for 15.3% of the initial interview sentences. The two major themes emerging from the responses to the question were (a) employees were embarrassed by or afraid of not passing the test and (b) the test was not relevant to the jobs in the new facility.

Pick Axe responded by saying, “I, I, I wouldn’t say they didn’t want to help themselves. I would say they were afraid they weren’t going to pass the test.” When asked to describe how they might feel if they did not pass the test, Pick Axe stated, “well it’s like, um, lots of the old people hadn’t been to school in 20 or 30 years and ah, they didn’t feel like they could pass the test because they hadn’t been to school in so long. And, had, hadn’t been doing math and ah, math and a whole lot of reading since high school.”

*3.5 Question 4: Suppose you had a situation happen in school while you were growing up that would make you not like school. What would it be like?*

The purpose of this question was to gain an understanding from the participants concerning whether they had experienced an incident that would make them not want to attend school. This question contained the second highest number of sentence responses at 17.5% of the total sentences. The initial responses to the question were varied as each respondent reflected on their answer. Two themes were mentioned by 3 of 8 respondents: being picked on by others and having trouble with a member of the school staff. In addition, 8.1% of the sentence responses mentioned being picked on whereas 4% mentioned having trouble with school staff.

Pick Axe stated, “you know in classes you have some kids smarter than others. Then you may not be as smart as them, and then uh, the real smart kids might talk about you because you are not as smart as they, they are, you know. That, that’s what makes you afraid too. That will make you think well I, I, you know, I can’t do this and uh, I am going to get laughed at and talked about if I fail this. And that’s the way it was, a lot about uh, taking that test [i.e., TABE] down there. So you know, a lot of people didn’t want anybody to talk about them or, didn’t want anybody to know that they couldn’t pass the test down there.”

*3.6 Question 5: Say you had to take classes in reading, writing, and math to keep your job. Assume that the classes could be scheduled any way you wanted them at no cost to you. What would those classes be like?*

Responses to Question 5 accounted for 13.7% of the interview sentences. The dominant theme was that students should be allowed to learn at their own pace with 4 of the respondents citing this theme. Sentence responses involving the dominant theme accounted for 15.4% of the responses for the question. Another theme appeared to emerge with 2 of 8 of respondents indicating that having classes in the morning was important.

When asked how he would set up the classes, Mike replied, “I wouldn’t want to be in there by myself. . . . I would like it to be at least 20 to 25 people in there.” He then said, “I’d rather have a, a, a lady teacher too.” Mike was asked to describe what would make him want to have a female teacher and he replied, “because a male doesn’t look like they, they take time with you like a, like a lady does.”

Ronnie provided more sentences for this question than any other question that he answered. He stated, “I’d like to have a private class” and indicated that he learned better in a private setting. Ronnie was then asked if he were in a regular classroom with more than one person if he would ask questions. He stated, “[I’d] be more vulnerable not to ask questions.”



*3.7 Question 6: Describe in your own words how a person's family would feel about someone who wanted to take basic education classes like those offered at the plant.*

Responses to Question 6 accounted for 9.5% of the total sentence responses for the initial interview questions. One theme emerged with 7 of 8 respondents saying that family members would encourage them if the respondents elected to participate in ABE classes. For example, Pick Axe stated, "I think my children would feel good about it." When asked if he could describe a situation where his family might not "feel good" about his attendance in basic education, he replied, "I don't think any of my family members or my brothers and sisters would, would feel bad about me taking it." Jethro was the only respondent who did not state that his family would be supportive. However, he did say that his family had always encouraged him to do what he wanted, and he did not say they would discourage him. For Question 6, 35.8% of the sentence responses indicated that family members would encourage the respondent's attendance in ABE classes.

*3.8 Question 7: There are many reasons that people have for wanting to go to reading, writing, and math education classes. Describe in your own words some of the reasons that would keep you from going to basic education classes.*

Respondent replies accounted for 11.4% of the total sentence responses for the seven initial interview questions. Follow-up responses to this question yielded the largest number of responses for any question accounting for 45.8% of the follow-up sentences. Two themes emerged for reasons to not participate in demonstrating or seeking proficiency in ABE: (a) low self-efficacy in reading ability, learning new material, and solving math problems and (b) perceived inability to pass the TABE. During the initial question, only 1 of the respondents indicated that low self-efficacy and a belief in not passing the test were reasons for nonparticipation; however, during the follow-up questioning, 4 of the respondents indicated that low self-efficacy and a belief that they would not pass the test were problematic for them.

Pick Axe responded to Question 7 by saying, "I haven't done it in so long I have gotten rusty on it." When asked to describe a situation involving not passing the test and attending classes that would inhibit participation, Pick Axe stated, "once I figured I couldn't pass the test then I started doubting myself . . . and other people felt the same way too."

John stated, "I was comfortable that I wouldn't pass it . . . and I said well I am not going to pass it so why take it." He described the following: "I just had that . . . funny feeling that I wasn't going to pass it . . . because a lot of them that I knew were smart, a whole lot smarter than we were, went in there and they didn't pass it so I just said well I know I am not going to pass."

## **4. Discussion**

### *4.1 Deterrents to Participation*

Three major themes emerged that acted as deterrents to participation in ABE: (a) TABE and ABE were not perceived as relevant, (b) fear of embarrassment, and (c) perceptions of low self-efficacy.

#### 4.1.1 TABE and ABE Are Not Job Relevant

This theme as a deterrent is consistent with Beder (1990) who asserted that low need and Thomas (1996) who asserted that no value were factors in deterring participation in learning. Beder (1990) also stated that low need correlated positively with age with the average age of the respondents in the present study being 50.8 years. Three of the respondents described the TABE as not necessary for the jobs in the new facility on two separate interview questions. The perception of the respondents was that they had worked at the facility for a number of years without needing additional education, and they could not see any differences in the work that employees performed in the new and old facilities to justify the need for taking the TABE or attending ABE classes.

The respondents in this study understood that they would lose employment if they did not demonstrate proficiency at the 8th grade level by passing the TABE or completing the requirements in ABE classes. From the standpoint of employment loss, it is difficult to understand how a belief that the TABE or ABE were not relevant would deter participation unless a lack of relevancy was used to avoid revealing other underlying reasons such as embarrassment or low self-efficacy. Cross (1981) had previously stated that dispositional barriers were probably understated and that participants used more acceptable reasons for why they did not attend rather than to state they were not interested or were too old.

When the respondents were asked what would deter them from taking TABE or attending ABE classes, a lack of relevancy or need was not mentioned. If a lack of relevancy was a deterrent to participation, the respondents should have described this lack when answering the question: What would prevent participation in ABE classes? The respondents' answers indicated that low self-efficacy was the predominant deterrent to participation and that a lack of relevancy or need was not a deterrent to participation in this study.

#### 4.1.2 Embarrassment of Not Passing the TABE

Respondents described being afraid that they would not pass the TABE and that fellow employees would discover the fact. The respondents stated that they were concerned about what their fellow workers would think about them, and they described embarrassment when stating how this would make them feel. In fact, 4 of the respondents described embarrassment as a deterrent to participation either in the initial interview questions or in the follow-up questions.

Respondents gave clarifying information about their description of embarrassment during the follow-up questions. For example, Pick Axe initially stated that people were afraid to take the TABE in interview Question 4. He then described being afraid in Question 5 as "the real smart kids might talk about you because you are not as smart as they, they are. . . . That, that's what makes you afraid too." Pick Axe was asked during the follow-up questions to describe what he meant by being afraid. He stated, "that would make me feel kind of bad knowing I couldn't pass that test and other people knew about it." The description provided by Pick Axe indicated that he perceived he could not pass the TABE (i.e., low self-efficacy in passing the TABE), which would cause embarrassment thus deterring participation.

Mike was asked to describe a situation where a problem might exist if someone had to read

out loud or to do math or writing in front of other people. He said that there could be a problem for people who could not read. When asked to describe what would prevent someone who could not read from taking ABE classes to help themselves he replied, “well, I feel like he wouldn’t want to embarrass himself.” In other words, embarrassment created by low reading and writing self-efficacy acted to deter participation in ABE.

Ronnie described feeling uncomfortable when he was asked to answer questions in front of other individuals. Ronnie used the term “shy and uncomfortable” to describe himself in the context of having to read out loud in front of other people. Ronnie described a desire to avoid embarrassment by not taking the TABE or to attend ABE classes even at the risk of job loss, and this embarrassment came from low self-efficacy in reading ability.

The respondent descriptions supported Miller’s (1995) assertion that people will avoid embarrassing situations where possible and even forego rewards to avoid embarrassment. Although embarrassment acted as a deterrent to participation for these respondents, much of the embarrassment was created by low self-efficacy. It seems plausible from this study that if low self-efficacy can be eliminated or reduced that embarrassment would be reduced as a deterrent to participation in ABE.

#### 4.1.3 Low Self-Efficacy

For this study, low self-efficacy appeared to be a primary reason why these blue collar workers would not participate in an educational opportunity even at the expense of losing their employment. Respondents described two areas of low self-efficacy: (a) respondents believed they would not pass the TABE and (b) low self-efficacy in reading ability, learning new material, or solving math problems. In the study, 7 of 8 respondents described or stated that they believed they could not pass the TABE on the first attempt. Jethro was the one respondent who did not indicate his belief about passing the TABE; however, it is the opinion of the first author that Jethro could not pass the TABE on the first attempt and would have to attend the ABE classes based on his prior requests for help in comprehending written material at work. Additionally, 4 of the respondents described low self-efficacy as a reason to not participate in ABE opportunities consistent with Bandura (1986) who asserted “people successfully execute tasks that fall within their enhanced range of perceived self-efficacy, but they shun or fail those that exceed their perceived coping capabilities” (p. 423).

Although low self-efficacy acted as a deterrent to participation, low self-efficacy in passing the TABE appeared to be a result of low self-efficacy in reading, learning new material, and math problem solving for 4 of the respondents. For instance, Pick Axe was asked to describe a situation where people might not take basic education classes. He stated, “a lot of people uh thought that because they had been out of high school and didn’t go to college . . . wouldn’t do any good. . . . To take classes . . . it had been so long since I did mathematics and uh I, uh know I can’t do it now.”

Ronnie responded to a follow-up question concerning his opinion as to what would deter nonparticipants from taking the TABE by stating, “felt like their, their learning ability they were still incapable of passing the test.” In addition, he stated that he never liked to read and that held him back and he had previously indicated that he would like private classes

ostensibly to avoid embarrassment. Low self-efficacy in learning new material and reading were primary issues in Ronnie's perception of not being able to pass the TABE.

#### *4.2 Implications for Practice and Research*

Early school experiences have profound effects on later perceptions of school and education among blue collar workers, and negative experiences in school create perceptions of low self-efficacy that appeared to deter later participation in ABE in this study. Therefore, early school experiences should be designed to foster positive perceptions of self-efficacy among students so that low self-efficacy does not become a deterrent in adulthood. Adult learners should be afforded opportunities to overcome perceptions of low self-efficacy so that they are not deterred from participating in ABE. By increasing perceptions of self-efficacy, performance accomplishments are increased (Bandura, 1986).

This study indicated that perceptions of low academic self-efficacy are carried into adulthood and can manifest as embarrassment or other reasons—perhaps perceived irrelevance—to avoid participation. Cross (1981) had earlier asserted that adults use other reasons (i.e., cost and lack of time) to avoid educational opportunities to avoid stating actual dispositional reasons. Future research should focus on determining the extent to which other reasons for nonparticipation are being used particularly among adults with less than a 9th grade education due to the importance of basic educational skills. In addition, the degree to which low self-efficacy among nonparticipants deters blue collar participation in ABE remains to be determined. In Mississippi, the community college system may offer the best way to develop a large sample since much of the ABE training in the state is conducted through the community college system with frequent contact with employers of nonparticipating blue collar workers.

Implications for practice include the development of programs to target low self-efficacious adults and to teach them to establish self-regulating behaviors to increase feelings of efficacy. Bandura (1997) asserted there are four primary sources of information in developing self-efficacy beliefs: (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) physiological and affective states. One way to improve self-efficacy is to incorporate these four sources into adult education programs. As an example, had the nonparticipants in this study been provided with challenging but successful academic mastery experiences as a prelude to the TABE, academic self-efficacy may have increased. The facility could have utilized verbal persuasion to increase academic self-efficacy in nonparticipants; Bandura asserted that self-efficacy increases when significant others express a belief that an individual has what it takes to succeed. By utilizing the four informational sources of efficacy, perhaps the academic self-efficacy of the nonparticipants would have been increased and inefficacy would not have deterred participation.

A relationship between low self-efficacy and embarrassment appeared to exist. Nonparticipants either felt embarrassed or perceived they would be embarrassed in situations where peers could discover that the nonparticipants were deficient in areas such as reading, math problem solving, and learning ability. Thus, they avoided the educational opportunity in order to avoid the embarrassing situation consistent with Miller's (1995) assertions. However,

an anticipation of embarrassment is rooted in an anticipation of failure; therefore, self-efficacy appears to be the major causal construct and must be developed in the early school years. Once in adulthood, those who are inefficacious will avoid educational opportunities to avoid embarrassment. Future research should explore the relationship between low self-efficacy and embarrassment to support this causal assertion thereby informing our understanding of avoidance behavior.

#### 4.3 Conclusions

This study offered an opportunity to explore nonparticipation in ABE that is likely to be difficult to duplicate. First, the facility mandated that job security was dependent on the successful completion of the TABE or ABE. In addition, blue collar workers who participated were paid an hourly wage to attend ABE classes up to 24 hours and the cost of the classes was paid for by the facility. This had the effect of removing costs as a reason for not attending classes as well as to provide a financial incentive to participate. Finally, offering the ABE classes prior to and after shift change helped to remove time constraints as a reason for not attending.

If blue collar workers are deterred from mandated participation in ABE as a result of low academic self-efficacy such as suggested by this study, then clearly low academic self-efficacy will act as a deterrent for individuals where voluntary participation would improve work related skills. Until the relationship between low academic self-efficacy and nonparticipation in ABE is better understood with associated programs designed to confront its effects, low academic self-efficacy will continue to act as a deterrent to participation in ABE with effects as profound as removing opportunities for employment or advancement thereby limiting a fuller participation in all that our world has to offer.

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